

97-06-15b

Okay, we're back now from our break, and we want to take a look at this last half of Romans 14. And we want to keep this in the context of this letter. Romans is one of the most often studied books of the Bible.

It is one of the most, in my opinion, one of the most misunderstood letters of Paul. We often come to Romans and dig out a lot of truth that we apply to salvation. And yet most of this book is addressing itself to life for believers.

Why do we do what we do? The big situation that Paul wrote this letter to address was people who said you've got to obey the law of Moses to be righteous. We have that same situation today. We have a lot of Christians around us who say, well, you need to go to church, you need to read your Bible, you need to get involved in the ministry, you need to join God in His work.

We have a whole set of things that we believe constitute righteousness. Some people see righteousness in what they do not do. Well, I don't smoke, and I don't drink, and I don't let my children play with dice.

That to me is still one of the most bizarre rules for righteousness that I have ever personally experienced. But there was a time when we were attending a church, and there were some people in the church. I was a junior high age at that time, and I went over to play with some of these fellow junior high age children.

And we got out a game to play it, and it didn't look like my game. We had all played this game before, but you normally roll the dice in order to find out how many squares to move your little piece and so forth, and went to reach for the dice, and they weren't there. I said, well, how are we going to play this game? They said, oh, we use a spinner.

And they had a cardboard with a little arrow and the numbers printed on it, and you had to flick the arrow and let it spin and stop on a number, and that told you how many. I said, well, what happened to your dice? Did you lose them? They said, no, we're not allowed to have dice. Dice are evil.

Dice are sinful. So we used a spinner. A lot of the people in the church would let their kids have the game, but they used a spinner instead of dice because dice were evil.

This is sort of an extreme example, but it happens. This would be an easy occasion for contempt. You could say, how silly, how ridiculous.

Look at these people, a spinner instead of dice and so forth. But we have to caution ourselves and remember that we look on the outward appearance, and it's easy to have contempt or it's easy to judge. And those are the two things that Paul mentions here in Romans 14.

But God looks at the heart, and it's not necessarily a wrong thing that people engage in what we would call legalism. And it's not our place to judge. God looks in the heart.

Now, if these people are doing this and if they get an attitude of superiority and if they think that they are somehow earning God's approval, then yes, indeed, that is a wrong thing. But there are other times when people just simply are in an early stage of their growth and they haven't learned better yet. And they do this because the first and foremost priority in their minds is wanting to please God.

And they believe that association with something that's associated with gambling is evil and is an honoring to the Lord. And they want to honor the Lord and they want to please Him in every detail of their life. And so they get anything out of their house that even remotely reminds them of things that dishonor the Lord.

And God may be pleased with someone that substitutes spinners for dice. And it's not our place to judge. This is the point that Paul is going to make in this second half of the chapter.

And it fits into this book. This book is talking about how do we as believers live our lives. We do it by faith.

And if we do what we do in faith, if we are making progress in God's plan, if we are exposing ourselves to the Word of God, if we're learning and growing and we're doing these things in response to that, we may not always make the right call. We may not always choose the right things. Sometimes we're going to do ignorant things and foolish things.

All of us can look back in our past as believers and in retrospect we say, you know, I didn't really understand. Hopefully we can look back and say I understand more now than I did then. Hopefully we're growing and making progress.

But we don't have to look back at an earlier stage of our life and say that was all worthless, it was meaningless. If we have been doing what we do because we want to please God, that counts. And it isn't so much what we did or what we thought as why we did it and why we thought it.

And the criteria by which our righteousness is determined is faith. Are we trying to please God? Are we trying to apply His Word as we understand it? If that's our criteria, we're doing the right thing. And if other believers are doing that, that's pleasing in God's eyes.

So Paul concludes this first section of chapter 14 in verse 10. He says, why do you judge your brother? Why do you show contempt for your brother? Notice it's the same two things that we saw in verse 3. The two places where we can fall into sin and we can definitely displease the Lord is if we look at other believers and have contempt for them. Or if we look at other believers and we judge them.

Now, this whole judging thing is a two-edged sword because there are other places where we are told to judge other believers. How do we know when we separate? How do we know when we... Paul gets on to the Corinthians because he says you're taking each other to court when you ought to be judging yourselves. You ought to be judging within the church.

You're going to judge angels someday. If you can judge angels, why can't you judge these small matters that you're taking to court? He says you ought to judge. Well, now here he's saying don't judge.

Is there a contradiction? What's the answer? Well, this is again guided by the principle that we want to do things that honor God and that build one another up. There is a time when we have to look at what other believers are doing and say we've got to separate from this. We've got to eradicate this.

We've got to eliminate it out of our fellowship, out of our periphery because this is tearing down. This is destructive. This is divisive.

This doesn't honor God. This is dishonoring to God. The Corinthians got so nonjudgmental that here was a man living in incest with his stepmother.

And they said, oh, look how accepting we are. Look how flexible we are. We're not going to judge this brother in Christ.

It doesn't matter what he does. And Paul says, no, you need to judge these things. You need to discern.

The principle is everything should be done for edification. What does it mean to edify? What is an edifice? We talk about it looking around. We go downtown and we say, oh, what a beautiful stone edifice.

It's a building. It's a structure. Everything should be done for the purpose of building up, making progress, the betterment and the growth and the maturing process of ourselves and our fellow believers.

If we find something in our life or in our lifestyle that is tearing us down instead of building us up, if the movies we watch distract our minds and we wind up thinking violent thoughts or we wind up thinking lurid thoughts or we wind up thinking about things that don't honor the Lord, that's something we need to eradicate. We need to judge ourselves and get that out of our lives. If we find an association with other people and every time we're around this person, it tears us down.

It screws up our mental attitude. It distracts us and we wind up depressed and discouraged. We need to limit that contact.

We need to eradicate that contact. We need to keep that in a perspective that allows us to focus

our lives on pleasing God. So Paul says in verse 10, Why do you judge your brother? Why do you show contempt for your brother? We shall all stand before the judgment seat of God or the judgment seat of Christ.

We need to concentrate on what God thinks of us, not on what we think of someone else. There is a time when we need to evaluate and we may need to separate. There's another time when we evaluate and we accept someone like in verse 1. We can receive one who is weak in the faith as long as it doesn't produce arguments, as long as we don't accept them just so we can browbeat them and try to drag them up to our vast lofty level of maturity.

Paul says in verse 11, As I live, every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess to God. That's the principle. Everything that is done should be done to the glory of God, to please God.

Verse 12, So then each of us shall give an account of himself to God. If we keep this in the forefront of our mind, it solves a lot of our questions about divine guidance. It solves a lot of our questions about who to associate with or how to spend our time.

This is a good verse to memorize. Each of us shall give an account of himself to God. When I plop myself down tonight to watch a two-hour movie on TV, I'm going to give an account for that allocation of time to God.

I give an account even as I do it. God is watching. God is evaluating the thoughts and intents of my heart.

Why am I doing that? Am I neglecting responsibility? Am I neglecting my family by burying my nose in the television? Am I neglecting my growth in the word of God? Maybe not. Maybe this is a family activity. Maybe we're enjoying this together and it's going to be an opportunity to discuss and to talk about lifestyle and talk about priorities with my family.

Maybe it's just pure pleasure. Maybe it's a way to express my capacity for life and so forth. There may be nothing wrong with that.

It isn't inherently good. It isn't inherently evil. It's why we do what we do.

If it reflects a balance and an appreciation and here's something we can enjoy and it doesn't distract and it doesn't harm, it doesn't tear down, then that's fine. So verse 13, Therefore let us not judge one another any more, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way. We need to be sensitive.

Two weeks ago we talked about this in terms of our example. Our lifestyle makes a difference in the eyes of other people and we need to be careful of it. We may understand some things that other people don't understand.

Our understanding of something doesn't necessarily make it right. We have to be sensitive to the

benefit or the harm that our actions will reflect toward others. Paul continues this thought in verse 14, I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself, but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

How interesting. If someone considers television to be a total evil, and they say we won't even have a TV in our house because television is inherently evil, and then that person who believes television to be evil, if they sneak over to a friend's house and watch TV, guess what? Even though we know there's nothing inherently wrong with television, but if in their mind it's a sin and they go do it in violation of their conscience, they are sinning. It is wrong for them.

How interesting. Something that is right can become wrong if you believe it to be wrong and you do it anyway. If you believe that this is not pleasing to God and you do it anyway, you have just committed a sin.

Why? Because you're violating your conscience. You are not operating out of faith. If your brother is grieved, in verse 15, because of your food, you are no longer walking in love.

You have violated the principle of love. And even though you're doing something that is okay, you have violated the principle of love. You have done harm to a brother, and your right thing has just become wrong.

We can be right. This is a mistake that I certainly have made and I think a lot of us make when we come to an understanding of the truth of the Word of God and we get into an argument with another believer who understands the Word of God differently. And I know that in the past, I have essentially beaten someone into submission with the force of my arguments and won the battle, but I lost the war because I did not act in love and I harmed a fellow believer and was too forceful and too dogmatic and lost the principle of speaking the truth in love.

There's no point in arguing someone into what we understand, especially if they don't have the foundation in their soul. And you may wind up convincing them and they may change their position because of your eloquence or because of your example or because of your belief that something is okay. And if they do something because you do it, it's wrong.

They're not doing it out of faith. They're doing it out of imitation or they're doing it out of something other than faith. And this is what puts discipleship and mentoring and a lot of these other things out the window.

We don't set ourselves up to be an example for others and we don't get them to do things because we do them. They have to do it out of faith. And they may not be ready for the faith that we exercise.

They may not have the understanding that we understand. We can't come to a glowing new view of certain things and then run around and tell everyone else and try to get them to do the same

thing. They have to grow and learn just as we did.

Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. Don't take your right understanding and destroy someone with it because they're not ready for it. This always reminds me of an episode that occurred when I was a small boy visiting my grandmother up in Foyle, Oklahoma, out in the country.

She found a little baby bird that had fallen out of a nest. And she picked it up and she was cooing over it and she felt sorry for it. She said, oh, this poor little bird has fallen out of its nest and it's hungry and it had its little eyes closed and its beak was up in the air open and it was cheeping and wanting food.

She felt very sorry for it. And so she looked around on the ground and she found a little roly-poly bug. And she picked up this roly-poly bug and, of course, it rolled itself up into a little ball.

She said, here you go, little one, and she popped it into the little bird's mouth. Well, the little bird stopped cheeping. Its little eyes opened and it was looking around and it wasn't making any more noise.

And pretty soon its eyes closed and its little head fell over and it was dead. It choked on this roly-poly bug. And my grandmother felt so bad that she had literally killed this bird with kindness.

And why did that happen? Well, little birds of that size and age don't digest little insects with exoskeletons that they can't grind up. It was too big. It was a type of food that the bird couldn't handle.

A little piece of earthworm or something would have been better. Well, we are hopefully on the road to greater understanding. We're on the road to maturity.

We're on the road to reaching a place of function in God's plan. And we learn things. And we hopefully are getting to the point of being ready for meat and solid food rather than milk.

Many of our fellow believers are not at that point. And if we look around and say, Well, here's a believer that doesn't understand what I understand. Let me pick up this roly-poly bug and shove it down their throat.

What are we going to do? We are going to harm someone for whom Christ died. And that's what Paul is talking about here. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.

We need to be flexible. We need to relax. We need to encourage and smile and love believers who misunderstand and distort and screw up a lot of the things that we know to be true from the Word of God.

What are we looking for in our fellowship with believers? Are we trying to show them how much

we know? Are we trying to be esteemed in their eyes and show them how correct and how advanced we are? Or are we looking for their benefit? Are we looking for ways to build them up and encourage them? Maybe they're misunderstanding a lot of things and doing a lot of goofy things. Maybe they're speaking in tongues. Maybe they're going to services and waving their hands in the air.

Maybe they're riding an emotional wave from Sunday to Sunday. What do we look for in our fellowship with believers that fall into a category like this? Look to see if there is the glimmer of interest in pleasing God. Look to see if somewhere in their early stages of Christian growth they have a hunger for the Word.

They have a desire to please God. They want to grow and they want to learn. And that's the thing to nurture.

That's the thing to build up. That's the ember to try to help fan into a flame. Those are the things to encourage.

We don't have to encourage them to continue their errors, but we can encourage them in the things that they're doing right. Are they praying a lot? Let's encourage them to keep praying. Are they looking at the Word of God? Are they memorizing some verses? Let's encourage them and applaud them and tell them that, yes, that's what we've done as well.

We've understood and benefited from prayer. We've understood and benefited from Scripture memorization or from listening. Maybe they go to a service where the Word of God is addressed.

Maybe it's not taught very accurately. Maybe it's not taught very deeply. Maybe it's not taught very much.

But if there is some teaching, if there's some opening of the Word and examination of the truth, we can applaud that. We can encourage that. We can build that up.

Our criticism isn't going to do anyone any good and to say, oh, that's a bad church. There's no teaching there. You're engaging in a lot of useless activities here and this, that, and the other.

We may do damage. We may destroy with our understanding and our big advanced notebook full of doctrine the one for whom Christ died. Do not let your good be spoken of as evil, he says in verse 16.

For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking. What does this eating and drinking represent? It's not what we do. That's what Paul is saying.

It's not our actions. It's not what we eat and what we drink or what we fail to eat or what we fail to drink. But righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Look for righteousness. Look for peace. What did Paul say in verse 1 of this chapter? Receive one who is weak in the faith.

What does it mean to be weak in the faith? Osthenia here means to be sickly in the faith, to be lacking. You're weak. You're feeble.

Someone who is weak and feeble, they're going to make all kinds of mistakes. Receive them, but not for disputes over doubtful things, not for arguments. The goal is peace.

The goal is love. The goal is righteousness through faith. So let's encourage faith.

Let's encourage peace. Let's encourage joy in the Holy Spirit. Some people go to these services that we think are off the wall where they wave their hands and there's a lot of tongue-speaking going on and we think, oh, that's just horrible.

What a nursery full of spiritual babies we have here. But a lot of these people have joy in their salvation. They have joy in the Lord.

If they have a desire to learn and to grow, they're going to grow out of that. They're going to learn that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is a whole lot more than the signed gifts that pertain to the first generation of the church. We don't necessarily have to try to educate them out of that right away.

We can tolerate. We can put up with. We ought to be, if there's someone who's going to be flexible, if there's someone who can smile and be a quiet source of encouragement and a quiet encouragement to study of the Word and an encouragement to grow, it ought to be us.

Who is it that ought to have flexibility? Who is it that ought to be available and be tolerant? It ought to be those of us who have grown. Anybody can be rude. Anybody can be arrogant.

Anyone can be critical. Anyone can browbeat and correct. We should be beyond that.

If we are as advanced as we think we are, that ought to be within the range of our ability. Do not let your good be spoken of as evil. The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking.

It's righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. He who serves Christ in these things, notice that our attention to the building up of one another is a service to Christ. We ourselves do this because we want to please our Savior.

He who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify or build up another. We have so many passages that reflect this principle.

We could go to dozens of them, but let's just continue with this one. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with

offense.

It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor to do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Now there is a challenge.

Sometimes we have to rein ourselves in and not be the universal source of guidance and the correct answer to everyone. We have to just smile and nod our heads and go on because that's what makes for peace. Have it to yourself before God.

Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. We can wind up approving a right thing and condemn ourselves in the process if we harm someone else in that. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats.

If we do manage to go browbeat someone into operating the way we operate and accepting the things that we accept and they're doing it out of respect for us or out of the force of our arguments and they don't really understand what they're doing, we have just led them into error. We have just caused them to stumble. Why? Because they're not operating out of faith and whatever is not from faith is sin.

Isn't that the theme of this book? Righteousness comes through faith. God is looking for us to trust him and to do what we do because we trust him. To come to understand his plan and to live the way we live out of respect for that.

To do it heartily as unto the Lord. Everyone needs to do that and we can distract and deflect our fellow believers with our example and with the force of our arguments and our criticism and so forth. And we can cause people to change their behavior and we may think, now see, your behavior is conforming to my understanding of the word of God.

Now you're on the right track and we've actually led them straight into sin because they're not doing it out of faith. We need to look for ways to build one another up in the faith. That's what this portion of Romans is talking about.

Paul has laid this theological foundation throughout the first part of this letter. He has pointed to the example of Abraham who did what he did because he trusted God. Is it right for everybody to take their son up a mountain and raise the knife and prepare to kill them? Not at all.

But Abraham did what he did out of faith. And Abraham believed God. Abraham trusted the promise of God and that's why he refrained from doing certain things.

He refrained from building cities. He didn't found towns and villages in the land. He lived in tents.

It tells us over in Hebrews 11 because he was waiting for a city whose founder and builder was God. That doesn't mean that nobody should found a town or that all of us should live in mobile

homes and tents because that's what Abraham did. That was the way he expressed his faith.

We express our faith in the circumstances of our lives and we need to give the freedom and have the tolerance to allow other believers to do that same thing. It is God who judges. It is God who corrects and rebukes and instructs.

And how does he do it? He does it through his word. The same thing that he has done for us he's going to do for other believers. God doesn't need us and our wisdom and our pride to go in and try to straighten other people out.

Do you have faith? That's the question Paul asks in verse 22. If we do, have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

That should be the focus of our attention. We have a plate full in analyzing our life, our conversation, the way we treat one another. Those of us who are married, how do we treat our spouse? How do we converse? How do they feel after we have spoken with them? That's a full plate.

We don't need to be looking down our nose at others. How do we spend our time? How do we allocate that currency that God gives us? It says in another place, He who doubts, redeem the time, buy up the time. The days are evil.

If we put doubt in someone's mind, if we give them a bunch of mixed motivation, he who doubts is condemned if he eats because he does not eat from faith. Whatever is not of faith is sin. Let me just read you a couple of passages that parallel these thoughts.

In 1 Corinthians 8, verses 7-13, you might make a note of this and peruse it at a later time. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 8, Not all possess this knowledge. Some, through being hitherto accustomed to idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, no better off if we do. Only take care lest this freedom of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

If anyone sees you, a man of knowledge, at table in an idol's temple, might he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so, by your knowledge, this weak man is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food is a cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall.

We saw a very parallel idea in 1 Corinthians 10, verse 23, and following. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14, after discussing these things in detail, Make love your aim, and earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God.

No one understands him. He utters mysteries in the spirit. He who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.

He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. Now, I want all of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than he who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified.

This whole business about tongues and so on, is it for the church today and so forth? It's a very simple answer to that. We can prove it six ways to Sunday that the sign gifts ceased after the first generation of the church. But the principle here ought to guide and inform all of us.

Speaking in tongues doesn't edify anyone, does it? The teaching of the Word of God edifies. That's what prophecy was and is. And so, people who look and say, well, we're speaking in tongues, we've got the presence of the Spirit, we're pleasing God, we're spiritual, we're wonderful, we're making progress, ought to look at this principle.

Would to God that we took as much pride in our teaching and growth and understanding in the Word of God as we take in our ministry and our impact or our speaking in tongues or any of these other things. That's the principle. 2 Corinthians 13, verse 5 and following.

Examine yourselves to see whether you are holding to the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test.

We know the criteria for the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ. It's not automatic at salvation. It comes through faith.

It comes through obedience. We find this in John chapter 15. I hope you will find out that we have not failed.

Galatians chapter 6. Brethren, if a man is overtaken in a trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

If anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Let each one test his own work. Isn't that what we've just seen? We need to pay attention to our own life.

How did we spend yesterday? How did we spend this morning? How are we going to spend this afternoon? That's what we need to be examining. Each man will have to bear his own load. Let him who is taught in the Word share all good things with him who teaches.

And perhaps the best summary of this is in Philippians chapter 2, verse 1 and following. If there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any incentive of love, any participation of the Spirit, if there is any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the

same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. Who was it that understood the truth of God better than anyone who has ever lived? It's the Lord Jesus Christ.

But who did he live to benefit? Who did he live to please? He lived to please his Father, and he lived to benefit others. And that should be our goal. That is the reason for which God has highly exalted the Lord Jesus Christ, was his dedication to pleasing his Father and his selfless life and death on behalf of us.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name. And in Colossians 3, verse 12 and following, put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, if we want to be God's chosen ones, if we think that we're advanced and mature, this should characterize us. Put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience.

Is this what characterizes our conversation? Is this what characterizes the way we treat one another? Forbearing one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, even as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these, put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.

And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing songs and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

That's the principle that guides us in this age. How do we know what to say, when to correct, and when to be silent? How do we know when to accept someone and when to separate? A few simple principles guide us. Are we doing what we do to please God? Are we doing what we do to benefit our fellow believers, to encourage them, to build them up, to be a blessing to them? That criteria will steer us in the right path every time.

Let's close in prayer. Father, we thank You for the benefits that we enjoy because of our relationship with You through Jesus Christ, our Lord. We thank You for the presence of Your Spirit.

We thank You for the truth of Your Word, which is understandable and comprehensible to us, because of the work You have done in our souls, because of the presence of Your Spirit. We pray that these things will live in our hearts and will be active in our conscience, that as we look at

ourselves and evaluate ourselves in Your sight, that we will have the principles that guide us and that teach us and that give us the ability to function correctly with regard to one another, that we will have the peace and joy and patience that are the fruit of Your Spirit, that we will have forbearance and longsuffering with regard to one another, that in every instance, in every contact we have with one another, our thoughts, our conversation, our behavior will please You and glorify our Savior and be an expression of love and an opportunity to build up and edify one another. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.