

97-06-29b

Okay, we're back now from our break, and we reviewed in the first session this morning what the Book of Romans is about. Anytime we come to a passage of Scripture, it's important to know the context. What is the setting for that statement, or that argument, or that point that is made by an author of Scripture? And our first rule of interpretation is always to check the context.

Unfortunately, a lot of the study in Romans has either ignored or misunderstood the context. But I'd like to point out here in chapter 14 and 15 of this book how Paul began by addressing this issue of misunderstanding the Christian life on the part of Jewish believers who were attempting to teach this and foisted on Gentile believers, and how he has argued against that by going back to universal things, going back to Abraham, going back to Adam, talking about the identity that all believers have in Jesus Christ, which is the same no matter what. In other places Paul talks about it, it doesn't matter if you're a Jew or Greek, bond or free, male or female, the identity that we have in Christ is the same.

And therefore, you can't take things that pertain to just one of those and try to force them on everyone. But remember in chapter 14 when he started talking in verse 5 about how one man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike. Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind.

He's saying, I'm not asking you Jewish believers if you are observing the feasts, or if you are observing certain parts of the Mosaic Law, I'm not asking you to give that up. I'm not telling you that even though you've abstained from pork all your life, now you must go out and eat it. He said, I want you to do what you do, God wants you to do what you do, out of a desire to please him.

And it is possible to observe a day and you're observing it to the Lord. You're abstaining from a piece of meat and you're doing it because that is your expression of obedience and acknowledgement of God's place in your life. It may be different for someone else.

This is not in the area of doctrine. This is not in the area of commands. This is in the area of opinion.

This is in that wide area. Some people have television sets in their house today. Other people do not.

Why do they do that? If somebody says, well television sets are evil, and anybody that has a TV set is evil, and they're a tool of the devil, and there's sex and violence on there, and we won't have one in our house because this will be a mark that we're righteous, well, that does nothing. If someone says, I believe the way that we can best honor God in our family life, and to avoid the issue even coming up, we're just not going to have a TV set, well, they're doing that to the Lord. Somebody else says, well, we've got a TV set.

We watch the news. We are not mastered by it. We control the TV set.

We limit the watching and limit what we watch on it and so forth. Well, they can do that unto the Lord. There's Christian programming on TV as well.

There's educational programming. There are ways that it can be beneficial. You can substitute TV watching in the passages in the New Testament on eating meat offered to idols.

Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind. You can be doing a wonderful, righteous thing by kicking all your TV sets out into the alley and letting the city pick them up. You can also be doing a wonderful, righteous thing by having one in every room and honoring God in the way you watch it, in the way you manage your time and your use of that appliance.

Let each one be convinced in his own mind. Why do we need to be convinced in our own mind? How does righteousness come? By faith. And what is faith? Being convinced that pleasing God is the most important thing and seeking to please Him in what we do.

And if we do what we do out of a primary desire to please God, it isn't nearly so important what we do as why we do it. People say, oh, you know, it's licensed to sin. You've got a floating standard there.

It's relativism. If it feels good or, you know, it might be right this time, it might be wrong another time. Not at all.

It's pretty easy to figure out what pleases God, isn't it? Abuse of other people doesn't please God. Wasting time doesn't please God. Pursuing self-indulgent, self-gratification doesn't please God.

That right there takes care of 90% of the things in the world. If you're hurting someone else or you're indulging yourself, you're not pleasing God. Well, that's a pretty easy principle to apply to just about anything.

And that's why Paul can say, whatever is not of faith is sin. But what's his point here in Romans? Why does he bring that issue up in this argument? He says, look, you Jews are busy judging these Gentiles because they're not keeping the law of Moses, and you're wrong. You're doing the same thing the pagans do in rejecting the truth.

The truth is the Gentiles don't have to keep the law. The truth is neither do you. The law has been fulfilled in Christ and we're under a new system.

And God is pleased when we trust him, when we do what we do out of an informed desire to please him. I qualify that statement on purpose because Paul does. It's an informed desire.

Remember what he said about the Israelites? He said they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. It's not enlightened. We have a responsibility to know God, to know about God,

and to know what pleases him and displeases him.

A lot of people go to the mission field because they want to please God, but they don't have a clue about what constitutes pleasing God. And it's like a person who has discovered that they're an alcoholic, and they've recovered from alcoholism, and somebody wants to give them a present. Well, they don't know anything about this person, and so they give them a piece of scotch.

I just wanted to please them. I just wanted to give them a nice gift. But because they don't know anything about the person, what they've actually done is not a good thing.

Well, an uninformed zeal for God is not the objective. It's an informed, knowledgeable zeal for God. And we have a primary responsibility to know the contents of the Word of God and to know what pleases God and to live in that light.

That's why we study the Word of God. And that's what faith is. You can't have faith in a non-proposition.

Faith is recognizing the truth about God and about his plan and responding to it, treating it as reality, having it shape our priorities, our thoughts and actions. Well, how does Paul conclude this section of Romans 14? Look at verse 10. He says in verse 7, none of us lives to himself, none of us dies to himself.

If we live, we live to the Lord. If we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

This is the reason that Christ died and lived again, that he might be the Lord of the dead and the living. We've got to be fully convinced in our mind that what we're doing is the thing that will best please the Lord in our case. And then he makes an application.

Why do you pass judgment on your brother or you? Why do you despise your brother? How did he start out back in chapter 2 of this letter? Who are you, oh man, judging others when you yourself are doing the very same thing? That's a theme that runs through this book. The reason Paul makes the arguments that he makes is A, to demonstrate that the standard that the Jews are judging the Gentiles by is wrong. Or to put it in contemporary language, Christians today who are looking around judging other Christians by their standard and saying, well, you're not a good Christian because you don't give the gospel to people all the time.

You're not a good Christian because you don't attend church enough, or you don't attend the church I think you ought to attend, or you don't engage in the ministries I think you ought to engage in, or your life isn't moral enough. You're too relaxed. You're not taking a stand.

You're not fighting evil. You're not marching on the abortion clinics. You're not boycotting this company and that company.

You're not taking a stand. You're not an activist. What's the point of this book? That's a wrong standard.

Righteousness, a life that pleases God, comes in the thought life. And we're not in a position to judge one another. We have our hands full judging ourselves.

So he starts out the book that way. He says, you've got your hands full acknowledging and responding to the truth that has been committed to you. Why are you standing there judging your brother when you yourself are doing the very same thing? You claim that this brother hasn't responded to the truth of God and isn't living in the light of it.

That's what you have done, oh Jewish believer, oh religious Christian. And he comes back to that as he wraps up this book in chapter 14 and 15. Why do you pass judgment on your brother? 14.10. Or you, why do you despise your brother? We shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.

There's that word all again. The religious and the non-religious. The Jew and the Gentile.

The person that grew up in a Christian home and the person that grew up on the streets. All of them are in the body of Christ. All of us are in the body of Christ.

We will all stand before the judgment seat and we're not going to be measured by each other's standard. God's not going to take an opinion poll. God's not going to ask us to write at the Naval Academy, it was called peer grease.

Grease meaning evaluation. Peers meaning peers. And back then we had to write up how good of a midshipman we thought our fellow company mates were, our fellow platoon members.

Well, there's going to be no peer evaluations at the judgment seat of Christ. So why make that kind of pressure or respond to that kind of pressure now? It's meaningless. The only standard that counts is God's standard.

That's the standard of judgment. And Paul reminds us of that in chapter 2, reminds him of it again in chapter 14. We are not to allow ourselves to be judged by the standards of another man's conscience, whether it's right or whether it's wrong.

People can take even a right thing and turn it into a wrong thing. We have to operate in faith. And you can think of the passages, we've seen them in the past, in Colossians especially.

Go over to Colossians where he talks about do not let yourself be judged. So then he goes forward in Romans 14 and he says in verse 13, therefore let us no more pass judgment on one another, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. I know and am persuaded that nothing is unclean of itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it

is unclean.

If your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love and so forth. Verse 23, he who has doubts is condemned if he eats because he does not act from faith. And we can actually take a right thing and take an understanding that we have and by foisting it on someone else who doesn't have that understanding, we can trip them up.

We can cause them to sin because we're holding them to a standard that they themselves don't understand. So what's his point? He begins to wrap up this long letter in chapter 15, we who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Let each please his neighbor for his good to edify him.

He gives the example of Christ. And then he says in 15.7, welcome one another therefore. This is the antithesis of what he started out talking about in chapter 2, isn't it? Don't be judging one another, welcome one another, but not for disputes, not for arguments.

Christ was a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness and to confirm the promises given to the fathers, the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. And then he quotes several Old Testament passages here in verses 9, 10, 11, and 12 that talk about the fact that God's plan is going to include the Gentiles. The light of God's grace is going to shine on the Gentiles.

God is going to be praised among the Gentiles. They're going to sing of God's name among the Gentiles. The Gentiles are going to rejoice with his people.

Verse 11, praise the Lord, all Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him. Further, Isaiah says, the root of Jesse shall come, he who rises to rule the Gentiles. In him shall the Gentiles hope.

Why is he quoting all of these passages from the Old Testament scriptures about the Gentiles? What is this letter about? You Jews, lay off the Gentiles. God's plan is directed toward the Gentiles. And this truth that has been revealed in this letter, the truth that has been revealed in this age, is that God's got his own way of dealing with them, and it's not your Old Testament law.

So he says in verse 13, may the God of hope fill you with joy and peace in trusting, in exercising faith. Everyone who walks by faith, lives by faith, is going to have the joy and peace that accompany faith. These are the things that everyone is seeking.

Everybody who goes after stimulation, everyone who goes after approval or fulfillment in the world, what are they really looking for? You want to have a life that's characterized by peace, a life that's characterized by joy, something that you get up in the morning and you say, this is great, I've got another day in my life, I've got another opportunity to live, this is going to be great. That's joy and that's peace. The God of hope, the God of expectation of wonderful future things, gives us joy and gives us peace when we operate in trust.

We're not operating because somebody's brow beating us, we're not saying, oh boy, so and so is looking over my shoulder and they're going to think the worst of me. Joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, this is where the power is, people today want to get people to conform to quote unquote Christian standards, want to get rid of their bad habits, want to get rid of their problems or their areas of sin by pressure, by meeting with them and brow beating them and holding them accountable or setting an example for them and saying, you really ought to follow my example, I'm not doing what you're doing so live like I'm living and so forth. There's no power in that.

There's no power in an example. There's no power in a mentor. There's no power in a program.

The power is in God the Holy Spirit. The only power that can change anybody is the power of God. And the power of God comes into the life of the believer, how? Through the Word of God and the Spirit of God and in no other way.

I am not a means for the power of God to come into your life. You are not a means for the power of God to come into my life. We can speak the truth to one another in love and that truth will convey God's power, but I can't influence you for good and you can't influence me for good in any way other than ministering the Word and reflecting the ministry of the Spirit.

It's the Spirit and the Word that carry God's power. Unfortunately, we so often tend to forget that as Christians. So now, in our passage for this morning in Romans 15, Paul says, I've written you in verse 15 of chapter 15, I've written you boldly by way of reminder because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the Gospel of God.

Once again, he combines the ideas. Paul is a Jew and he's ministering to the Gentiles in God's new plan. It doesn't matter if you've come from a religious heritage or not.

It doesn't matter if you're a Jew or a Gentile. This is a priestly service that Paul exercises, which speaks of Jewish things to the Gentiles, which speak of non-Jewish things, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Again, we think immediately back to the first couple of verses of chapter 12.

This is our calling to be transformed by the Holy Spirit. We're not transformed by fellowship. We're not transformed by people telling us the way we ought to live.

We're not transformed by peer pressure. We're not transformed by accountability. We're transformed when our minds are changed.

And the only thing that can change a human heart and a human mind is the Word of God in the hands of the Spirit of God. There is no other way. In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God.

Verse 17, verse 18, I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. Now look at verse 20, thus making it my ambition to preach the gospel not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on another man's foundation. But as it is written, they shall see him who have never been told of him, and they shall understand who have never heard of him.

And we'll see this more fully in our next lesson on fundamentals when we conclude our study of the Great Commission. But this verse is often appealed to that Paul wanted to go preach the gospel where Christ had not been named. And that's in terms of evangelism.

And that's not exactly what he is saying. And I think probably we will address this next Sunday. But let me introduce the thinking here.

You recall the foundation passage that we read in chapter 2 of Ephesians for our scripture reading this morning, that Christ is the cornerstone and that the foundation has been laid. But think about what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3, verse 10 and following. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation, and another man is building on it.

In Corinth, Paul had come. Yes, he had evangelized. He had converted Gentiles to Christ.

And then he stayed and taught. And he laid the foundation, foundation like we've studied in Hebrews 6. And then Paul left, and he moved on somewhere else to lay that foundation among Gentiles. And another man was building on it.

What kind of a person do you think this other man is? Well, he's a pastor. He's teaching the Word of God. Now, there are many people attempting to build on that foundation.

And Paul warns them, he says, let each man take care how he builds on the foundation that the apostle has laid, the foundation which is Christ. No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now, if anyone builds on the foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become manifest, for the day will disclose it.

It will be revealed with fire. Fire is always a picture of God's judgment. The fire will test what sort of work each has done.

If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, even though he himself is saved, but only as through fire. Now, this is specifically talking about teaching ministry after the foundation is laid by the apostle.

And notice what he says. He says, other men are going to come and build on this foundation, but the foundation can't be laid again. Why is that? That foundation is laid by the apostles.

That's the foundation. That's what we have in the inspired scriptures of the New Testament. Nobody is now laying foundation.

That foundation is already laid. It's the foundation of Jesus Christ. It's the teaching about Jesus Christ that we find in the New Testament.

On this one passage alone, you wouldn't necessarily be able to substantiate that, but notice that Paul doesn't say there are other men going around laying foundations. He says there are other men going around building on the foundation, and let them take care how they build. You see, in 2 Corinthians 10, we will not boast beyond limit.

We will keep to the limits God has apportioned to us to reach even to you. We are not overextending ourselves as though we did not reach you. We were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ.

We don't boast beyond limit in other men's labors. Our hope is that as your faith increases, our field among you may be greatly enlarged so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you without boasting of work already done in another man's field. Paul says, I'm going to go beyond the Gentiles I've already evangelized and taught to do work in new fields where a foundation hasn't been laid.

Paul is in the foundation-laying business, and once that foundation is laid, pastors come and build on that foundation, but he's going to go beyond them and lay new foundations amongst the Gentiles. He says in Galatians 1, verse 15, when he who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace was pleased to reveal his Son to me, what is the foundation? Other foundation can no man lay, but that which is laid, which is Christ. God revealed his Son to me in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles.

I did not confer with flesh and blood. I didn't go to Jerusalem. To those who were apostles before me, I went away to Arabia and so forth.

I came back and visited with Peter. I didn't see any of the other apostles, and the people in churches of Christ in Judea only heard it said, he who once persecuted us is now preaching a faith he once tried to destroy. What's his point? The other eleven apostles are laying that foundation in Israel to Jewish Christians.

They are preaching Christ in Israel. Paul doesn't want to lay a foundation where foundations have already been laid. He's laying a foundation among the Gentiles, and he's laying it where he hasn't been before.

The apostles laid the foundation and trained pastors. It is the pastors who build on that foundation. It's an important thing to understand because he is consistent in his talking about this.

It isn't designed to be a statement about evangelism. It's talking about the difference between an apostolic ministry and a pastoring ministry. Nobody can go now and say, I am laying the foundation.

The foundation is laid. All of us as pastors and teachers and people learning the truth are building on that foundation. So when Paul says in Romans 15 that my ambition is to preach the gospel not where Christ has already been named lest I build on another man's foundation, what's he talking about? He's not going to go in the realms where the eleven apostles are laying the foundation.

That's Israel. Those are the Jewish church. He's not going to go back to places like Corinth where he has already laid the foundation.

He's going to go to places where Christ has not even yet been named and lay that foundation. Well, the word of God has now spread to the whole world. There are only a handful of languages that a few dozen or a few hundred people speak where the word of God has not been translated.

This is the foundation and it's our opportunity to build upon it. So that brings us now to verse 22 of chapter 15. This is where we're going to pick up next time.

This is the reason I've often been hindered from coming to you. Now since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, how could Paul say this? I no longer have any room for work in these regions. Does this mean that because Paul has already been to Ephesus and Corinth and Antioch and these other places, there's nothing left for him to do? He can't teach them any new truth.

He can't minister to them in any meaningful way anymore. He says, I have no more room for work. Why does he say that? Because the apostles are in the foundation laying business.

And once the foundation is laid, they turn the nurture of the church over to the pastors and they go to lay that foundation somewhere else. That's what this verse means. And it helps us to understand not only that there are no modern day apostles because that foundation has been laid, but it also tells us that we need to pay close attention when Paul says, let each take care how he builds on the foundation.

Because this is not just talking about whether each believer is going to have divine good or human good, gold, silver, precious stones versus wood, hay, and stubble. This talks about our understanding of the Christian life. This talks about the theology that is built up and taught.

Everyone who purports to organize and communicate and build on the foundation in the New Testament needs to take care how they build. And that is a specific reference to teachers. It's a

specific reference to pastors.

It's a specific reference to theologians. All of us as believers have a responsibility to know whether or not we are getting the truth or not. But there is a special judgment on those and an evaluation for those who build on the foundation laid by the apostles.

First of all, you have to be building on that foundation, which is Christ. And secondly, you have to be building on it with eternal things, gold and silver and precious stones, not wood, hay, and stubble. I will submit to you that the spirituality by works that was taught in the first century church, Mosaic law, obedience, and the spirituality by works that is taught today, ministry, evangelism, morality, and so forth, is wood, hay, and stubble.

It does not have eternal value. It has substance and visibility now, but it won't survive the fire. And that's the discernment that we have to have as teachers and as students of the Word of God.

Where are the eternal things? Where are the things that last? And making a difference in somebody's economic situation, making a difference in someone's circumstances, isn't eternal. Circumstances are temporal. Change is wrought in the heart and in the soul by the Word of God.

Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. That's what our theology, that's what our teaching, that's what our building on the foundation has to do or it's not going to survive the fire. It isn't nearly as important what we do as why we do it, and we have to have our eyes on eternal things.

That's the thrust of the book of Romans. Why do we busy ourselves looking around at others, judging them, and seeking to change them by our peer pressure? Paul says, pay attention to the judgment that we will face when we will account for the thoughts and intents of our own hearts. Why do we do what we do? Are we pleasing ourselves or are we pleasing God? Are we trying to influence others or are we trying to be influenced by God? That's the realm of eternal things.

That's the foundation and that's what needs to be built on that foundation from the Word of God. Let's close in prayer. Father, we thank you that our relationship is primarily with you.

We know that in Christ we are united and we have fellowship and relationship with one another, but it does not supersede or take the place of our relationship and our responsibility to you. We thank you for your grace, your patience with us. We thank you for the provision that you've made for us in your Word and in your Spirit, and that your power is available to transform us, to do things within us that nothing else can do.

We pray that the power of your Word and the power of your Spirit will be active within us. We pray that we will be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and we will come to know what is that good and acceptable and perfect will that you have for us. We pray that as a result we will be built up in the faith, that our lives will partake of the gold and silver and precious stones that will not only make a difference in this life, but also in the ages to come.

We know that this will reflect the glory of our Savior, Jesus Christ, to whom we owe our very lives.
We ask this all in Jesus' name. Amen.