

EXPOSITION OF ROMANS

Message #51

Romans 14:13-23

Criticizing each other over gray issues is a favorite sport of many Christians. When it comes to the Christian life there are specific things which are sinful which we are to avoid. Adultery, idolatry, sorcery, strife, envy, jealousy, drunkenness, murder, homosexuality, immorality are not gray; they are all evil sin. But there are a variety of things in life which the Bible does not classify as sinful. **Every believer has a right to decide his own position concerning gray issues.**

BELIEVERS SHOULD NOT JUDGE EACH OTHER ON GRAY ISSUES, BUT RATHER USE SOUND BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES TO MAKE CERTAIN WE DO NOT OFFEND ONE ANOTHER IN ANYTHING WE DO.

We do have liberty in Jesus Christ; however, we are never to use that liberty in such a way that it harms another brother or sister.

PRINCIPLE #1 – We must realize we must never do things that can cause another brother to stumble. 14:13

The strong believer, the one who realizes he has liberty in Christ in gray areas, must not do something that can cause a weaker brother to stumble. The idea of stumbling is the idea of tripping up the growth in the life of another believer.

The mature, spiritual Christian is one who will be willing to forfeit his liberty so that another believer will not be tripped up from growing in his spiritual life.

PRINCIPLE #2 – We must realize that individuals think differently concerning gray areas. 14:14

Paul says, look, the gray area is not the problem; it is the way people think about it that is the problem. Some people look at a gray area and see it as perfectly legitimate, and another person looks at the same gray area and sees it as being wrong.

PRINCIPLE #3 – We must realize that weak Christians can be destroyed over gray issues. 14:15

That word “destroyed” is a Greek word which means to be ruined. The idea here is that it is possible to ruin a weaker Christian through criticizing him and despising him (14:1, 3). It is also possible to ruin a weaker Christian if he saw a stronger one exercise his liberty in an area that could harm him. It could cause him to stumble and fall back into some hurtful practice.

PRINCIPLE #4 – We must realize that our liberty may be viewed by others as being evil.
14:16

The charge here is to the strong believer. What Paul is saying to the strong believer is that he should not use his liberty around someone who could call it evil or see it as evil.

However, the one who is calling it evil is not innocent either (**14:3b**), because he is judging the strong believer on matters he has no right to judge. There is no question that a gray area can draw negative criticism.

PRINCIPLE #5 – We must realize that we are to produce spiritual fruit. **14:17-19**

When it comes to gray issues, the one who is most pleasing to the Lord is not the one fighting about gray areas; it is the one who is blossoming in the fruit of the Spirit.

The gray area fighter never demonstrates peace and joy because he is too busy fighting about gray areas.

Now there is real intriguing depth found in **verse 18**. This text states that the one who is producing the fruit of the Spirit is the one “acceptable” or “pleasing” to God and “approved” by “the” men. That word “approve” is one that means to gain approval after an examination.

What I understand Paul to be saying is that initially the Christian who fights over gray areas will make his mark with certain men. That is, he will get their attention because of his ranting and raving over gray issues. Certain men will always rally around such a loudmouthed bully. But spiritually-minded people will see through him, and in the end, the one who will really wind up being pleasing to the Lord is the one who developed in true Holy Spirit righteousness and lived a joyous and peaceful life.

Verse 19 shoots straight. Don’t get into fights and wars with others about gray areas; rather strive for peace and strive to build each other up in the faith.

PRINCIPLE #6 – We must realize that all consciences are not alike. **14:20**

The message of this verse is very clear - there is nothing wrong with the gray area, but all consciences are not the same on the gray area. Eating meat sacrificed to an idol meant nothing to certain Christians, but weak Christians really struggled with that.

PRINCIPLE #7 – We must realize that abstinence may be necessary. **14:21**

There are two specific gray areas named in this verse: **1)** The gray area of eating meat; **2)** The gray area of drinking wine. Every believer had the responsibility to make certain he did not cause his weaker brother to stumble concerning either of these issues. Paul’s principle is simply this; **abstain while the weaker Christian is around.**

PRINCIPLE #8 – We must realize that our Christian liberty is to be a private liberty. **14:22a**

We do have liberty in Jesus Christ. We do have liberty in gray areas. But we do not have the right to parade our liberty before others; we are to keep it between ourselves and God. When people try to lure you into a discussion about your or another person's view on gray areas, tell them you have a policy not to discuss gray matters that are private matters between a believer and God.

PRINCIPLE #9 – We must realize that we do have Christian liberty to be happy. **14:22b**

If our conscience does not condemn us in what we are doing, we do have liberty to be happy and enjoy life.

PRINCIPLE #10 – We must realize that a violation of conscience is sin. **14:23**

If your conscience bothers you on a gray issue, you do not have liberty to partake of it or enjoy it. In fact, if you were to participate, it would be sin for you.

There is no place in this passage where Paul demands that anyone change their view of the gray area. What he demands is that believers change their views of their brothers and sisters in Christ.

What Paul was after were a group of believers who cared about God and each other. He did not want believers wasting their time judging each other on gray issues. He promoted Christian liberty, but he also promoted the wise use of that liberty. He wanted every believer to mature in the things of God.