

KINGDOM OF GOD IS NOT EATING AND DRINKING
(SUNDAY, JUNE 23, 2013)

Scripture Reading: Psalm 133; Rom. 14:13-23

INTRODUCTION

Christians in Rome – deep theological understanding, a faithful church in many ways, but also in need of correction on a number of issues.

Rom. 1:8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

We see especially in chapter 14 that Paul needed to give specific instruction on how they were to deal with differences.

Honesty of God's Word as it deals with major characters and local churches.

The presence of God's grace and the good work that local churches may be doing do not mean that local churches might not also have some real problems – Corinth, Rome, etc.

Being part of a local church is a very serious calling.

Sometimes as Christians because of sin and our own frailty, we don't always have the right focus.

Satan would love for us to either ignore sin or focus on issues that are not critical to our main purpose.

Paul in this text instructs us of the serious nature of being part of a local church, the great duty we have to each other, and how we must make sure that together we have the right focus.

Live in terms of what truly matters for the sake of Christ's church and kingdom.

Text has three parts.

- 1) Walk in Love, vv. 13-16
- 2) Focus on what the kingdom is about, vv. 17-18
- 3) Act in faith but not to the hurt of others, vv. 19-23

I. WALK IN LOVE, VV. 13-16

Last week we talked about the strong and the weak.

The **weak** likely were mainly Jewish Christians (maybe also some Gentiles) who did not eat certain kinds of food and observed certain days out of **continuing loyalty to the Mosaic Law**.¹

The identification of weak does show that Paul **doesn't agree** with their views, but Paul is not simply just taking the side of the strong.

One commentator writes on the issue that the weak were facing.

At stake was the whole Jewish conception of holiness and whether a clear line of demarcation must not be drawn between the holy community and those outside. By removing such an important boundary marker Paul would seem to many Jewish Christians to be threatening their sacred space and leaving the community with its defenses down and exposed to all sorts of corrupting influences.²

Strong – tempted to despise

Weak – tempted to judge

In verses 1-12, Paul gives instruction for both.

That continues in verses 13-23, with the balance being shifted to instruction to the “strong.”

Verse 13 – summary and a transition.³

Summary of one of the main themes of v. 1-12, a word to both to the strong and the weak.

Paul then turns specifically to the strong.

Interestingly the word translated as resolve is the same verb judge, obviously used in a different way.

Let us not judge each other, but let us make a judgment to not place an obstacle or trap before a brother or sister.

Paul has already used the words stumbling block and cause to fall in Romans 9:33 in a quotation from Isaiah.

The two words here are synonyms.

¹ Moo, 829. He states that this view has become the most popular in recent years.

² Dunn, 819.

³ Moo, 851.

What is the stumbling block or cause to fall? In light of the context it means pressure placed upon the weak to do what their consciences were telling them not to do and so fall into sin and potential spiritual ruin.⁴

The weak were wrong in their understanding. But the strong were to be very careful not to cause them in anyway to do that which they viewed as being sinful.

We would love to know more of the background which might aid in our understanding.

We do know the importance of food both today and in the ancient world. Some suggest a possible context might be what is called the “love feast,” the sharing of a meal in conjunction with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.⁵

Verse 14 shows again that Paul did not believe in the continued application of the food laws dealing with unclean and clean food.

Paul says that he knows and is convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself.

This is a very strong statement.

And yet look at how Paul ends verse 14.

Hopefully the “weak” Christians in Rome will grow in their understanding of the truth and Paul’s position, but if someone believes still that they should not eat something because it would go against God’s word, then that one should not eat.

I believe in propositional truth, which means that the truth of what we believe can be expressed in logical statements of belief. Truth is not a vague feeling.

We summarize what we believe in creeds and confessions.

However, often it does take people time to understand truth.

Doctrines of grace – eschatology – other matters.

We don’t believe in multiple, conflicting truths. But place must be given for conscience when we are talking about matters that do not directly concern the gospel, the deity of Christ, or the Triune nature of God.

⁴ Moo, 852.

⁵ Moo, 852 fn 13. Moo here notes the suggestion of Godet.

Verse 15 shows the serious nature of what was taking place in Rome.

Verse 15 speaks of a brother grieved because of your food.

Paul is again talking about how the actions of the strong could negatively affect the weak.

The verb grieve means something more than just an irritation. Given the context here we are talking about someone who is pressured in one way or the other to violate his or her own conscience. That is a very serious matter.

If you are causing this grief, obviously, as Paul states, you are no longer walking in love.

And then look at the end of verse 15.

Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.

Isn't this quite a statement illustrating how sometimes Christians can cause great trouble to others over matters like food and drink?

Yes, Paul, would say, you have the freedom to eat what you desire. But is food more important to you than someone Jesus died to save?

What is more important – your belly or your brother?

Verse 15 does not mean that one of God's elect can lose his salvation. Verse 15 is also not going against the doctrine of what is called particular or limited atonement.

The last phrase of verse 15 is difficult in light of some of the key doctrines we believe, but we have to consider that Paul is giving a very serious warning.

When Scripture does give warnings they apply to both the elect and the non-elect, though they will be received in different ways by the elect and those who are not.

The doctrine of God preserving His saints is never to be used as a blanket for sinful patterns.

The final word of these verses is that the lawful freedom we do have in Christ must be carefully used. It should not become grounds for accusation of evil.

This a good warning for us today even though we do not face the identical situation confronting the church in Rome.

Make sure you are walking in love and not in ways that encourage others to do that which they would believe is sinful.

II. FOCUS ON WHAT THE KINGDOM IS ABOUT, vv. 17-18

Verses 17 and 18 provide the theological center for this second half of the chapter.

Paul uses the phrase kingdom of God which is found most often in the book of Luke. It is an expression that Paul uses at least 20 times in his different letters.

The expression kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven means – the present and active rule of the LORD in bringing restoration to creation and salvation to all of God’s people especially revealed in the person and work of Christ.

It is foreshadowed and foreseen in the OT.

Jesus proclaimed the kingdom and revealed it in casting out demons and in his teaching and healing.

The power of the kingdom was unleashed in the death and resurrection of Christ.

The kingdom of God continues to expand through the working of the Holy Spirit as souls are saved and as God’s people live as they should.

The climax of the kingdom comes in the final new heavens and earth.

The kingdom of God concerns God’s central purpose for His work of creation and redemption in Jesus Christ.

What is the purpose for the work of Christ?

Is it so that you can eat and drink whatever you want?

No, the central concerns of the kingdom are righteousness, peace, and joy, these three gifts coming through the working of the Holy Spirit.⁶

⁶ Moo, 857.

Righteousness often in Romans means the righteousness which we receive through faith – imputed righteousness. But here along with peace and joy, Paul is taking about how we treat others, especially other believers.

When we seek to deal with others in terms of righteousness and when we also seek to live in peace, joy is the product. And these actions and gifts come as you live by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus did not die to make your everyday a Friday. He died to reconcile us to God and to call a people out of their sin who would then demonstrate the love of God to each other.

Verse 18 states that when you have the proper kingdom focus, that is when you are living acceptable before God and when you will be approved by men.

Do you have the right focus in terms of the purpose of Jesus Christ living, dying, and being raised from the dead?

III. ACT IN FAITH BUT NOT TO THE HURT OF OTHERS, VV. 19-23

In this final section, Paul again emphasizes the main points raised in verses 13-17.

Paul addresses these issues in the opposite order they were first raised.

Verses 19 and 17: Peace

Verses 20 and 15: Do not tear down and destroy

Verses 20 and 14: All things clean/nothing is unclean by itself

Verses 21 and 13: don't do anything to cause a fellow believer to stumble.⁷

The command in verse 19 is a strong command – pursue the things which make for peace and the things which build each other up.

The command here to pursue peace doesn't just mean you simply not try to cause trouble for others but that you are actively working for peace. You seek that this local church and the cause of Christ are strengthened.

Do you see again the serious nature of being part of a local church?

⁷ Modified from Moo, 850.

Rom. 15:2 Let each of us please *his* neighbor for *his* good, leading to edification.

The command of verse 20 is as I mentioned earlier similar to that of verse 15 but likely in verse 20 Paul is talking about the church rather than an individual believer.

Don't tear down that which God is building.

And look again at the contrast of verse 20 – the **work of God** **for the sake of food**.

This is again a warning how easy it is for us to pick the wrong fights and to cause great harm to each other over matters that are hardly essential to the sake of the kingdom.

Verse 20 concludes with another admonition directed to the strong.

Paul repeats in part what he stated in verse 14 but he is again reminding the strong that although they have freedom to eat, it is wrong to cause anyone to stumble by what you eat.

Anything that might cause your brother to stumble should be avoided.

Again this is not a command that you stop doing something just because someone else doesn't happen to like it. We are talking about matters where someone is encouraged to do that which they believe is sinful.

Notice in verse 21 that Paul adds another issue not brought up in the first half of the chapter.

What does he add in verse 21? He adds the drinking of wine.

This reference to wine should likely be understood again from the perspective of wine that somehow would have been used in a pagan ceremony.

This might have been less of an issue and so it is not treated to the same degree as the eating of meat which begins the chapter. Notice also that Paul speaks of anything that might cause your brother to stumble or be offended or be made weak as we read in the NKJV.

And then finally Paul gives a final word to the strong and the weak in verses 22 and 23.

The strong have faith. That is good, but that faith should not be used to try to beat down the weak and certainly not to cause them to sin.

Clearly here Paul is talking about faith not in the full sense of saving faith. Paul is not encouraging you to be a secret, hidden Christian. Faith here refers to the understanding that the ceremonial laws of the OT no longer bind the believer.

Verse 22 ends with a sort of beatitude. Blessed or happy is the one who does not bring self-condemnation in what he approves as being right to eat.

Verse 23 ends with a word of warning to the weak.

Those who doubt when they eat are condemned if they are going against their conscience. It is sinful to go against your conscience, even if you might be wrong in your belief.

CONCLUSION

Differences over matters not involving key doctrines or that which can clearly be called sin must be handled without a spirit of judgment or despising those who think differently.

Pursue the things which make for peace and the things which edify.

Make sure you have a focus truly on the central matters of the kingdom.

Word here directed to children and younger men and women that you would never seek to encourage someone to do that which would go against a matter of conscience.

We live in the Facebook – My life is on display before the world age.

Be careful about what others might conclude is the central purpose of life. Be careful that freedom does not become something spoken of as evil.

Let us seek to live in terms of what truly matters – not eating and drinking – but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Prayer

Closing Hymn – 278

BENEDICTION – 1 PETER 5:10-11

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.