

Sermons through

Romans

Whatever Is Not From Faith

Romans 14:19-23

With Study Questions

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Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. 20 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. 21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. 22 Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin (Romans 14:19-23).

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Peace

Deacons, elders, licentiates and ministers in our denomination all take vows. These vows (a vow is a promise made to God-Psalm 50:4; 76:11; 116:14), include items which are critical to the office (belief in the word of God, seeking to lead a godly life, etc.) as well as issues of difficulty. Included in all of these vows is the promise to zealously pursue, seek and maintain the “peace and the unity of the church”.

In the ordination and installation of a minister, we see this promise surrounded by those things which might war against the pursuit of this peaceful enterprise. The budding minister is asked:

Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the gospel and the purity, the peace, and the unity of the church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account?

The preaching of the gospel and the pursuit of the purity and true unity of the church has always encountered some form of persecution or opposition. The persecution can be violence or ridicule from the world

(Matthew 5:11, 12; Jude 18) or corruption from within (Acts 20:29). These types of things must be endured, exposed and/or confronted. We would be naïve to think this is not a battle.

The natural temptation when one becomes aware of some stain of error is to crush it before it gets legs. **“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees”** Jesus taught, addressing the false **“doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matthew 16:11, 12)**. But it can be reckless, selfish, lazy and a catering to one’s own frustration to immediately become heavy handed in the face of error. Sometimes it seems that it would be much easier to clean my kid’s rooms with a blow torch rather than a broom.

We must remember that the pursuit of the things that make for peace is continually weaved into the battle plans of purity and unity. Jesus is, after all, the **“Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6)**. It would be incongruous to say we’re seeking the Prince of Peace while dismissing peace itself. We are called in our passage to **“pursue” *diokomen*** things which make for peace or “what makes peace” (ESV). To pursue means to do something with intense effort and with definite purpose or goal.

When we think of **“peace” *eirenes***, let us consider the words of Christ, **“Let not your heart be troubled” (John 14:1)**. It has been explained as the sitting down in one’s heart or let your heart have a seat.

Even in the addressing of error, there should be an effort to bestow peace. After all, if a person is consumed in error, that error is likely a source of consternation or grief. It is just too easy and self-serving to rip into somebody. The prevailing sins in this chapter are contempt and an unhealthy self-serving judgmentalism. Mutual edification is where our words and actions are to lead. **“Edify” *oikodomes*** means to increase the potential or someone, to strengthen and to build up.

Whether it’s with your spouse, siblings, children, parents, friends, co-workers, or someone serving with you in some form of ministry or project, an underlying theme in your thoughts, words and deeds is to edify by bringing peace to their souls, even (or especially) when addressing weakness or error.

I have a common practice when we bring someone into some post of ministry to challenge them with this thought: “When I see you’ve been in a conversation with someone and I, afterward, ask them what you were talking about, I would like to hear them say, ‘I was being ministered to.’”

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. 21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak (Romans 14:20, 21).

Destroying God's Work

We've already discussed the nature of the offense revolving around food and how things are not inherently evil, so I will not address that again. What should catch our eye here is the warning not to "**destroy the work of God**" for some irrelevant or trivial reason.

God is building His church. It is made of "**living stones**" being built into a "**spiritual house**" (1 Peter 2:5). At this risk of mixing metaphors, each living stone is a "**temple**" (1 Corinthians 6:19). We are to treat our own bodies as a temple (not so much in terms of what we eat as in our pursuit of purity and holiness-1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16). We are to also recognize this to be true of others as well.

God is building His church with living stones and when we fail to edify one another by seeking to instill peace in the hearts of our brethren, we are destroying His work. It is like a construction crew putting dents and slashes in the metal and wood of the structure they're building.

Friends of mine who are pastors and elders will convey to me horrifying accounts of congregational meetings which end in hostility and division. There are any number of reasons why this takes place. It is often due to a very unstructured form of church government or undefined theological convictions.

But very high on the list is a lack of circumspection (an awareness of one's surroundings). A person may stand up and exercise their perfect right to make statements. So often this is done without considering how this stumbles, offends and weakens the brethren. We unwittingly destroy the work of God (the healthy and proper growing of His church) by our reckless interactions.

I realize this is tricky business. We live in an era where the church's effort not to offend has caused it to almost entirely lose its salt; the great temptation to love "**the praise of men more than the praise of God**" (John 14:43). Yet the error on the other side of the spectrum is to offend for

insufficient reason. Not everybody who disagrees with my theology is a Pharisee.

Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin (Romans 14:22-23).

Imitating Christ

Each Christian has faith. That faith is the instrument by which God brings them to Christ. From that faith we are called to govern our lives. There are blessed liberties and possessions that God **“gives us richly...to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17)**. But I should never enjoy those things at the expense of the welfare of my brethren. This, again, gets tricky. Because the church is not to be held hostage by the weaker brethren. Keep in mind that the exhortation in this chapter is toward both the stronger and weaker. The stronger is not to despise nor is the weaker to judge.

But hopefully we’ve seen in this chapter that the issue does not primarily revolve around meat, vegetables, days or wine. It revolves around the unhealthy disposition of passing judgment on the one who has been welcomed by God (Romans 14:3); it revolves around not living to oneself to living to the Lord (Romans 14:7, 8); around not destroying the one for whom Christ died (Romans 14:15).

I pray we’ve seen in this chapter a call to imitate Christ. We forget that one of the great New Testament passages that conveys the sacrifice of Christ, taking upon Himself our sins, is a passage which was written as a call to imitation.

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 22 “Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”; 23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you

were healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls (1 Peter 2:21-25).

Jesus did not come to be served but to serve and give His life (Matthew 20:28). The Matthew passage being another passage designed for the readers/listeners to imitate.

To put it another way:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves (Philippians 2:3).

Do we grasp what Jesus has done for us? Did He bear your sins? Have your eyes and ears been opened to that glorious truth? If so, we are called to walk in a manner consistent with that.

Whatever Is Not From Faith

The chapter concludes with a curious, yet realistic assessment. All Christians are at various levels of maturity. We all have certain convictions of what's true, false, right and wrong. The Scriptures may be infallible but none of us are infallible. Again, we are not talking about heresy or immorality here, but "doubtful things". Each of us from our own level of maturity should seek to operate our lives faithfully. The apostle reasons, **"for whatever is not from faith is sin."**

Let us finish with a brief examination of this phrase. Whatever is not from faith is sin. Now it doesn't follow from this that everything I say I do in faith must be okay. There are people who have claimed to be following their faith in the pursuit of horrible things. Suffice it to say for now that if the faith is a true saving faith, it is open to instruction and correction in the face of sin and heresy.

But assuming for now that we are not talking about sin and heresy, but doubtful things, we can rest assured that if we are in the faith, and seeking to walk in that faith-seeking to please God in our thoughts, words and deeds, because of Christ, our works are pleasing to God.

On the other hand, if there is an act (whatever it might be) that does not proceed from faith, it is sin. I was recently asked at a Bible study about the good works of unbelievers. Does God not approve? We all know unbelievers who do wonderful things. They are people we trust. They might be good neighbors. Yet they are not doing these good things to please God. These good things do not proceed from faith and are, therefore, sinful. Why? Because with God, the reason (the motive) for the good work is of paramount importance.

Let me illustrate. Say you observed a wife who exercised regularly, made every effort to look and keep her house beautiful. You might think to yourself, "What a wonderful wife!" But what if you found that all this effort was made, not for her husband, but for another! The exact same works would most certainly be now viewed differently.

It might be a worthwhile endeavor for a person to ask who they are seeking to serve. Someone might say, "I am not seeking God. My good works don't need God." Well then who are you serving and how do you know if it is a good work?

"Whatever is not from faith is sin" is one of the very closed-minded, exclusive statements we see peppered throughout Scripture. Right there with "No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). The natural mind may war against it. But since anyone would agree that the motivation for an action will determine whether it is truly good or evil, apart from Christ, what drives us? And is that master, whoever and whatever it may be, worthy of your eternal devotion?

Questions for Study

1. What are all Christians to pursue? How can this be difficult (pages 2, 3)?
2. What are some ways you can edify and bring peace to others (page 3)?
3. What is God's work and how can people destroy it (page 4)?
4. In what ways does all of Romans 14 challenge us to imitate Christ (pages 4, 5)?
5. Explain the phrase, "whatever is not from faith is sin". How can something that outward appears good actually be a sin (pages 6, 7)?
6. Who are you ultimately serving? Why is that worthy of your service (page 7)?