

Whatever Is Not of Faith Is Sin

📖 Romans 14:13-23

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Alright, one question. One person gave me some work to do.

Q: Is sanctification not complete until *after* the judgment seat of God?

A: 1 John 3:2 says that when we see see Jesus Christ we will be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. Since we see Him at the rapture then our sanctification is complete at the rapture. The rapture teaches that at any moment the Lord could come with the believing dead and those who are alive and remain will be caught up in the air with them and we will all be transformed into resurrection bodies. This precedes the judgment seat and so our sanctification will be complete and final before the judgment seat. When we go to the judgment seat there is nothing to correct or perfect because this mortality will have put on immortality and this perishable will have put on the imperishable. We are as perfect in position and experience as Jesus Christ. This is important because if you think there is something lacking at the judgment seat then you can see the prospect of some kind of penal remediation or punishment. That changes the whole nature of the judgment seat away from one of the joy of meeting our Savior to one of fear of meeting our Judge. He is our Judge, of course, but the nature of the judgment is one of evaluating our works done in the body, whether good or bad. He is not going to shame us. 1 John 2:28 says that we may be ashamed but that sense of shame is not coming from Him but coming from us because of our realization of how we wasted the opportunities He gave us. In the end the works done by the Spirit are classified as good and therefore of imperishable quality and so qualified for reward. The works done by the flesh are classified as bad and therefore of perishable quality and so disqualified for reward. So our sanctification is complete before the judgment seat of God not after.

We're dealing with Romans 14 and this is a very confusing chapter for many Christians. J. Vernon McGee justified his long introduction to this chapter saying, "I have given a great deal of space to these preliminary remarks because I know there are many puzzled Christians who will be helped by what Paul has for us in this important

chapter.”¹ I hope this chapter is helpful for you. Some commentators think the issues in this chapter are the main reason Paul wrote the entire epistle. They argue that the Jewish and Gentile believers at Rome were dividing over all kinds of amoral, trivial issues such as food and days and to foster unity where it counts what does Paul do? He emphasizes for 11 chapters the doctrine that believers must agree on. The doctrines of condemnation, justification, sanctification, glorification and God’s plan for Israel are essential doctrines we must agree on. We cannot differ on these things and be in fellowship. These are absolutely essential truths. They are the basis of our unity. But what is non-essential and where we should have harmony are the issues of clean and unclean food, the keeping of certain days, and other amoral issues. So the argument is that in chapters 1-11 Paul is giving the doctrinal essentials where Jew and Gentile must have unity and in chapters 14-15 the non-essentials where Jew and Gentile may have differences but must have harmony. That way of looking at Romans helps you see the probable reason Paul wrote in preparation for his plans to come to Rome and build them up in further training. I hope this helps us in our relationships with other Christians too. Do we agree on condemnation? Do we agree on justification? Do we agree on sanctification? Do we agree on glorification? Do we agree God has a future plan for Israel and we should not get arrogant toward the nation Israel because of their unbelief? If we do that is sufficient common ground. Then when it comes to keeping certain days and eating certain foods we can disagree on those things and not break fellowship. So on essentials unity; on non-essentials harmony.

In 14:1 Paul commands the brother strong in the faith to welcome in his circle the brother who is weak in the faith, AS HE IS. Remember, the issue is not tolerating his sin. The issue is not sin at all. The issue is scruples, twinges of conscience that some Christians have because they were raised in some culture that said certain matters were moral that were really immoral. They were scruples. The weak brother has the scruples and the strong brother is to wholly welcome him. He is not to welcome him for the purpose of straightening him out by challenging his scruples. He is to accept him as he is. In 14:2 Paul gives an example of a Gentile who is strong in the faith who may eat all things in - contrast to a Jew who is weak in the faith and can eat vegetables only. In 14:3 the Gentile is commanded to not look with disdain on the Jew who does not eat all things. The Jew is commanded to not judge the Gentile who does eat all things. The reason set forth by Paul is that God has accepted both of them. If God has accepted them who are we not to accept them? In 14:4 Paul asks this very question, “Who are you to judge the servant of another?” That is the first great principle to take away from this chapter. Your fellow brother in Christ is a servant of Jesus Christ. They are not your servant. Therefore, you have no place to judge them on scrupulous issues. This, of course, does not mean that we cannot judge sin among us. 1 Cor 5 says that we must judge sin among us. But on scrupulous issues we should not judge among ourselves.

In 14:5 the weak person regards one day above another, this was the Jew; he kept Sabbath and feast days. The strong person regards every day alike, this was the Gentile; he had more freedom than the Jew. Paul says, “Each

¹ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary: The Epistles (Romans 9-16)*, electronic ed., vol. 43 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 96.

person must be fully convinced in his own mind." Here is another principle; be fully convinced in your own mind. It is critical to work through certain questions so that you don't do something that violates your conscience. We should never do something if we have doubt. A man who doubts is like a ship tossed to and fro by the winds and the waves. It is never a sure course. Be fully convinced in your own mind. In 14:6, Christians who were fully convinced on opposite sides of the issue of keeping certain days were both doing what they were doing for the Lord. One ate and one did not eat for the Lord. This is the important thing to see. In 14:7-8 we see again that both sides are accountable to the Lord. We all answer to Him. He is our Master. We don't live for ourselves or die for ourselves because He purchased us out of the slave market of sin. Now He is the one whom we live and die for. We will give an account of ourselves to Him. In 14:9 the purpose of Christ's death and resurrection was that He might qualify to be the Supreme Judge of the entire universe. Since He is the Supreme Judge then 14:10 asks, "Why do you judge your brother?" This, of course, means judging on scrupulous issues and not on sin issues. Public sin issues are a subject of our judgment among ourselves. Many passages teach this, but on amoral issues we are not to judge our brother. We have no right. It is stepping on the toes of the Supreme Judge of the universe. As Isaiah wrote, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall give praise to God." So then, 14:11, "each one of us will give an account of himself to God." This means we will go to the judgment or evaluation seat of Christ. You may have scruples or you may not have scruples and therefore enjoy more freedom. But whatever you do on these types of issues you are to do them for the Lord because He is going to judge your motives for doing these things. Let me reiterate that sin will not be the issue at the judgment or evaluation seat of Christ but your motives behind what you did in the body on these types of things will be an issue. Tom Constable concludes saying, "In this pericope (vv. 1–12) the apostle stressed the folly of judging our fellow Christians who relate to amoral practices differently from the way we do. There is a strong emphasis on recognizing Jesus' lordship in our lives in these verses. The word "Lord" occurs seven times in verses 5–9."

In 14:13 Paul begins to apply these principles so that we can have the best experience at the judgment seat of Christ. **Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—** Observe this is the fourth time Paul has said do not judge one another on scrupulous issues. He said it in verse 3, verse 4, verse 10 and now he says it in verse 13. The repetition seems to indicate this was a major problem at the church in Rome causing unnecessary division. By application the same kind of thing is going on in our time. Most churches split over some stupid issue that should never have been an issue in the first place. The Holy Spirit knew this in advance and addressed it through this letter. Paul says again, **let us not judge one another anymore.** But if we should not judge them anymore what should we do? Paul says, **But rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.** This is the highway to harmony. It is a command of God for the strong believer. The strong believer is to **not put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.** He has the freedom to eat all things himself. He understands the doctrinal truth that Christ has set us free to enjoy freedom. But he should also understand what Paul teaches elsewhere, that exercising a freedom is not always

profitable or edifying (1 Cor 10:23). Actually exercising a freedom in front of a weaker believer may put **an obstacle or stumbling block** in his **way** that might cause him to fall. This would not be walking in love. What does it mean to put an obstacle or stumbling block in his way? What is the difference between **an obstacle** and **a stumbling block**? The words are often used as synonyms but some difference seems to be meant by Paul here. Constable says, "The Greek word translated "obstacle" (NASB) or "stumbling block" (NIV; proskomma) refers to an object on a path against which someone strikes his foot and consequently stumbles or falls (cf. 1 Cor. 8:9). The stronger brother's liberty might retard the weaker brother's progress as he walks the Christian path. It might set him back temporarily or even do permanent damage to his sensitive conscience. Another Greek word translated "stumbling block" (NASB) or "obstacle" (NIV; skandalon) describes a snare used to catch an animal or victim as it walks by (cf. Matt 16:23; 1 Cor. 8:13). The stronger brother's liberty might even constitute a temptation for the weaker brother to sin. It might tempt him to go beyond his stronger brother's behavior and cast off restraint in moral as well as amoral matters." The difference in my estimation is that putting an **obstacle** in front of a weak believer refers to the lack of consideration that a strong believer may manifest when he does not consider that a fellow believer may struggle when he exercises his freedom. Therefore, the responsibility of the strong believer is to consider that a brother may be weak in a certain area and to give up the exercise of his freedom in that area for the sake of the weaker believer. By contrast, putting **a stumbling block** in front of a weak believer refers to a deliberate attempt by a strong believer to tempt a weak believer to violate his conscience. So then, the difference is that one is not deliberate and the other is deliberate. The strong believer has a responsibility on one hand to be cautious about exercising a freedom in mixed company and if knowledgeable of a weaker believer should never exercise the freedom. To do so is sinful, inconsiderate and not loving. We should all determine not to do this.

Now in verse 14 Paul knew and was convinced **in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.** This statement may sound like Paul is advancing a double standard. Is that what Paul is saying? No, it is absolutely true that all foods are clean. Jesus Christ declared all foods clean when He said in Matt 15, "It is not what enters a man which makes him unclean but what comes out of the heart, that is what makes a man unclean." And here in verse 20 Paul says "All things indeed are clean." So the only standard is that all foods are indeed clean. However, what is in view here is not the standard but whether a believer has come to know and is convinced that all things are clean. There are some believers that have not come to know and become convinced of that truth. They were taught that some foods are **unclean**. This, of course, is the Jew. He was raised from a little child to think that some foods were unclean. The only way it can become clean to him is to learn and become convinced in his own mind, as verse 5 said, but at this time he has not come to know. Coming to know is part of the process of sanctification when as we learn the standards that are in our minds we are transformed so that we come to approve of the things that God approves. By this we come to enjoy greater and greater freedom. But at this time the weak believer has not been transformed in his thinking and so Paul says **but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean**, that is, to his

conscience it is **unclean**. The thing itself, of course, is not **unclean** in itself because it has been declared **clean**, and that is the standard, but **to him it is unclean** because his conscience is judging it unclean, he cannot eat it in good conscience. Therefore, he must not eat. It would be assumed that over time he will learn and grow to have the freedom to eat, he will grow to become strong so that he can eat in good conscience. But he does not yet have that freedom. This is simply part of the growth process and we should be considerate of the time that it takes for others to come to know and be convinced in their own mind. That is why it is so important to keep learning Bible and sitting only under the most excellent teachers so that you can grow to enjoy freedom and to have consideration for others. This is a sign of maturity.

In 14:15 Paul explains, **For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love**. Here is another principle and rule of thumb. Is what I am doing **according to love** or is it according to selfishness? Am I exercising my freedom because I have the freedom or am I walking in consideration toward my brother? Exercising a freedom for the sake of freedom is selfish, foregoing a freedom for the sake of a brother is selfless. We are to walk as selfless. The construction here is a 1st class condition, assumed reality for the sake of argument. If you eat something that your brother considers unclean, whether deliberately or not **you are no longer walking according to love** because it is your responsibility to be aware of the scruples of other believers or at least considerate of the possibility he has scruples and to walk accordingly so as not to accidentally put an obstacle in front of him or deliberately to cause him to stumble. **Walking according to love** is a rule of thumb. It is the highest principle and to not follow it is to sin, it is to walk according to the flesh. Therefore, you should determine to **walk according to love** and this means to have thoughtful consideration in every situation whether you should eat or drink or keep a certain day or wear cosmetics or whatever it might be because all these things are trivial things in the grand scheme.

At the end of 14:15 Paul gives a command to the strong believer. **Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died**. **Food** is a trivial issue. Christ's death is a serious issue. To exercise your freedom in some trivial thing in his presence would **destroy...him for whom Christ died**, making it a serious issue. This brings the real issue into focus. To destroy a brother is to act contrary to Christ who died for him. Why would you do such a thing over something so trivial, eating some food, drinking some drink? It would be better to simply forego it. And if you cannot forego it then you have a problem. This is how the Bible defines an addict. Someone who cannot give something up and will not give it up for sake of him **for whom Christ died**. The attitude is that the weaker brother needs to deal with it. That is a sinful attitude. The individual needs to admit that what was once a scrupulous, trivial thing, has for himself become sin. Nothing scrupulous should take on a level of importance that makes it required even in the presence of weaker brethren. It is a sign of selfishness and self-absorption that is pitifully sinful, even contrary to the death of Christ because the death of Christ is about Him giving up His life for another and you will not even give up something trivial such as food or drink for another. Have you thought about that? How important is that food or drink to you, that poker game, that dress,

whatever? Is it more important than your brother **for whom Christ died**? Are you willing to make a brother stumble so you can exercise your freedom?

In 14:16 Paul gives a conclusion and command to the strong believer. **Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil.** Well, how can the strong believer disallow this? How can he prohibit someone from saying evil things about things he thinks of as good and God says are good? He can prohibit it only by not exercising his freedom in the presence of those who are weak. This is the only way because once a strong believer has exercised his freedom the weak believer is taught to speak evil of the thing the strong believer is doing, which is really nothing, but it is in the mind of the weak believer. So to avoid it being spoken evil of he must not do it in his presence. Simply give it up. It is trivial. Do not exercise freedom if there is any question.

14:17 explains, **for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.** Now Paul has introduced **the kingdom of God** as a point of illustration about what is really important. The **kingdom of God** always refers to the future kingdom covenanted to David and to Abraham and to be fulfilled in the Messiah who will come to rule on earth as the second Adam for 1,000 years. There is no kingdom now but those who believe in the present age are sons of the kingdom and are preparing to serve in positions of rule in that coming kingdom. Paul says the kingdom is not characterized by things like **eating and drinking** but by **righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.** Paul's argument seems to be that the strong believer should not make a big deal out of giving up the exercise of his freedom in this age because **eating and drinking** are trivial things in **the kingdom.** The things that are of substance in the **kingdom** are **righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.** So the strong believer should focus on those things in the present age in preparation for the kingdom to come. The way we focus on these things is by setting our minds on the word of God and walking by the Spirit. These things are all fruit of the Spirit. The point is that in the present age leading up to the kingdom we are in preparation for the kingdom and should learn to live by the Spirit so we can see His kingdom fruit produced, fruit that will be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ and accrue to our positions of rule in the kingdom. These things are **righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.** Things like eating and drinking should be sacrificed accordingly since they are, by comparison, trivial things. If they might cause a brother to stumble give them up and pursue righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit instead. That is the way of love.

In 14:18 Paul explains further how this relates to the judgment preceding the kingdom and our preparation for that kingdom. **For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.** When the stronger believer gives up some trivial thing like food or drink so as not to cause his brother to stumble he is serving Christ and will therefore receive a favorable verdict by God. As a byproduct he will also be approved by men.

In 14:19 Paul gives a conclusion, **So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.** That is, we pursue a kingdom ethic. The kingdom ethic is defined as walking by the Spirit. This is

what we should pursue. There was not **peace** at the Church of Rome; there was division. There was not the **building up of one another**; there was the tearing down of one another. And this over trivial things. Brethren, this is not the way things should be. This is not characteristic of the future kingdom of God. Therefore, we ought to **pursue** in the present age **the things which** are characteristic of the future kingdom age; **peace** with one another and the building up of one another. These things are essential to our preparation for the future judgment seat and kingdom.

14:20 continues to emphasize the command to follow; **Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food**. This is simply saying don't tear down the work of God for something trivial. The fellow believers are **the work of God**. The things that are trivial that could tear him down are food, drink, TV, et. al. We should not let them ever become something more than trivial. If they become essential we are addicted, have taken them too far, given them too much importance, lost sight of the things that are truly important, we are now living in sin. The next sentence says, **All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense**. He is defining the work of God as the individual believer who might be caused to stumble by your exercise of freedom. Remember that your brother, as scrupulous as he may be is an accomplishment of Christ's death appropriated by faith. And if that brother eats when for him it is unclean you have torn down, damaged, and injured the work of God. That is not good.

In 14:21, what is good? **It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles**. It is not going to hurt anyone to abstain from things that might cause a brother to stumble. It's when we insist on our freedom despite the harm it might cause that it is not good. If there is any question at all then you should abstain from doing it. This is a non-negotiable truth. I know people who will not drink publicly because the possibility exists that it might cause someone to fall. That is a healthy policy. It is certainly good not to eat meat or to drink wine or to do anything by which your brother might stumble.

In 14:22, **The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God** on these scrupulous issues. Be in the clear before Him. Be sure you have talked to Him about these things and that you don't feel any reproach or condemnation doing these things before Him. Because if you do you're not going to have any rest in your soul when practicing them. That's what Paul says, **Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves**. The word **Happy** is *μακάριος* and means "blessed" or "fortunate." It's good to not have a sense of **condemnation** in what you approve. If you have a sense of condemnation you are not fully convinced of what you are doing and that is contrary to verse 5. God wants you to be fully convinced in your own mind. Anything short of that is not good. There should be no doubting.

In 14:23 we have a summary of the entire chapter. It's a verse I use all the time. It's a litmus test on these issues. Memorize this verse. It is so practical. **But he who doubts is concerned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin**. This is very simple; if you cannot do it without any doubt it is **sin**. This is where the sin is; not in wearing pants, not in eating or drinking, unless it is pushed too far. But the sin

as Paul addresses it is when you are doubting. This is because **doubt** is the opposite of **faith**. **And whatever is not from faith is sin**. God created man to live by faith. Doubt is not okay. Satan was the one who planted doubt in the woman's mind. James says that the man who doubts ought to not expect that he will get anything from God. Doubt is the opposite of faith and the only response God accepts is faith. Man was made to live by faith. Hebrews says that without faith it is impossible to please God. When we live by faith we are walking in the light and enjoying the life God has given us. When we do not live by faith we are walking in darkness and not enjoying the life God has given us. These are the only two ways to live, by doubt or by faith. On scrupulous issues like keeping of days, meeting on Sunday's, celebrating Christmas, wearing pants, watching movies, the important thing is to be fully convinced in your own mind so that the things you do you do for the Lord and His glory out of faith.