



(For access to all available commentaries and sermons of Charlie's click [HERE](#))

Romans

For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. Romans 14:18

Still building on the entirety of the contents of chapter 14, Paul again begins this verse with the connector "for." This has been one long and continues stream of points and summaries in order to establish doctrine concerning "disputable matters." It is obviously something of profound importance to him and one which then begs the question, "Why?" The answer has several parts -

First, he had come out of the legalistic system which ruled the life of a Pharisee. He saw how it corrupted the already complex system of the law to the point that it became a crushing burden on the people. Jesus personally spoke against their conduct time and time again. Thus Paul understood that legalism is destructive to the individual and displeasing to the Lord.

Secondly, adding to God's mandates through legalism invariably leads either to feelings of self-righteousness by those who impose them or to feelings of worthlessness to those on whom they are imposed, but who fail at meeting a requirement which is actually no requirement at all. And the opposite - liberalism, or the setting aside of God's mandates, invariably leads to immorality, license, and a weak and ineffective gospel message; one so watered down that it actually makes no change in the life and conduct of the one who hears it.

Finally, as the Lord's spokesperson for doctrine during the church age, his words are to be taken as the inspired word of God. Because they are, just like any other time in redemptive history, we are not to add to nor take away from what God prescribes.

Proverbs 30:5, 6 sums this thought up quite well -

"Every word of God is pure;
He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him.
Do not add to His words,
Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar."

When man interferes in what belongs to God alone, he becomes an usurper of God's right to rule and His authority over His creatures. Think of it... what a slap in the face of God to decide that we know what is better than He!

Because of these, and certainly many other valid points, he says, "For he who serves Christ in these things is..."

(1) "Acceptable to God." Christ is God's standard for humanity. He is our example and He is our guide. Our religious duties are to Him. Therefore, when we serve Him as rightly instructed, the inevitable result is that God accepts our conduct. He gave the instructions and He gave the Son whom we are to serve.

(2) "Approved by men." Those who see our conduct and understand our relationship with Christ will approve of our actions in that capacity. Although this section is dealing with our acceptance of others' actions within the faith, this doesn't necessarily mean that those who see and approve will all be Christians. But even those who aren't will be able to say, "He is a good example of the faith he professes." How many times does a person look at a Christian and say, "If that guy is an example of being a Christian, then I want nothing to do with Christianity!" And why? Because they are either adding to what God expects

through legalism ("Look at that self-righteous jerk!") or failing to act properly through a watered down, liberal faith ("Look at the perverted things that 'Christian' does!") Our adherence to God's laws reflect on the One we profess to serve. If another maligns our Lord when we are faithfully obedient, then He will judge that person. But if someone maligns our Lord when we act unfaithfully, then He will certainly judge us.

Life application: We serve an infinitely wise God. What He ordains is right, whether we personally accept a premise or not. We may have a conscience about eating meat, but that is our problem, not His. Our conduct towards other Christians is to be in light of God's word, not our own pet peeves. And this certainly reflects on our relationship with the Lord. And those who view us from outside the faith are making value judgments on the Christian faith (and thus Christ) because of our individual actions. Let us remember this and act accordingly.

Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Romans 14:19

And yet again, Paul begins with "therefore." This is actually a combination of two conjunctions which mean "so then." As always, such a statement requires a review of the previous thoughts for the sake of proper context. Going back to verse 14 is enough to get a good hold on this "therefore."

"I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men."

If "there is nothing unclean of itself," but the conscience can make something unclean, then the conscience needs to remain undefiled. This is because anything which is not of faith is sin. If we cause someone to work against their conscience in a disputable matter, we cause them to sin and we have become the cause of their sin. What Christ allows should never be brought to this state "because the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking." How clear Paul is; how easily we dismiss it!

Instead of robbing a fellow of a clear conscience over such trivial matters, instead "let us pursue the things which make for peace." The concept of pursuing is an on-going process. We don't just pursue until we reach a set point and then stop. Instead, we keep on pursuing, never tiring of chasing after those things "which make for peace." And the things which make for peace can be considered under two broad areas -

- 1) Ensuring that those things which are prescribed in Scripture are accomplished. In other words, pursuing proper doctrine. Conscience is not a consideration in this instance; God speaks; we obey.
- 2) Ensuring that the things which are doubtful are not improperly handled as if they were prescribed; if the Bible makes no prescriptive statement on the matter, then let others pursue it according to their conscience.

Adhering to these two broad categories will certainly make for peace. And at the same time, they will allow for "the things by which one may edify another." To "edify" means to "build up." One cannot be built up in the faith if they are allowed to violate something prescribed by God. Likewise, one cannot be built up in the faith if they are coerced to act against their conscience in a matter which is not prescribed in Scripture. The goal for Christians is harmonious living within God's standards, not finger pointing, backbiting, gossiping, personal vendettas, or unauthorized judgments.

As noted in previous verses. Paul has discussed this matter for the entirety of Romans 14 thus far. This should be so immensely clear that we should never miss the point. He has come at it from every angle imaginable, and sometimes with repetition. Let us keep our fingers out of the lives of others in disputable matters... and yet we fail. Knowing the Bible and properly applying it will keep us from sinning against our fellow believers and it will keep us from being the cause of sin in them.

Life application: Romans 14 asks us time and again to know our Bible. Why? Because we cannot make right judgments on "disputable matters" unless we know what are and what are not disputable matters. We therefore sin when we don't read, study, and remember our Bible. It really is that simple.

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. Romans 14:20

"Do not destroy the work of God..." What is this referring to? It is the work of God in Christ Jesus, fulfilling the law and its requirements so that we can live in newness of the Spirit. Jesus Christ is now building a temple with His followers as "living stones" in that building. The word Paul uses for "destroy" signifies to tear down a structure. When we use something such as dietary restrictions (which have been set aside in Christ) as a standard of judgment toward others, we in essence "tear down" portions of His temple. We either make believers ineffective or we keep people from becoming believers. Who would want to participate in a legalistic, finger pointing religion?

And so, "for the sake of food" we sin against our fellow man and diminish the glory of the Lord and "the work of God" in others' eyes. What a terrible price to pay over something which isn't even prescribed in His word! And this is absolutely certain because Paul continues, "All things indeed are pure..." That statement could not be any clearer. He is talking about foods and then, even in the exact same verse, he makes this proclamation. And yet there are denominations by the score who put unscriptural burdens on their followers, "Don't eat, don't touch!"

Instead of God's word as the standard, they promote their agenda. Instead of the freedom which is found in Christ, there is bondage and harsh rule.

And because of a mishandling of the word, the result then is that it becomes "evil for the man who eats with offense." If a Christian is told that drinking soda is wrong and then another Christian says that soda drinking is fine, there is now a dilemma in their mind. "Which do I believe?" If they go ahead and drink a soda when they feel it may be wrong, they have now committed evil because they are consuming the soda with a guilty conscience. This is the sad state of the neurotic believer who is swayed by every form of doctrine which blows their way. They actually sin through their own lack of knowledge and their guilty conscience over a matter which is really not an issue that should have ever arisen.

Life application: It is the word which prescribes what we can and cannot do. By knowing the word and understanding the work of Christ on our behalf, we will remain free from sinning against our guilty conscience. Don't ever stop reading and learning your Bible.

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 14:21

Again, as Paul has done on several occasions in this chapter, he gives a very short, concise, and clear statement. If your brother is offended by your eating habits or by your wine drinking then don't do them around him. Instead, that is what you have a house for. If we cause another to "stumble" or be "offended" or "made weak" we have sinned against a person for whom Christ died. Is it worth causing this type of disruption in another's life just to engage in eating and drinking? No.

The kingdom of God is not about meat and wine, but about righteousness, holiness, and glorifying God. He has given us these things during this life to enjoy but not at the expense of fellowship and harmony within the body of believers.

Life application: Use empathy towards those around you. Don't have a belligerent attitude over "doubtful matters" but rather live at peace with those who are of the faith. We'll be spending eternity together, so why should we be fighting about these things now?