

Romans Part 49 – Chapter 14

Sunday, April 23, 2023

With input from Timothy Keller: The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness; <https://shepherds.edu/the-judgment-seat-of-christ>;
<https://www.tenth.org/resource-library/articles/will-christians-be-judged/>

We just covered that in **Romans 14:1-9** Paul admonishes us not to judge other opinions on how they serve the Lord. The closing statements included:

“when we get prone to judge people, we are really playing God, aren't we? And that's a blasphemous thing. Drop the criticism. Let the Lord be the judge; it is better that we should love one another.”

KnowingJesus.com: Our union with Christ is perhaps one of the most astonishing privileges of the Christian. We are one with Him, in union with Him, part of His Bride, and members of His very Body. We are being built up together with other believers to become a holy dwelling-place in which God lives by His Spirit.

Christ was made sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Throughout our lives, we should be His willing servants and devoted disciples. We should seek to do everything as unto the Lord, for it was to this end that Christ died and lived again that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

Whatever we do in word and deed, action and attitude, mind and motive, may we do all unto the Lord. Whether we live or whether we die, let us do ALL to His praise and glory, for ever and ever.

Timothy Keller:

We need to transform our view of self. We seek to know that we are important and valuable. We look for that ultimate verdict everyday in all the situations and people around us. And that means that every single day we are on trial. Every day, we put ourselves back into the courtroom. But do you notice how Paul says that he does not care what the Corinthians think of him or what any human court thinks? He is saying that the problem with self-esteem – whether it is high or low – is that, every single day, we are on trial. That is the way everyone's identity works. In the courtroom you have the prosecution and the defense. And everything we do is providing evidence for the prosecution or the defense.

Some days we feel we are winning the trial and other days we feel we are losing it. But Paul says he has found the secret. The trial is over for him. He is out of the courtroom. It is gone. It is over. Because the ultimate verdict is in.

Do you realize that it is only in the gospel of Jesus Christ that you get the verdict before the performance? The atheist might say they get their self-image from being a good person. They are a good person and they hope that eventually they will get a verdict that confirms they are a good person. Performance leads to the verdict. For the Buddhists too, performance leads to the verdict. If you are a Muslim, performance leads to the verdict. All this means that every day, you are in the courtroom, every day you are on trial. That is the problem.

But Paul is saying that in Christianity, the verdict leads to the performance. It is not the performance that leads to the verdict. In Christianity, the moment we believe, God says “This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. Or take Romans 8:1: *Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* God imputes Christ's perfect performance to us as if it were our own, and adopts us into His family.

You see, the verdict is in. And now I perform on the basis of the verdict. Because He loves me and He accepts me, I do not have to do the things that make me look good. I can do things for the joy of doing them. I can help people – not so I can feel better about myself, not so I can fill up the emptiness.”

We are out of the courtroom. Why do we keep trying to get back into the empty courtroom to re live the trial?

Romans 14:10-23:

10 Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;

RED FLAG: A Christian who regards their brother in Christ lower than they do unbelieving people.

Notice what Paul says is **1 Corinthians 4:1-5:**

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. 3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4 For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

10 Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;

Tenth.org: Remarkably, the Bible insists that we will be rewarded for good works we do, even though we know they are God's own work in our lives. A clear example is found in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus says, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Mt. 6:19-20). In other words, the saying, "You can't take it with you," simply isn't true when it comes to Christians. Indeed, we send such treasures ahead of ourselves in the form of good works. One of my own favorite verses comes from the Old Testament and makes a similar point: "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. 12:3).

2 Corinthians 5:10: *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive compensation for his deeds done through the body, in accordance with what he has done, whether good or bad.*

Sheperds.org: The verse affirms that the purpose of the bēma seat is that the real heart of each believer might be revealed (the verb “appear” means “to be made manifest, laid open for all to see”). The term translated “bad” in this verse is unusual; it denotes not moral corruption or intrinsic evil, but that which is useless, vile, hopelessly good-for-nothing. In his earlier epistle to the Corinthians, Paul characterized such valueless works as “wood, hay and stubble” which would be certainly consumed by the fire of divine scrutiny (1 Cor 3:11-15), and he contrasted such works to “gold, silver and precious stones” which would be refined by such a fire. The point is that some works, though superficially noble and

selfless, will be demonstrated at the judgment seat of Christ to have been born of wicked motives, animated by the desire for self-aggrandizement, and/or empowered by fleshly devices (1 Cor 4:5). These will be discarded as worthless and ignoble.

Romans 14:11: *for it is written,*

*“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,
and every tongue shall confess to God.”*

Now Paul quotes mostly from the second half of **Isaiah 45:22-23:**

*Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth;
For I am God, and there is no other.
23 I have sworn by Myself;
The word has gone out from My mouth in righteousness
And will not turn back,
That to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance.*

This supports the idea of God judging our works during the end times. Isaiah looks forward to a moment when every knee will bow in acknowledgment that Christ is the Lord. Every tongue will confess—meaning to praise or swear allegiance to—the Lord. In other words, everyone gathered at that judgment will willingly recognize and submit to Christ as the Lord of all.

12 So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Paul's point here is that this account is not given to other Christians (Colossians 2:16–23). This passage speaks of the need to tolerate fellow believers when they have a different opinion on a non-essential issue. A heavy motivator for that tolerance is the fact that we, ourselves, are not that other Christian's ultimate master; God is.

*13 Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather **decide never** to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.*

There is a sense of commitment in this verse, we must decide beforehand and stick to that decision to never put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. We should not find ourselves unprepared for these situations.

Paul previously referred to Christians who don't eat meat for religious reasons as being weak in faith (Romans 14:1–2). They are not convinced that God in His grace has freed them from legalism and certain prohibitions on food. Paul did not condemn these "weak in faith" believers, however. Instead, he told the stronger Christians to fully accept those weak in faith and not to try to argue them out of their opinion.

Now Paul calls for a new action: deciding not to put anything in the way of other Christians, causing them to trip, spiritually. Context is crucial in applying this passage. Too often, the term "stumbling block" is used as an accusation by those Paul has described as the "weak in faith." As other verses have made clear (Romans 14:3), believers cannot wield their own convictions like a club, browbeating others into conforming with their preferences (Colossians 2:16–23; 1 Corinthians 10:29–30).

14 I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.

Paul knows and is fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean to eat or drink for Christians (1 Timothy 4:4). From a "ground level" view, there are no unclean or forbidden foods. By extension, this supports Paul's earlier point that those things which the Bible does not explicitly forbid are acceptable for believers.

There is a powerful, and important second side to this idea, however. Paul adds that if a Christian believes anything to be unclean, then it is unclean—for him or her. Paul is talking about a person's conscience. If, because of upbringing or previous experiences, someone cannot bring themselves to believe they can participate in eating or drinking something, that thing is actually wrong for them to consume.

This is a new idea. Paul elevates the role of the human conscience for those who are in Christ. Even if the facts seem to show that it is okay to participate in something, and even if other mature Christians confirm that it's okay for Christians to do, but you just don't feel that it is right, then it is wrong for you.

It's important to realize this principle only applies to disputable issues. These are the topics on which Scripture and the teaching of the apostles doesn't take a position. In other words, murder, adultery, and stealing are always wrong.

15 For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.

Christians with a faith strong enough to allow them to eat meat and participate in other disputed activities must not demand their freedoms at the expense of their siblings in Christ. Even if they believe—or know for sure (Romans 14:14)—that the other person's conviction is wrong. In doing so, they may lead the one whose faith is weak to violate his conscience. Such a choice would be a sin.

This teaching may sound hard to us in a culture that values personal freedom so dearly. Paul has already made it abundantly clear in Romans 12 and 13, however, that the culture of the church is meant to be one in which Christians set themselves aside for the good of the Lord and of each other.

16 So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil.

Now Paul says if that were to happen, it would cause a good thing—freedom from the restrictions of the law for those in Christ—to be spoken of as evil. This means careless and proud exercise of freedom in Christ can damage those it leads violate their own conscience and mar the reputation of such freedom itself.

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Paul reminds the Christian believer that they didn't come to faith in Christ just to eat meat and drink wine. Those freedoms from the restrictions of the law are real and meaningful, but they are not the point of the kingdom of God. There are other benefits: we receive God's declaration that we are

righteous in His eyes because of our faith in Christ. We experience both peace and joy because of God's Holy Spirit with us. In other words, our place with God is secure, and that brings real emotional stability and confidence.

18 Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.

Those who serve Christ with a focus on righteousness, joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit are both acceptable to God **and** approved by other people. This is the best option!

19 So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

This way of living also results in peace and encouragement for everyone. Paul urges these strong Christians to pursue that peace and mutual encouragement by setting themselves aside for the good of their brothers and sisters.

20 Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats.

Now he says it negatively, telling these free Christians not to tear down or destroy the work of God for the sake of food. Put most plainly: Paul is telling these Christians with stronger faith to be willing to give up eating the meat they are free to eat if that will build up and unify the church instead of dividing it and tearing it down.

21 It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.

Don't do what is wrong. Instead, do what is good. Even if it means "giving up" your freedom voluntarily for a specific time or purpose. Even if that means eating only vegetables, today, for the sake of those of weaker faith. If it shows love to a "weak in faith" fellow believer, it's worth that.

22 The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.

Paul now writes that they should keep this faith that they are free to eat and drink these things between themselves and God. He is not saying they should keep their faith in Christ to themselves! In fact, Paul writes, these stronger-faith Christians should also listen to their consciences. If they do, they will be blessed to have no reason to condemn themselves for publicly approving something that may cause another person to stumble.

23 But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

If someone doubts and eats meat anyway, Paul writes in clear language, that person is condemned. He is not eating "from faith." Put another way, he is eating against his own faith. Paul does not mean that such a person is condemned in the sense that he will no longer be a Christian. He is condemned in the sense that he is guilty of sin, though still in Christ.

Paul's last line is a summary statement: Whatever does not come from faith is sin. It is important to read this statement within the context of this discussion. Paul means specifically that for someone to violate their own convictions by participating in one of these disputed areas is to act against faith instead of from faith. That's a sin.