

Introduction

1. Last week we looked at verses 1-12 of chapter 14 where Paul began to provide some instructions on how to handle differences within the body of Christ when it comes to matters of conscience or conviction
 - a. Some still felt they were beholden to the ritualistic practices of the OT like the laws governing food—likely Jewish Christians
 - b. Others understood that they were not bound by such rituals—likely Gentile Christians
 - c. So, there were differences in convictions within the body
 - d. We saw how this applies to us today because while we may not struggle with the OT rituals, the Bible clearly spells out some things (we call this doctrine), but there are many things the Bible doesn't address directly and where we are given the freedom to do our consciences allow us to do
 - e. This can cause tension and division within the body unless we follow the instructions Paul lays out for us in this chapter
 - f. In the first 12 verses, Paul addressed the attitudes we are to have toward one another when dealing with such things:
 - 1) He began last week by calling on us to accept one another rather than judge or look down upon one another
 - 2) He reminded us that even though we may hold difference convictions regarding what's permissible and what's not, we all serve the same Jesus
 - 3) He also reminded us that ultimately God is the judge and when it comes to matters of conviction or conscience, we are to leave the judging up to Him
2. Today he continues on the same topic but now he addresses our behavior when dealing with such differences

A. The freedom we have in Christ needs to be balanced with a commitment to not cause others to stumble/sin (14:13-18)

1. As Paul did in vs. 1-12, he again warns us not to judge one another over our differing convictions (13a): **“Therefore let us not judge one another anymore,”**—we might add to this Paul's charge in those same verses not to look down upon or show contempt for one another as well
2. But, he now adds another charge (3b): **“but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.”**
 - a. Paul actually uses a play on words here—more literally it reads, “let us not judge (Greek: krino) one another anymore, but judge (Greek: krino) this—not to put an obstacle...”
 - b. Paul uses two words here, one for obstacle and another for trap (see NET: “...**never to place an obstacle or trap...**”, both of which are used metaphorically as something that causes another person to sin
 - c. So, when we differ on our personal convictions, on the one hand there is the temptation to judge or look down upon one another
 - d. On the other hand, there is the temptation to just ignore the convictions of our brothers or sisters with whom we disagree and barge ahead doing whatever we want to do

- e. However, Paul calls us to something different—balancing our Christian liberty with a commitment not to cause others to stumble/sin
3. While something may be permissible in and of itself, it may still be sin for some (14): **"I know and am 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."**
 - a. Paul uses the example of meat sacrificed to idols
 - b. Some Christians, likely Jewish, considered such meat to be unclean, and therefore believed it was wrong to eat it
 - c. Paul was convinced "in the Lord Jesus" that such meat was not unclean in and of itself (based on his argument in 1 Corinthians 8:4 that idols aren't real gods), and therefore permissible to eat
 - d. However, for the one who still considers it sin to eat such meat, it is sin
 - e. So, it's not the meat itself, but the believer's conscience that determines if eating it is sin
 4. Engaging in behavior that wounds/weakens the conscience of a brother or sister is not acting in love (15): **"For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died."**
 - a. It causes the brother or sister to be "hurt" (lit. grieved or distressed over what he or she believes is sin)
 - b. Paul goes as far as to say that it "**destroys**" one for whom Christ died
 - 1) Paul uses similar language in 1 Corinthians 8:9-12, esp. 11 (READ)
 - a) The example Paul uses is that of a brother who understands that idols are nothing and therefore is free to eat whatever he wishes
 - b) Because of this he goes dining in an idol's temple, which in and of itself is not sin
 - c) However, a weaker brother (one with an under developed understanding of Christian liberty and one who still believes eating meat sacrificed to idols is sin) sees the other brother eating in the temple and is therefore encouraged to do the same
 - d) Paul says this is a sin against the brother as well as Christ because it wounded the conscience of the weaker brother (e.g. encouraged him to do something his conscience indicated was wrong)
 - e) So, while it was perfectly okay for the more mature brother to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols, it was unwise for him to do so out in public at an idol's temple
 - 2) A possible parallel example for us today is drinking:
 - a) The Bible doesn't prohibit drinking alcohol, but rather the abuse of alcohol, which means drinking it is a matter of conscience
 - b) Therefore, when a Christian drinks it in his own home and does so responsibly, it is a matter between him or her and the Lord
 - c) However, let's say this same Christian makes a habit of going out to night clubs and drinking on a regular basis, or is seen often with a beer in his hands
 - d) What he is doing may not be sin in and of itself, but what if his behavior encourages a less mature brother or sister in Christ to set aside any reservations about drinking and do the same (e.g. wounds his or her conscience)?
 - e) His behavior has just wounded/weakened the other brother's conscience, and according to Paul sinned against him and Christ

5. We should not allow our freedom to become a form of evil (16-18): **"Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men."**
 - a. When we abuse our freedom (as described above), what is a "good thing" for us (that which our conscience permits us to do) becomes a bad thing ("**spoken of as evil**")—Paul commands us not to allow that to happen
 - b. When we allow that to happen, we misunderstand the kingdom of God by placing our freedom in Christ (doing whatever we want to do like "**eating and drinking**") over more important things like righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit
 - c. However, when we avoid harming or hurting others by our freedom and serve Christ in this way, it "**is acceptable to God and approved by men.**"

B. We should be willing to give up some of our freedom for the sake of peace and building one another up (19-23)

NOTE: There are three primary imperatives in these verses

1. The first is in v. 19: At all times, we are pursue two things (actually a subjective that carries the weight of an imperative):
 - a. **Peace: "So then we pursue the things which make for peace..."**
 - b. **Building up one another: "and the building up of one another."**
 - 1) The word for "building up" is a construction term and refers to building something
 - 2) Metaphorically it refers to strengthening someone in their faith, to make them more mature
 - 3) It is sometimes translated as edification which means to help someone improve or become better
 - 4) Paul repeats this call to build up one another just one chapter later (Romans 15:1-3): **"Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. 2 Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. 3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME.""**
2. The second imperative is found in v. 20: We are not to **TEAR DOWN** a brother or sister in Christ for the sake of our freedom (20-21): **"Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. 21 It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles."**
 - a. God's work here refers to other brothers and sisters, and we are not to tear them down by abusing our freedom in Christ
 - b. Even if things are permissible (e.g. "**clean**"), they become "**evil**" for the one who does them at the expense of causing offense to his or her brother or sister in Christ
 - c. Paul's charge to us is that it's better to not exercise our liberty if it causes our brother or sister to stumble
3. The third imperative is found in v. 22: We should keep some things/behavior between us and God (22-23): **"The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. "**
 - a. Most English translations render this as, "**The faith you have, keep to yourself before God**" (NET, ESB) or "**keep between yourself and God**" (ESV, NIV)

- b. In other words, certain convictions are best practiced privately, where God is the only witness, rather than in public where it might cause others to stumble
- c. But, Paul serves this up with a warning (22b): **“Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.”**
 - 1) In 1 Corinthians 6:12 Paul wrote that all things are lawful, but not all things are profitable
 - 2) He repeated it in 1 Corinthians 10:23: **“All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.”**
 - 3) Paul repeats this sentiment here in Romans when he calls on us not to condemn ourselves by what we approve
 - 4) Instead, we should be completely convinced that what we do—in public and private—is something which the Lord approves
 - 5) If not, if there is any doubt and we do it anyway, Paul says that it is sin and we condemn ourselves because we’re not doing it in faith (but in doubt)

Conclusion

- 1. Paul has provided us with a number of real-life examples of what it means to live a transformed life, including what it means when it comes to dealing with differences in our convictions
- 2. There are a number of themes (if you will) that have become apparent in chapter 14 over last week and now today:
 - a. We should accept one another rather than judge one another
 - b. We all serve the same Jesus, just in different ways
 - c. God is the ultimate Judge, not us
 - d. Exercising our Christian liberty should never be at the expense of causing our brothers and sisters to stumble
 - e. Sometimes we need to keep certain behavior or convictions to ourselves and God to avoid sinning against our brothers or sisters, and God