

## Romans 13

- We are in the middle of Paul's teaching on the proper response to our faith
  - Revisit the bullseye

Individual → church → unbelievers → government → society → the ideal of Christian liberty → the ideal of love

- Now moving on to society

[Rom. 13:8](#) ¶ Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law.

[Rom. 13:9](#) For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

[Rom. 13:10](#) Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the* law.

[Rom. 13:11](#) ¶ Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.

[Rom. 13:12](#) The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

[Rom. 13:13](#) Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.

[Rom. 13:14](#) But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts.

- Verse 8 is literally translated "owe nothing to anyone" but it doesn't mean that thought
  - You can see what Paul is really saying when you notice what he adds
    - Owe nothing except to love one another
    - If Paul meant never to borrow anything from anyone, then logically when he says except to love one another
      - He would be suggesting that we should constantly be in debt to people for their love shown to us
    - But that makes no sense
      - We don't want to have people constantly lending us love

- We want to be the ones who are giving others love
- And that's the way Paul meant this phrase
  - The NIV get's it right

[Rom. 13:8](#) ¶ Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

- Paul isn't prohibiting borrowing
  - Christ talks about borrowing in the gospels as a permissible activity
  - Paul is prohibiting borrowing and not paying back what we borrow
  - This allows the second half of his statement to make sense
    - The only debt we should never seek to get out from under is the debt of love we owe others
- For the law is fulfilled in loving our neighbor
  - When we truly love another, we meet the purpose of God's Law, in that all the rules and regulations of that Law were directed toward two ends:
    - Love your God
    - Love your neighbor
- Paul takes a moment to explain this principle, which is echoed in the Gospels when Jesus meets the rich young ruler
  - In verse 9 Paul lists a few of the Ten Commandments merely as examples (note his comment "if there is any other...")
    - Notice He only lists the laws concerning people (not God)
  - They can be summed up as you shall love your neighbor
  - Loving your neighbor is a general Christian principle that defines our attitude toward society
    - And it is the fulfillment of God's law of holiness regarding other men

- Then in verse 11 Paul gives us the basic Christian purpose or motivation for treating society properly
  - Paul says do this knowing the time
    - Do this because you know that we are in final stage before glorification
      - Only a few years left
      - Maybe a decade or two
      - Maybe a few decades
      - Probably before the Cubs win the world series
  - Paul says we should awake from sleep
    - Compare that statement to:

[1Th. 5:1](#) ¶ Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you.

[1Th. 5:2](#) For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.

[1Th. 5:3](#) While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.

[1Th. 5:4](#) But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief;

[1Th. 5:5](#) for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness;

[1Th. 5:6](#) so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.

[1Th. 5:7](#) For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.

[1Th. 5:8](#) But since we are of *the* day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.

[1Th. 5:9](#) For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

[1Th. 5:10](#) who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.

[1Th. 5:11](#) Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

- So day is a picture of living in the light of God's holiness, and night or sleep a picture of living in the darkness of sin

- Now moving to verse 13, here's another set of exhortations that seem out of place
  - Paul lists carousing (wild party life), drunkenness, sexual promiscuity (the word means "bed" in Greek), licentiousness, strife, jealousy
    - Shouldn't these be personal traits listed earlier in the bullseye?
    - They could have been, but Paul emphasizes them as part of our relationship to society because they are offenses toward other men
      - Our neighbors
      - As a Christian, we should never be drunk
        - We should never engage in out of control, embarrassing demeaning behavior (why I don't dance)
        - Have nothing to do with sexual promiscuity or anything that might provoke lust or sinful behavior in others
        - Don't encourage strife or jealousy in others – don't flaunt what you have or stir up dissent
    - It's about loving our neighbors
  - These things are also directly related to our Christian witness, as ambassadors for Christ
    - In fact, just look at His rejoinder in verse 14
    - In contrast to these vices, put on the Lord Jesus
      - Put aside the flesh, make no provision
    - When we wear Christ, we are doing our utmost to love our neighbors
      - And potentially be useful to God for bringing someone to faith

- Now moving directly to chapter 14...

[Rom. 14:1](#) ¶ Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but not for the purpose of* passing judgment on his opinions.

[Rom. 14:2](#) One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only*.

[Rom. 14:3](#) The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.

- Paul moves to the subject of Christian liberty
  - What is Christian liberty
    - The word just means freedom
    - It refers to the freedom that comes to any New Covenant believer as a result of God's grace
  - Prior to faith, men are kept under law
    - Meaning our every action and thought is judged against God's standards of holiness reflected in the Law given to Moses
    - This Law is inadequate to produce righteousness, but it could reveal our unrighteousness when we disobeyed it
  - But a believer is no longer under law for amoral matters
    - Amoral vs. immoral
    - God no longer regulates our lives in amoral according to the strict Jewish laws, because these laws were satisfied in Christ and the covenant was completed
    - Like a contract that has been properly executed, it is no longer in effect
  - Instead, we already have all the righteousness required by God in Christ
    - Now our amoral actions are free to take whatever form is appropriate to meet the test of loving God and loving our neighbor
      - The goal hasn't changed – love God and neighbor

- But the form that love will take is no longer precisely prescribed
- It now will vary by situation and the Spirit will guide us in the form love will take
- Now Christian liberty has two potential forms of abuse
  - On pitfall is licentiousness
    - People who take the lack of rules to mean anything goes
    - These people fail at the test of love for their neighbor because they abuse their liberty by infringing on others
      - They sin against themselves and others by approving things that violate the conscience and harming others in the process
  - The other pitfall is legalism
    - People who create rules for themselves and others in place of those that God removed by grace
    - These people fail the test of love because they rob others of their joy they have in their freedom in Christ
      - They sin by working against the counsel of the Spirit producing bitterness and discouragement
- Now Paul is going to counsel against both mistakes in the exercise of Christian liberty
  - To begin, accept those who are weak in faith
    - It's vitally important that we understand what Paul means by weak in faith
  - The context of chapter 14 makes abundantly clear what Paul means by weak, but I'll give you the answer now
    - First, it doesn't mean weak in the sense that the person is somehow less convinced of the gospel or less commitment to Christ
      - It's not weak in its existence
      - It's weak in its application

- Weak in faith means immature, or new in the faith, or less convinced of how to practice faith in a day to day way
- Secondly, the word faith is actually a euphemism for Christian liberty
  - Weak faith is a faith that hasn't fully understood and accepted all that grace makes possible
    - It's a faith in our liberty
- Finally, weak faith is not a pejorative term
  - It is not an insult
  - It is a fair and accurate description of the state of every new believer
- The comparison would be to a newborn baby
  - We could say that a new born baby is weak in physical strength
    - The baby doesn't lack strength altogether
      - Just as the new believer doesn't lack faith in the ultimate sense
    - But compared to more mature bodies, an infants body is very weak
      - What an older person can accomplish and enjoy could easily harm a newborn baby
      - We don't look down on the infant because it can't do what a 20 year old can do
      - We understand the difference and grow the child up
- So now, look at Paul's discussion and you'll see this is what Paul's discussing
  - He says accept the one who is weak
    - The word accept is proslambano, which means to take in or receive along side another

- Matt uses this word to describe the way Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked Him when He said He would go to the cross
- When we encounter a brother or sister who is weak, we must not receive them so as to pass judgment
  - You may not have understood what Paul means
    - He isn't saying simply that we shouldn't criticize them
    - He's saying we should try to fix them or change them
  - If we approach someone who is weak in their liberty and see them as our special project, we risk violating this commandment
- Now before Paul explains why it would be wrong to pass judgment, he uses an example to illustrate his point
  - First, he uses two people to characterize someone who is strong and mature in his walk and therefore is comfortable in liberty
    - Vs. someone who is weak and uncomfortable with liberty
  - In the first example, the one who has strong faith knows that he may eat all things
    - The one who is still weak, feels they can only eat vegetables
    - Why only vegetables? Because they were concerned about offending God by eating a meat they shouldn't
      - Like Pork
      - Or like meat sacrificed to idols, etc.
      - Rather than risk offending God, I will avoid meat altogether
    - This is a kind of weakness of faith because it reflects the person's failure to understand how God's grace removed the stipulation of what we can or can't eat
      - As Jesus said

[Mark 7:18](#) And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, [Mark 7:19](#) because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (*Thus He declared all foods clean.*)

- Then Paul makes his application
  - Neither person should sit in judgment for the other
    - The weak accept the strong and the strong accept the weak
  - In a church congregation, do I demand that everyone show equal strength in their bodies
    - Do physically strong people go around demanding that weaker people start carrying heavier loads?
    - Do weaker people criticize the strong for carrying too much?
  - Likewise, when we encounter people that aren't at the same place as us in spiritual strength in the area of liberty, why do we feel the need to bring them to a different place?
- Look at Paul's next statement

[Rom. 14:4](#) Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

[Rom. 14:5](#) ¶ One person regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.

[Rom. 14:6](#) He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.

[Rom. 14:7](#) For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself;

[Rom. 14:8](#) for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

[Rom. 14:9](#) For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

[Rom. 14:10](#) ¶ But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

[Rom. 14:11](#) For it is written,

" AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME,  
AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD."

[Rom. 14:12](#) So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

- How can we judge another's servant?
  - Meaning, how can we say what is right for another's servant to do?
    - If that servant is doing what his master instructed, then we can't say it's wrong
    - God is able to make both men stand
      - In other words, liberty works both ways
      - We have liberty to use our freedom to its fullest
      - We also have liberty to restrain ourselves in these same areas
    - And Paul is implying here that when someone is exercising self-restraint, they are obeying God's direction to them
      - God may ask things of us that restrict our liberty
      - Some Christians shouldn't drink, shouldn't smoke
      - Some Christians might be asked to observe an orthodox Jewish lifestyle or be circumcised (Timothy)
    - In other words, self-restraint is a perfectly valid expression of liberty
  - On the other hand, the weak can't turn to the strong and condemn them because that same Master has given them freedom in amoral matters as well
    - Both men will stand (meaning, be declared righteous) by that same Master by faith not by works
      - So we aren't in a position to say what's right for them
      - We must accept them and be OK with difference in the body
- Paul uses another example of observing a day
  - One man has days observed above another, another man doesn't
    - This is a reference to Sabbath or Jewish High days
    - Observe a Sabbath or don't observe – it's an amoral act and we have freedom

- But we must be fully convinced in our own mind
  - We must do what we are personally convicted to do, not what someone else is doing
    - Since these are amoral matters, we have no standard but our own conviction
  - You can't go wrong in the behavior, only in you reason for doing it and it's effect on others
    - In either case, we do what we do FOR THE LORD not for me
    - Because everything we do is for the Lord, our life and even our death is a matter for the Lord to decide
- Paul makes his point by reminding us that we all have a future moment when we give an account to Christ for how we followed His instructions
  - Maybe instead of worrying so much about how other Christians are exercising their liberty, we should put that concern aside and evaluate our own obedience
- So here are the principles of liberty expressed so far:
  - We have liberty in amoral matters to decide for ourselves what is best, according to the Lord's direction
    - We do what we believe will please the Lord
  - We cannot impose our convictions on others
    - If we act out of pressure from others rather than conviction, we act in sin
- How do we bring pressure to bear on others so as to cause them to sin?
  - Remember the two ways you can misuse liberty?
  - The first problem is a weaker person trying to place unnecessary restriction on liberty (legalism)
    - Usually because we confuse amoral with immoral
    - Or because of tradition or culture

- Paul has already mentioned this problem early in this chapter, and he gave an even more forceful warning against legalism in Colossians:

[Col. 2:16](#) ¶ Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day —

[Col. 2:17](#) things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

[Col. 2:18](#) Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on *visions* he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind,

[Col. 2:19](#) and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

[Col. 2:20](#) ¶ If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,

[Col. 2:21](#) “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!”

[Col. 2:22](#) (which all *refer to* things destined to perish with use) — in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?

[Col. 2:23](#) These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence.

- The second error is to influence a weaker member of the body into following our lead into behaviors they aren't comfortable with personally
  - But they follow because they see you enjoying your liberty and assume they must be ready for them as well
    - Full exercise of liberty can only come with highest degrees of spiritual maturity and self discipline
      - And not everyone can or should get there
      - Drinking, entertainment, Sabbath
    - If we encourage or lead by example, we could set someone up for a big fall

[Rom. 14:13](#) ¶ Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this — not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.

[Rom. 14:14](#) 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.

[Rom. 14:15](#) 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.

[Rom. 14:16](#) Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil;

[Rom. 14:17](#) for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

[Rom. 14:18](#) For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.

[Rom. 14:19](#) So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

[Rom. 14:20](#) 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.

[Rom. 14:21](#) It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or *to do anything* by which your brother stumbles.

[Rom. 14:22](#) The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

[Rom. 14:23](#) But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *his eating is not from faith*; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

- First, Paul gives a well known Biblical principle
  - Don't stumble your brother or put a stumbling block in your brother's way
    - A stumbling block is a trap or hindrance
    - Something to trip a person in their walk with God
      - To be the cause of another's fall into sin
    - Remember, these may be amoral matters, but if we cause someone to do something that violates their conscience, it is sin for them
  - Paul explains this in 14-17
    - There is nothing unclean in itself (speaking of food)
    - You can eat anything you want
    - But if someone thinks it is unclean, it is unclean to them

- Meaning, that they believe that eating some food offends God and is sin
  - So, if they do something that is against their conscience, they are telling themselves that it's OK to disobey God
- Whether the actual act is offensive to God or not becomes irrelevant at that point
  - Simply going against our conscience is sin and the food has become a stumbling block
- Paul says don't destroy your brother over food
  - It's the furthest thing from love that we allow food to bring about a brother's sin
- That's what Paul means when he says don't let something that is intended for good (food) become an evil thing
  - You see that the food is truly amoral
    - It has no inherent goodness or badness
    - It is simply a matter of how it is used
  - In verse 17 Paul says the kingdom is not about food, but love
    - Don't make the point about behavior, but heart attitude of love
- Finally, Paul sums up a little and ends with two rules of thumb
  - Let our goal be the building up of one another, not the tearing down
    - And tearing down means pressing people to live a certain set of rules according to our desire
    - Instead, allow people to live according to their conscience in amoral matters
      - Don't eat, drink wine or do anything to cause offense
- Rule #1 – What faith you have in your liberty, have it before God
  - Be assured in your own mind...do it for the right reasons

- Do what you do in confidence because you are sure this is something God has permitted
- Don't condemn yourself by what you approve
  - Don't commit a sin by approving something that you know in your heart is not within your liberty as given by God
  - Happy is a man who lives according to his convictions without second guessing himself
- But notice this man is to have these as his OWN convictions
  - He can't make these someone else's convictions
- Rule #2 – He who doubts is condemned by what he eats
  - If you are doing something with a doubt as to whether is it permitted, then you sin because you act not on faith, but on a fleshly basis
    - Your doubt is evidence that your are not convinced in your spirit
    - So wait on God
      - So don't do anything just because others are doing it
      - And don't ask them to stop because you feel convicted