

Romans: “Living Faithful and Free for the Lord”

Romans 14:1-19

Jon Haakana

INTRO: Have you ever felt judged by someone else for something you didn't think was wrong? Have you judged someone else for something you didn't think they should be doing? Wrong is wrong, but sometimes things or actions are not necessarily wrong in themselves.

In the Christian community – alcohol, TV, movies, dancing, cards.... or “worship wars”

Beginning of Romans – Paul speaks of conscience – some things always wrong; others not.

Illustration – Catholic priest...alley behind church...robber - gun – wallet... priest went for wallet – collar...are you a priest? Take back your wallet – I'm catholic too. Priest pulled out 2 cigars – repentant thief said smoking is wrong – “I can't believe you would do such an evil thing.”

Today we turn to Romans 14: We will talk about convictions – can affect relationships w/others. Paul starts out saying – don't judge others based on our convictions – **read v. 1**. NIV – “Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.” (that means not wrong in and of themselves, but we may have a conviction it is wrong)

But because something is wrong for us doesn't make it wrong for everyone. Our convictions don't determine right or wrong – God's Word does – example of thief & priest.

Things that God's Word has not spoken about – there's a freedom in Christ – should not judge others on the exercise of freedom. Paul's example – eating meat/veggies, one day more holy...

Important – doesn't appear that it is salvation issue for either – both believe they are pleasing God. But Paul said these aren't issues of doctrine – that need to divide the church or individuals – but disputable matters that each of us should think thru so we can please God. Be fully convinced...

Paul identifies these folks by the faith they possess – weak or strong. Notice instead of stronger the faith the more we deny ourselves, the stronger faith is one who is able to understand his freedom in Christ, thus able to exercise more freedom in disputable matters. Maybe you heard phrase – “I don't drink/smoke/chew...or date girls who do!” People often measure faith by what they don't do vs. what they feel free to do.

Now Paul doesn't say the weaker faith displeases God – **read v. 3**. Also, in Heb. 6 we read, “Without faith it is impossible to please God...” As long as we have our focus on the Lord and act in ways that are in accord with the faith we have, we will please the Lord, no matter if our faith is weak or strong.

I do believe as we grow in faith – able to experience our freedom – God’s creation for our good. Ok, so in today’s world, what would be some examples of things that people have convictions about that are not specifically spoken of as sin in Scripture? Watching TV, going to movies, methods of educating our kids, dancing, playing cards...List will never be exhausted...

Now for some of these things, many will see them as disputable matters. For others – undisput. One matter that brings debate among Christians is the drinking of alcohol. Some = as Xian should not drink. They see destruction alcohol can bring – if no one drank, world would be better place.

While I understand their thinking and desire for the world to be a better place, we have got to be cautious in thinking that eliminating the things we abuse will make the world a better place. Martin Luther once said regarding this subject “Do you suppose that abuses are eliminated by destroying the object which is abused? Men can go wrong with wine and women. Shall we then prohibit and abolish women?”

We have got to speak and stand where the Bible speaks, and allow liberty and freedom where the Bible is silent. Now before everyone goes out to the bar and ties one on after this message and thinks that it is ok to do whatever you want and that nobody has a right to judge me for anything I do, you need to keep in mind a couple of cautions.

First, we need to recognize that if we judge that something is wrong, then for us, it is wrong. If we think drinking alcohol is wrong, then we should not do it. It would be a sin for us to drink because we would not be acting in faith. As Paul has said, ‘be fully convinced in your own mind.’

Second, if we think we should never be judged by others, then we are wrong. If we seek to use some area where the Bible is silent or permits freedom to abuse that freedom to the point of sin, and you are part of the church, expect to be confronted on it.

Listen to 1 Cor. 5:9-13 Paul is saying don’t worry about judging someone who is not a Christian... They have no ability to stop sinning because they do not have the Holy Spirit. God will judge them. However, those in the church, who call themselves a Christian, who are sinning, not just doing something we may have a conviction about, but doing what the Bible says is wrong; those are people we should judge and confront to help them overcome their sin to the glory of God.

So regarding this issue of drinking: If you think drinking is wrong, you should not drink. It would be a sin for you. But also, if you often indulge in this freedom to the point of drunkenness, you are sinning and you should stop exercising this freedom. We need to cut out those things that are likely to lead to sin. And we as the church need to be a help to those who are sinning by lovingly confronting their sin.

2nd part of our text - Now just because we are free to do something does not mean that we should or that it cannot be wrong to exercise our freedom. There are times that it may be wrong to exercise a freedom we may have. For instance, we should not cause others to stumble based on our freedom.

Read v. 13b, 15 - We have to be careful not to use our freedom to hurt someone whose faith is not as strong as our own. This means making judgment calls as we make those decisions regarding whether it would be right to exercise our freedom.

This also does not mean that we can never exercise a freedom if there are some who are weaker in faith on that particular issue. We should only not exercise that freedom when it may cause them to stumble. We should not drink alcohol around those who may be tempted to drink by our actions.

The second factor we want to consider is, Jesus conducted himself in ways that the Pharisees did not like and were upset by, but is it glorifying to the Lord? **Read v. 17-19**. Paul also writes in 1 Cor. 10, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble... For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved." Paul was always concerned about the glory of God and about people coming to salvation.

Conclusion - God has given us freedoms to enjoy, but not to abuse. There are many things that the Bible doesn't specifically condemn that can be viewed as Xian liberties. That does not mean we should exercise that freedom whenever we want, but that we should examine things closely and make decisions on whether it is ok for us based upon how it expresses love for a weaker brother...

Don't just do things with no regard for others. But be discerning in living your life. So, have you been judging others based on your convictions? Are you causing others to stumble based on your freedoms? Let's ask the Lord to reveal areas where we need to repent and seek to love others and glorify the Lord in our exercise of our freedom in Christ. In the name of Jesus. Amen.