

## Romans Chapter 14- John Karmelich

1. My title for this chapter is, "It is not our job to fix them".
  - a) The issue at hand is dealing with other Christians. If there is one thing to get out of this lesson, it is the idea that on "debate" issues (i.e., things that are not blatant sin issues), it is not the job of Christians to fix other Christians. That job is God's and His alone.
  - b) If people have given their life to serve Christ, then that means God, and not us, have taken over their lives. We are to let God take over their lives, not us.
2. Now that I've just tried to fix you with that comment, ☺ welcome to a study of Romans 14.
  - a) We are continuing our study of the third section of the Book of Romans.
  - b) The first part of Romans, which is chapters 1-8, deal with God's unconditional promises to the believing Christian. The second part of Romans, which is chapters 9-11, deal with God's unconditional promises to the Nation of Israel. Chapters 12-15, the third part, deal with our response back to God. It is the Christian saying, "OK, I believe all this stuff, about Jesus and my salvation. Now what do I do?"
  - c) The methodology for these chapters has to do with "turning things over to God". Giving one's life to Jesus is more than a single moment vow. It is a lifetime commitment. It is about telling God He is in charge of our lives, and not us. It is initially about accepting Jesus' payment for our sins. Then it is a moment-by-moment decision to let God take over our lives. The secret of living the Christian life is letting the power of God work through us in order to live the life as described here in Romans.
    - i) Chapter 12 was the start of this section. It laid out the methodology for living the Christian life. The key sentence was "Present your body as a living sacrifice" (Ref.: Romans 12:1). It is the idea of regularly realizing God is in charge of our lives and we are not. It is about going forth and living a life that is pleasing to God based on obedience to His commandments. In a sense, the rest of Romans is commentary and examples of what it means to live a life pleasing to God.
    - ii) The remainder of Chapter 12 dealt with examples as such. As I stated in the last lesson, this ranged from loving one's enemies to being hospitable to people around us. It is about being a good witness to those around us.
    - iii) Chapter 13 dealt with issues that are beyond our control. The prime example was dealing with government leaders. There are things we as Christians cannot change. The point is about having a good attitude about things that are beyond our control that we have to deal with in our lives.
3. All of this leads to Chapter 14: Dealing with other Christians. This chapter focuses on dealing with Christians who we may not like or simply disagree with at any given moment.
  - a) In some ways, this is the most difficult assignment for our ego. It's one thing to love those we love around us (i.e., Romans Chapter 12). It is another thing to accept the things we cannot change (i.e., Romans Chapter 13). Now Paul is asking us in Chapter 14 to be loving to the person we can't stand in church every Sunday. ☺
  - b) It is almost as if our ego is saying "Well, if I have to let go my control of my selfish desires to do the things in Romans Chapter 12, can I at least complain about things I cannot control like those listed in Chapter 13? For example, if I have to put other's needs in front of my own (i.e., Chapter 12), can I (my ego speaking) still complain about those rotten politicians that run my government? The answer is no, as discussed in Romans 12-13.
    - i) Our ego is continuing into Chapter 14: "If I have to submit to the government as stated in Chapter 13, can I still complain about that Christian sitting in the next pew that lives differently than me? Obviously, I'm a more spiritual Christian than they are. Can't I have to right to criticize them behind their back?" ☺

- ii) The answer to the last question is no. That gets me back to my opening remark about “it is not our job to fix them”. If God has taken over their lives, it is God’s job to work on them as it is God’s job to work on you. We have enough of our own problems to work out without meddling into someone else’s problems.
- 4. Let me add a few additional thoughts here: The issue of the moment is not “sin”, but debatable Christian issues. Paul will give us several examples of such in Chapter 14.
  - a) When it comes to dealing with sin in the church, I like the “Matthew 18” model to deal with that issue. Jesus said when a fellow believer sins against you, privately bring up the issue to them. If they refuse to repent, then approach them again with two or three witnesses. That way, it is not your word against theirs. If they refuse to change at that point, then “tell the church”. If they refuse to change at that point, then that person should be kicked out of your church. (Reference Matthew 18:15-17, paraphrased).
    - i) Notice in this model, Jesus teaches us how to deal with sin in the church. It does not mean we are to be the “sin police”. Jesus is focusing on when someone sins directly against you. This model has nothing to do with meddling.
    - ii) I mention all of this because the focus of Romans 14 is “anti-meddling”. The focus is on debatable Christian issues and not sin itself.
- 5. One thing that crossed my mind that I haven’t brought up since Romans Chapter 1 is, “Why are these issues brought up in this book?” Why would Paul write to the Romans on this issue in far greater detail than say, other churches?
  - a) Part of the reason is that when Paul wrote to the Romans, he had never been there. It may be that Paul taught these issues wherever he went. Because Paul had never visited the Roman church, he lays out far greater details as he has not had a chance to preach out these issues prior to writing a letter. In other words, Paul could have discussed these issues to other churches and never felt the need to write it all out in such detail.
  - b) Another issue is Rome is the center of the Roman Empire. Paul may have been motivated to go into greater detail in this letter as the church in that city has an opportunity to have a greater impact on the world than any other city of that time.
  - c) Given all of this, the Book of Romans not only spends a lot of chapters explaining Christianity and what “salvation” entails, but spends a lot of chapters explaining what we as Christians are asked to do in response to God’s love toward us.
  - d) Paul is asking the Roman-Christian to make an impact to the world around him. Paul is indirectly asking us as Christians to impact to the world around us.
    - i) The methodology is the key. It is about “presenting God our bodies as living sacrifices”. Once we “let go” for God, He can then work through us in order to have an impact on the world around us. That includes loving one another. That includes submission to government. In Chapter 14, that includes loving the fellow Christian we may not be too crazy about.
- 6. Jesus said non-Christians would know we are Christians by our love for one another. (Ref.: John 13:35.) If the outside world sees us bickering all the time, why would they want to join us?
  - a) “The problem with Christians is we organize our firing squads in circles.” Chuck Missler.
    - i) The point of that quote is we spend an inordinate amount of time infighting and hurting one another.
    - ii) Does this mean church problems should be swept under the rug? No. It means we deal with each other in a loving way. It means we are civil when we deal with debatable issues.
- 7. The main point to get across from this whole introduction is how to deal with Christians who we disagree with. Again, it is not about sin, it is about debatable issues. It is about seeing other Christians whose relationship with God is different from ours. The point is not to “fix” them.
  - a) Now I can get off my soapbox and start Chapter 14. ☺

8. Verse 1: Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.
- a) Let's start with the phrase "whose faith is weak". I've yet to meet a veteran Christian who thinks their faith is inferior to others. It is "the other guy or gal" who has the problem. ☺
    - i) Paul is going to give a couple of examples of "weak faith" in this chapter.
    - ii) We tend to think of "weak faith" as having doubts about Jesus or God. That topic is never even mentioned in this chapter. Going through periods of doubts is normal even for the most devout Christian. They usually occur when the world around us is falling apart.
    - iii) The idea of "weak faith" as used by Paul has to do with our actions and attitudes on non-salvation issues. Paul's first example, beginning in Verse 2 is about vegetarians versus meat-eaters. We'll discuss that in a moment. My point here is that what we normally think of "weak faith" is different from Paul's illustrations in this chapter.
  - b) The next point of Verse 1 is "without passing judgment on disputable matters".
    - i) In a sense, much of Chapter 14 is commentary on this command.
    - ii) There are several examples in this chapter as to what is "disputable". The focus on this chapter is our attitude in dealing with disputable issues.
    - iii) The problem is our ego wants us to "fix" those around us. Naturally, our view is right and everyone else's is wrong. ☺ Therefore, we want to fix other Christians to conform to our view of Christianity.
  - c) There is a classical Christian cliché that I'll paraphrase, "In essentials, clarity, in all other things, charity". The idea behind that saying is that when it comes to Christian fundamentals, no debate is allowed. When it comes to debatable issues, we are to disagree, agreeably.
    - i) So, what are the essentials? Most versions of "The Apostle's Creed" that one sees in a Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox Church would define the essentials. A creed is simply a list of beliefs. The main idea is the belief that Jesus is Lord, He is the Son of God, and He died for our sins and rose again. It is the belief in the trinity, the resurrection, and probably a few other obvious things I can't think of for the moment. ☺ My point here is that other than the essentials, the rest is debate and Christians should debate it peacefully.
    - ii) To put it another way, we should not think other Christians are going to hell nor are inferior Christians because their views on non-essential issues are different than others. Just about every Christian believes the views of their denomination are the right one, or they wouldn't belong to that church. The point Paul is getting at is to avoid spending time arguing over issues that are not solvable by debate.
9. Verse 2: One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.
- a) Paul's first example of "weak in faith" is someone who is a vegetarian.
  - b) It is best to explain this illustration historically: At that time, most meat that was sold in the marketplace was animals sacrificed to pagan gods. The "leftovers" of the animals were then sold in the marketplace. Given that, many Christians of that day would not eat such meat because it was offered to idols.
    - i) One could just hear the Christian of that day saying, "I'm a superior Christian to others because I wouldn't touch that meat that was offered to a false God".
    - ii) There is also the issue of the meat being "kosher" for Jewish-Christians. There were certain types of animals that were forbidden to be eaten by Jews and animals must only be slaughtered a certain way (removal of the blood). Paul might also have that in mind for the case of Jewish converts to Christianity.

- c) Let me try to paraphrase Paul's view on food here: Paul's view is that we are saved by our trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin. We can't be "more saved" by maintaining a certain type of diet. The purpose of food is to give us good nutrition so we can be healthy and live a good life. We can't get more spiritual by avoiding certain food groups.
  - i) Does this mean Jewish people who become Christians can eat what they want? That is another debate issue. Many Jewish-Christians still obey the Old Testament food laws only to remember God's unconditional promises to the Jewish nation. If they do it solely with that in mind, it could be acceptable. To eat "kosher" thinking they are more spiritual would be as Paul puts it, "weak in the faith".
  - ii) Along the same line, if someone chooses to be a vegetarian for health reasons, that's fine too. The issue is our attitude towards Christians who eat differently than us. Getting back to the opening theme, it is not our job to fix others.
  - iii) "But I want to fix the person next to me! Can't you see how wrong they are?" ☺  
The point is if they are seeking God, it is His job to mature them, not ours.
- 10. Verse 3: The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.
  - a) Notice the two-sided-sword of this verse:
    - i) The one who eats everything must not condemn the Christian who does not.
    - ii) The one who is a "picky-eater" must not condemn the Christian who eats all.
  - b) Why? Look at the last phrase of Verse 3: "for God has accepted him."
    - i) In other words, if God has accepted him or her, why have we rejected them?
    - ii) The mistake many Christian churches make is we ask people to "clean up their act" prior to joining the church. That is what Paul is preaching against. The food illustration is just an example. The main idea is that God works on maturing believers. It is not our job to fix people whose views are different from ours on Christian debatable-issues.
    - iii) How do we know God has accepted them? After all, they're not behaving with the same style as you or me. How do we know they are ok?
      - a) The answer is to judge their behavior on the essentials. The question is do they believe the fundamental issues of Christianity and does their behavior follow those beliefs.
      - b) We might respond, "Well yeah, but if they were really Christians, they would act just like us. They would conform to our image, not God's" ☺
  - c) This reminds me of a comic strip cartoon: Two Christians walk out of two churches and face each other. One is wearing a t-shirt, short pants and sandals. The other is wearing a three-piece suit. They both have bibles under their arms. They are both looking at the other and thinking, "There, but the grace of God go I". The idea is that each of them think they are more spiritual than the other guy they are staring at.
- 11. Verse 4: Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.
  - a) Let's start with the phrase, "someone else's servant".
    - i) The idea Paul is getting at is each Christian is a servant of God and not each other. The point is no Christian is above or below any other.
    - ii) If you re-read Verse 4 with that in context, it will make more sense. If you have any doubts that is what Paul is talking about, Verse 9 makes that more clear.
  - b) The second phrase says, "To his own master he stands or falls". If God is our master (that is what "Lord" means) then we must be judged by God alone on our actions.
  - c) This verse is working its way up to Verse 12, where it states that each of us as Christians must give an account of ourselves to God. The point is we are all judged by God. God is more than capable of judging people all by Himself and doesn't need our help.

- d) This gets back to my introduction comment where our ego wants to say, “If I have to love those around me (Chapter 12) and I have to accept things I cannot control (Chapter 13), can’t I still be in charge of fixing other Christians? (Chapter 14). The answer is no. Christianity is all about turning every aspect of our lives over to God. That includes the desire to “fix” other Christians around us.
    - i) Wait a minute John. Didn’t you say in the last lesson that the main purpose of Christianity is to “build up the body of Christ”? Don’t we all have spiritual gifts to help mature each other? How can we help other Christians unless we fix them? That’s a good question. I’m so glad you brought that up! ☺
    - ii) There is a big difference between helping one who wants help and trying to fix someone not asking for help. Just as God gives us free will and doesn’t step in until we ask Him, so should our attitude be toward other Christians. Remember we’re dealing with non-sin issues, which are “debatable” issues. What one eats is a prime example of debatable issues.
    - iii) The issue at hand is to distinguish between helping and meddling.
  - e) This leads to the final phrase of Verse 4: “The Lord is able to make him stand.”
    - i) In other words, God is more than capable of fixing the person sitting next to you in church. God is big enough to handle their issues as well as yours.
    - ii) If God has called us into the Christian family, then God loves us too much to leave us alone. He wants to mature us and prepare us for eternity with Him. That is why the word “salvation” is sometimes used as a synonym for Christian maturity. Growing in our faith toward God is about trusting Him more every day and turning our will over to His will in every aspect of our lives. One of those aspects is to trust God with the person next to us who also is a Christian.
  - f) This is a good chapter for Christian couples to study. The biggest problem we all have with our spouses is we want to fix them and have them be more like us. We think our personal model of Christianity is the ideal and theirs is wrong.
    - i) One of my teacher-mentors told of his marital problems. He credits his wife with single-handedly saving their marriage. She did it by honoring and cherishing her husband as the bible commanded and stopped trying to fix her husband. She said to God in effect, “He is Your problem”. My job is to love Him and I’ll let You deal with Him.” The husband then said, “God and my wife ganged up on me through prayer. I never stood a chance”.
    - ii) The point is God is big enough to handle the Christian standing next to you. It could be your spouse, a relative, a friend or that obnoxious so-called Christian that you see every Sunday. The point of this sentence in Verse 4 is God is big enough to handle the problem. Our job is to love others and God commands and let God deal with them. If we “gang up on them in prayer” with the right attitude, they don’t stand a chance! ☺
12. Verse 5: One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.
- a) In Verse 5, we now have the second example of non-essential Christian issues: The first example was meat-eaters versus vegetarians. The second example, here in Verse 5 has to do with one Christian considering one day of the week more sacred than others, while other Christians consider every day special.
  - b) Before I get into specific debate issues, notice the last phrase of Verse 5. It says, “Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.” What does that mean? It means you won’t solve this debate by studying the bible. It means that if one Christian thinks, “Sundays are more special than others”, than that view is acceptable. If another Christian thinks, “every day is special to God”, than that view is equally as acceptable. You can’t study the bible supporting an argument that either view is more correct than the other is.

- c) This leads to the debate over “when” one goes to church.
  - i) Many Christians have heard of the denomination called “Seventh Day Adventists”. To summarize their view, they believe that Sunday is a day of rest. One should go church on Saturday and then rest on Sundays. I remember driving past a marquee listing their church service times. The listed three service times on Saturdays and proudly (or jokingly) said, “Sunday service times: Never!”
    - a) The argument is based on the 10 commandments. One of the commandments (not suggestions!) is that six days we shall work and one day we shall rest.” (Reference: Exodus 20:9-10).
    - b) The view of that denomination is “resting” includes not going to church.
  - ii) Another view is that “resting” means going to church and not work. The idea of the Sabbath is to not work when one could. The classic joke is, “Can I mow my lawn on the Sabbath? My response is, “Do you make a living as a gardener?” ☺ The concept of the Sabbath to “rest in God” as opposed to lying in bed all day.
  - iii) In the book of Acts, there is a single reference to Christians meeting “on the first day of the week” (Acts 20:7). That would be Sunday on a Jewish calendar. It is the idea that Christians get together on the same day Jesus rose from the dead.
  - iv) My point is one can make an argument for Saturday church, or Sunday church. As for a weekday church service, Paul says here in Verse 5, “another man considers every day alike.” Some Christians have to work weekends (e.g., medical people, policeman, fireman etc.) I don’t have a problem with those who choose to go on another day of the week or even every day of the week.
  - v) In summary, I want to show some of the reasons why certain Christians choose different days to go to church. The point is what is right for you is not right for me. Another point is we are accountable to God for our actions. If God has put it on our hearts to go on Saturdays instead of Sundays, or vice-versa, it is not our job to “fix” other people. On that issue, they are accountable to God, and not us.
- 13. Vs. 6: He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. <sup>7</sup> For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. <sup>8</sup> If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.
  - a) Here, Paul ties both illustrations together. Paul takes the “meat versus vegetarian” debate issue and the “when should we go to church issue” and says in effect, “it is just debate.
  - b) Notice the phrase that is repeated over and over again in these verses: “to the Lord”.
    - i) He who regards one day as special does so to the Lord (Verse 6).
    - ii) He who eats meat, eats to the Lord (Verse 6).
    - iii) We live to the Lord (Verse 8).
    - iv) We die to the Lord (Verse 8).
    - v) We belong to the Lord (Verse 8).
    - vi) Hopefully you see the pattern. ☺ The issue is not so much what we do in these debatable issues, the key is do we focus our efforts to glorify God in all that we do.
  - c) Let me explain further the concept of living “to the Lord”.
    - i) It is like Paul’s illustration of “Present your body as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1).
    - ii) The idea is that all we do is designed to glorify God. That not only includes “religious things”, but sleep, family time, hobbies, etc.
    - iii) If we are attempting to live a life pleasing to God, then it doesn’t matter which side of these debate issues we choose. If one believes Jesus died for their sins, and then lives one’s life in gratitude to God based on that belief, then we don’t have to worry about which “route” they chose to follow God on these issues.
  - d) This comes back to my opening theme of “It’s not our job to fix them”. If we see a committed Christian, then we must let God get the glory for maturing them, and not us.

14. Verse 9: For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.<sup>10</sup> You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.
- a) Paul's next point can be paraphrased as follows: "Look folks, Jesus died and rose again. Part of His role will be to judge all people, saved and unsaved ("dead and the living"). It is Jesus' job to judge people and not ours. Get off your holier-than-thou horse and let Jesus deal with the judging issue. Last time I checked you have enough problems." ☺
    - i) Jesus said, "Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son". (Ref.: Matthew 5:22a, NIV).
    - ii) Paul is using the point that Jesus will judge everyone one day as an argument against judging one another.
  - b) It is important that one understand there are two Greek words for "judgment" being used here. Each is translated differently in this text.
    - i) One is just translated "judge". It means to believe one is going to heaven or hell. It is the idea that we, not God decides who is saved and who is not.
      - a) The other word means to look down upon another person for their behavior. That is the idea conveyed in Verse 10.
    - ii) The argument against us eternally "judging" is that we can't read minds. We don't know who is sincere and who is not. God reads minds, which is why we can pray silently. Therefore, it is fair that God alone decides who gets into heaven.
  - c) Notice the word "brother" is used two times in these two verses.
    - i) The word is generic. The idea is that all Christians are equal in God's eyes. It means that no one Christian is any more or less superior to any other.
  - d) Another way to look at these verses is to consider the following: When we are being judged by God, do you think He is going to say to us, "By the way, nice job ten years ago when you put down that guy in church for not being spiritual enough?" ☺ Do you think God will say, "I like the way you insulted that person who I love dearly. I'll just add on an extra bonus room to your mansion for that one!" Of course not. The point is we only are going to give an account for our lives, not for fixing the people around us.
  - e) It's time to discuss the concept of "Christian judgment".
    - i) There are references throughout the New Testament on this one.
    - ii) The idea is that the believing Christian gets rewarded based on our behavior on earth. Is that fair? I don't know. God's in charge and He makes the rules!
      - a) If anything, it is an incentive program to live a life pleasing to God.
    - iii) As to specific's, the bible is vague on this issue. My personal view is that God holds us accountable based on what information we do know about Him and what gifts, talents and resources He provides for us. We are then rewarded based on how we use all of those assets for God.
    - iv) If you want further research on this topic, study the word "reward" in the New Testament. There are dozens of references on this issue.
    - v) Understand that there are two separate judgments in heaven. There is one for believers and one for "everyone else". Revelation Chapter 20 deals with this issue. These two judgments are a thousand years apart in time. (Ref.: Revelation 20:5)
    - vi) Believers are judged based what resources and talents God has given us. Our eternal rewards are then based on that judgment. If we are part of this judgment, we cannot go to hell. This judgment is only about one's eternal rewards.
    - vii) A thousand years later, nonbelievers are judged on what knowledge they did have about God and how they reacted to that knowledge. (Ref. Revelation 20:11-15).
      - a) The text does not say whether anyone or everyone goes to heaven or hell in this judgment. The idea of these verses is that every human will be accountable to God based on how they lived their lives.

15. Verse 11: It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God." <sup>12</sup> So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.
- a) Paul is quoting Isaiah 45:23 in Verse 11.
  - b) Notice the word "every": It says every knee will bow down before God. I am convinced that when we get resurrected, those without knees will get a pair just to bend them! ☺
    - i) I don't know if we will do this simultaneously, or we get in line. ☺
  - c) The point is everyone will bow before God one day and give an account of ourselves.
    - i) The next time you want to criticize somebody in church, keep this in mind.
    - ii) Not only do we have to do this, but the person next to us will be bowing as well.
    - iii) It's also not our job to say to that person, "Look, you are going to be accountable to God, so you might as well be more like me and do "x" my way.
  - d) Notice the word "himself" in Verse 11. We have to give an account of ourselves to God.
    - i) In other words, we are not going to give an account of the person next to us when we get to heaven. We have to give an account of our own life.
    - ii) God is not going to hold us accountable for the faith of another Christian. God does call us to minister to one another. God calls Christian parents to raise their children in Him. The results are God's problem. God calls us to make the effort to help other Christians and we are accountable on that issue. One has to separate that issue of helping others with how a person turns out. Other Christians are accountable of their life to God as we are accountable for ours.
16. Verse 13: Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.
- a) Let's start with "why" we want to criticize or want to fix other Christians around us:
    - i) It usually comes down to our ego. We see others living a Christian "style" that is different from ours. (Again, we're focusing on debate issues, not sin.)
    - ii) Using one of Paul's examples, we may see someone eating meat and we think that is wrong (or vice-versa). We may think it is only proper to go to church on Sundays and we know someone who thinks it is ok to go on Friday.
      - a) We then start thinking, "Well, either there is something wrong with them or something wrong with me. Obviously I'm right, so I need to tell them!"
    - iii) Let me give another example: We may see a Christian who smokes cigarettes. We may think it is improper, but it a debate issue. Before we go tell them that our "bodies are a temple to God", ask yourself do you ever eat junk food or desserts? A Christian with bad health habits may get to heaven faster, ☺ but it is not our job to fix them, especially if they don't ask for our help.
    - iv) Christianity is also full of theological debate-issues that good Christians can disagree upon. This includes "end times" views and one's view on free will versus God's sovereignty. God calls Christians to disagree, "agreeably" and not be angry if other's views are different from ours.
  - b) With all of that out of my system, I can now get back to Verse 13. ☺ The way we deal with our egos wanting to fix others is to remember, "Wait a minute. The bible says God is in charge of that other Christian, not me. God loves them and I have to have faith that God is working in their life on His schedule and His methodology and not mine. I have enough problems of my own. I am accountable to God about my life and not theirs. Given all of that, my job is to love them and that's it."
    - i) That last paragraph is the idea behind Verse 13. The verse says, "not to put a stumbling block" in front of someone. What does that mean? It means when we say, "You should not be doing this or that and be a Christian." We are causing that person to question their own faith and cause a stumbling block. God is more than capable of dealing with that person all by Himself.



17. Verse 14: As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean.
  - a) Paul now goes back to one of his issues-of-the-moment: food.
  - b) One has to remember that Paul is Jewish. I'm positive he once followed strict Jewish dietary laws. While those food laws remind a Jewish-Christian of God's unconditional promises to the Jewish nation, as a "Christian-alone" it is a non-issue. In other words, all Christians are free to eat whatever they want.
    - i) That included at that time, food that was offered to idols. Since those idols are false-gods, it is a non-issue if a Christian eats them.
  - c) However, Paul's point here is in effect, "Look, if the Christian next to you thinks eating (or not eating) a certain food is wrong, then let them think it is wrong. Don't try to fix them. In their mind, it "is" wrong. Let it go. If God wants to change them, He will.
  - d) The broader application of Verse 14, is in Verse 15:
18. Verse 15: If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.
  - a) What this verse is saying is don't cause another Christian to stumble in their faith because your view is different. For their sake, we must "conform" to their behavior.
    - i) Here's an example: A Christian might believe that one must be a vegetarian. Even if we disagree with that view (and I do), I would not eat a steak dinner in front of them. I don't want that person to "lose faith" because of me.
    - ii) Paul is saying "give up one's rights" for the sake of others. Remember we're dealing with debate issues, not sin issues.
  - b) Another classic debate issue is Christians drinking alcohol. Some Christians think having a drink is acceptable and others do not. Getting drunk is considered sinful behavior. (Ref. Ephesians 5:18.) Therefore, the classic debate issue is "Can a Christian have a glass of wine with dinner?" The application here is even if we think it is ok, we should not drink in the presence of another Christian if they think it is wrong. On such issues, it is best to keep on the safe side. Make an attempt withhold our "rights" to do things that could cause other people to stumble in their faith.
  - c) There are other issues where one person thinks something is "wrong" because he or she is personally weak on an issue. For example, a Christian may think it is wrong to go to a convenience store because they have a weakness for alcohol and entering such a store is too much of a temptation for them. My only point here is not to say to them, "Hey, no big deal, watch me enter the store!" For their sake we are to give up our rights of the moment if it causes them to stumble.
  - d) The key is loving one another. Christian love is all about putting other's needs in front of our own. If we have such love, then we should be willing to give up our rights-of-the-moment in order not to allow other Christians to stumble.
19. Verse 16: Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil.
  - a) The idea of Verse 16 is if we have "total freedom" in Jesus Christ, we shouldn't use that freedom to cause other Christians to stumble. We should not be the "food police" (or whatever) going around trying to conform others to our views on Christianity.
20. Verse 17: For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, <sup>18</sup> because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.
  - a) After spending a bunch of verses telling us how we should not behave (i.e., give up our rights to criticize others), Paul tells us what we should focus on instead: It is the idea of "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit".

- b) What does that mean? It means our primary focus in life is to please God, and not each other. It means we desire to have an internal sense of peace and joy based on the fact we know God has forgiven all of our sins. We draw upon God's strength in order to love one another. Out of our love for one another, we are willing to give up our "rights" in order to help others grow. We let God fix others, and not ourselves.
  - c) Notice the phrase "approved by men": Paul is saying is if we live a life that is pleasing to God and our desire is to love another, and then our life will be "approved by men".
    - i) That means if we give up our "rights" in front of other Christians so that they don't stumble in their faith in God, we're not doing them harm.
    - ii) The term "approved by men" means that if we are willing to give up our rights to certain Christian privileges in order to help other Christians, we will get their approval as being a loving Christian.
  - d) Let's give the reverse situation for the moment. What if a person is "in your face" insisting you have to change to "their" style? For example, let's say one knows your view on some debatable issue and they want to fix us.
    - i) First, I want to make sure the other person is calm. I find people who are angry are not willing to listen. They just want their opinion heard to they just want to argue. In such cases, I let them "get it out of their system" first.
    - ii) Sometimes, people just want to be heard. If you can repeat back the key points of what they just said, (even if you disagree), it calms them down because they understand that you now understand their point of view.
    - iii) Some people enjoy debate for debate's sake. The answer here is to have good discernment. If someone is really interested in your opinion, answer them. If they just want to argue or want you to agree with them, it is a waste of time.
    - iv) Given all of this, one can then calmly explain the "Romans 14 view" that God is in charge of my life and not you and me. If God wants to change me, He is more than capable of changing me. Let's see what happens over time.
21. Verse 19: Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.
- a) What Paul is saying is to "go out of way" to do things that cause peace and mutual growth in a church. Try to avoid church conflicts as much as possible.
  - b) A pastor friend applied this verse some time back: There was a debate in his church over a big financial decision. The issue would have brought in extra money for their church. The problem was that some in the congregation didn't like the idea. He decided against it, even though he was personally for it. His reason was it was not worth causing a split in the church over the issue, even though the church really could have used the money.
    - i) His decision led to "peace and to mutual edification" as Paul commands us to do.
  - c) Again, this is over "debate" issues. If some issue is causing a split, avoid it the best one can. The primary concern of a church is "peace and mutual edification". That means to help each other grow in our faith in Jesus. If it means giving up one's rights on some issue, so be it, if giving up that right helps out other Christians.
22. Verse 20: Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. <sup>21</sup> It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.
- a) Paul is back to his favorite illustration: food. His point is if eating or not eating certain food groups causes other people to stumble, then we should give up our rights.
  - b) Notice the harshness in the first phrase, "Do not destroy the work of God".
    - i) Let's suppose someone believes Jesus died for their sins. They think a Christian must eat only vegetables or never drink (or vice-versa), etc.
    - ii) If we get in their face and say they must change their way in order to be pleasing to God, we are causing their faith to stumble. They may think, "I can never live like that. I might as well give up my faith in Jesus."

- c) The danger is in trying to “fix” people, we are turning people off to Jesus. Unfortunately, the history of the Christian church has seen lots of people walk away because they can’t stand to be around certain people in the church. The “sin police” have caused many people to walk away from God.
  - d) The classic example is when we tell people, “Well, you can join our church after you cut your hair, change your style of clothing and clean up your act”. That is the classic example of “destroying the work of God”. It is God’s job to change people, not ours. Our job is to help their needs, love them, encourage them, etc. (I can’t say this enough: I’m not talking about sin-issues, just “debatable” issues.)
  - e) Notice in Verse 21 Paul says “drink wine”. This is the first time Paul expands upon the “food issue” to include the classic Christian debate issue on drinking wine.
    - i) I could make a bible case that it is ok for Christians to drink wine.
    - ii) I could equally pick out other bible verses that Christians should not drink wine.
      - a) The point is one can argue it either way using the bible as a reference.
    - iii) Paul’s point is “Look folks, if the Christians around you think it is wrong to drink wine and you think it’s ok, don’t do it for their sake.” Don’t cause others to stumble for that reason.
    - iv) I would like to take this one step further. If you are in church leadership, part of the price to be paid is to give up wine or similar drink. You could be buying it at the grocery store, and a member of the congregation could see you there and be “shocked” that the pastor or elder drinks wine. Again, this is not about “rights”, it is about not causing other Christians around you to stumble over this issue.
23. Verse 22: So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves.
- a) There is a classic joke of someone with a big ego arguing, “When I want your opinion, I’ll give it to you!” Paul is specifically arguing for the opposite view of that comment: Paul is saying to keep our opinions to ourselves on these issues.
  - b) Someone once quipped that when it comes to debate, “some people have something to say and others need to say something”. The point is, in context of Verse 22, is to keep one’s opinion to oneself on a debatable issue and not stir up strife.
  - c) The second sentence of Verse 22 focuses inward: “Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves.”
    - i) Let’s suppose you think it is ok to eat any food. You then see someone claiming they are “more spiritual” because they refuse to eat certain food groups in their dedication to God. We then doubt our own view on this issue. We think maybe I need to be more spiritual and give up the same food group. In such a situation, one is condemning themselves. That is the opposite of what Paul preaches.
  - d) The classic danger in Christianity is to believe in Jesus and “fill in the blank”.
    - i) It is the danger of trying to be “more spiritual” by emphasizing one of these issues.
    - ii) It is the false idea for example, that only a “true” Christians only go church on Saturdays or on Sundays.
    - iii) Paul’s point is we are happier Christians if we don’t condemn ourselves for behaving one way in one of these debatable issues. The issue is not what we think; the issue of the moment is how we treat others. The issue is, are we willing to give up our rights as Christians in order to help others.
24. Verse 23: But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.
- a) Let’ suppose you are thinking, “Well, the guy or gal next to me is not eating meat, I wonder if I should avoid it as well”. That is what Paul meant by “who has doubts”.

- b) The point is one's motivation. If one is thinking, "Well, the bible teaches I can eat what I want so who cares about anyone else?"
    - i) If one is focusing on oneself, they are not loving those around them.
    - ii) In that case, the last phrase of this verse applies: "everything that does not come from faith is sin".
  - c) Paul is saying that if one is in a situation where one is not sure what is the correct answer in a debate issue, go the "safe route" and give up one's rights on an issue if it could cause someone around us to lack faith in God due to that issue.
25. As I conclude this lesson, I want you to ponder the question, "Why did Paul spend so much ink on this issue?" I could have summarized Paul's point of "Don't meddle on non-debate issues" in a lot less verses. Why do you suppose Paul spent so much effort to bring out this point?
- a) I think Paul understands that when Christians go to church, our tendency is to put on our "Sunday behavior" and not act as if we do the rest of the week. We do our best to act more spiritual around other Christians. Sometimes our egos take it a step further and try to fix others around us to be more like us.
    - i) Paul is preaching against putting ourselves first. If we are to show love to fellow Christians around us, that means giving up our "rights" for their sake.
26. Let me end this by getting back to the opening premise: "It is not our job to fix them"
- a) My wife asked me the other day what I was writing about in this lesson. I summarized it for her as follows: The last lesson reads like an Alcoholics Anonymous Meeting. It emphasized "The Serenity Prayer" of letting go of the things we cannot control. This lesson reads more like an "Al-Anon" meeting. (That's a support group for loved ones of people with addition problems.) The emphasis in "Al-Anon" is to understand that one cannot fix someone else unless that person desires to change."
    - i) That same principal applies to Christianity. God does not call us to "fix" other Christians. God-alone gets that privilege and God-alone gets the glory.
  - b) The "big theme" of the latter chapters of Romans is all about how to respond to God's love toward us. The answer is to love God back and show love to others around us. The specific example at hand is to be willing to give up our Christian "rights" if it harms others. Part of the methodology of loving one another is to not try to fix other people's lack-of-faith on some particular (non-sin) issue.
  - c) God is more than capable of helping us grow in our faith toward Him. There are Christian debate issues where I have changed my views through the years. I have never changed once by someone yelling at me and telling me I must change. I suppose the same applies to most veteran Christians as well.
  - d) This chapter is an anti-meddling chapter of the New Testament. It is an example of how to love other Christians and leaving room for God to work in their lives. When we try to fix others, we are "getting in the way" of letting God work in their lives.
27. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, fill us with Your love so that we can love to those around us. Help us to show that love in ways that are pleasing to You. Help us to let go of our rights if it causes those around us to stumble in our faith. Help us to deal with difficult people in ways that are pleasing to You. Help me to focus on my behavior and not worry about those around me. Guide my life, as I live as a living sacrifice for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.