

Are You a Stepping Stone or a Stumbling Block? (Part 1)

Romans 14:13-23

Thought for the Day: When you have a difference of opinion on a disputable matter with a brother or sister in Christ, do not cause your brother or sister to stumble in their faith because of the freedom you enjoy in Christ.

Romans 14:13-23 is part of a larger section that runs from 14:1 to 15:13. In this section of Romans, Paul is dealing with the issue of strained relationships between mature and immature Christians, especially concerning “disputable matters” (14:1). Disputable matters are differences of understanding, conflicting preferences and priorities, and opposing convictions about non-essential matters among believers that can lead to disunity, disharmony and division in the body of Christ. When we find ourselves on opposite sides of the fence with a brother or sister in Christ, how should we deal with it? When we have a difference of opinion in a gray area, what attitudes and actions should we take toward one another?

In Romans 14:1 – 15:13, Paul shares several principles that help us to answer these questions:

I. Stop Judging and Don't Be a Stumbling Block (14:13)

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.

Therefore – encourages us to look backward and to remember certain important truths. Why are we to not judge one another?

- a. Vs. 1 – Because there are some matters in the Christian life that are disputable—not all issues are black and white; there are gray areas. Therefore, we are to accept and welcome one another.
 - b. Vss. 2-3 – Because one person's conscience may allow him/her to do something while another person's conscience will not. In either case, we need to remember that, in Christ, God has accepted both people—and so should we.
 - c. Vs 4. – Because when I judge a brother or sister in the Lord, I am judging a servant of the Lord. I do not have the right to judge the Lord's servant.
 - d. Vss. 5-6 – Because we do not all share the same convictions regarding religious observances and practices. The important thing for all of us is that we do what do unto the Lord.
 - e. Vss. 7-8 – Because “no man is an island”; what we do has an impact, for good or ill, on those around us. We need to remember that we and our brothers and sisters in Christ belong to the Lord.
 - f. Vss. 9-12 – Because Jesus Christ is Lord; each of us will stand before Him to give an account of our lives. Therefore, I need to mind my own business and prepare for my own accounting.
- **Stumbling block** – sticking your leg out and causing someone to trip and fall. Example: legalism – emphasizing non-essentials to the point of tripping someone up in the Christian life.

- **Obstacle** – pictures a baited cage with a spring-loaded trapdoor. Don't put a trap, a temptation, in front of your brother or sister.
 - We must be careful that the exercise of our freedom in Christ doesn't cause someone else, who is weak in faith, to fall away from the faith. The exercise of our freedom can bait a trap, can create a temptation, that may cause someone else to fall away from the faith.
- Some of the doctrines that are taught in churches sound good and seem harmless, until you start to put them into practice in the real world, and then you discover how destructive they can be to people's faith.
- False teachings abound! Many of them are leading people to spiritual destruction.

II. Be Convinced and Keep a Clear Conscience (14:14)

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.

- Matthew 15:11 – It's not what goes in, it's what comes out.
- Acts 10:10-16 – God has removed all the dietary laws; we are not to look down on anyone as unclean.
- Romans 14:20 – "All food is clean..."
- 1 Corinthians 8:8 – "Food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do."
- 1 Timothy 4:3-5 – Everything God created is to be received with thanksgiving.
- Hebrews 13:9 – We are not spiritually strengthened by ceremonial foods.
- But all of this is trumped by our conscience! If you cannot eat with a clear conscience, for you, it is a sin to eat.
 - Romans 14:23; 1 Corinthians 8:4, 7
- Love is to take precedence over knowledge and truth!
 - Truth + Love = Instrument of healing and blessing; Truth – Love = Weapon of spiritual destruction.
 - 1 Corinthians 8:1; Ephesians 4:15
- We must not violate our own conscience and we must not encourage or tempt another person to violate theirs!
- "*Nothing is clean or unclean by itself.* Inanimate objects can be neither good nor evil because they do not have a mind or a will. Furthermore, they lack the capacity to do anything on their own. Idols are nothing until someone ascribes significance to them. The pieces of polished wood or stone are not evil; the worship of them is evil. Meat offered to a fictitious god is no different than any other meat, except for the meaning attached to it by people." (*Chuck Swindoll, Insights on Romans, p. 296*)

III. Act in Love and Don't Destroy Your Brother (14:15)

IV. Avoid Bringing Disgrace Upon the Faith (14:16)

V. Accurately Represent the Kingdom of God (14:17-18)