

Are You an Instrument of Construction or Destruction?

Romans 14:15-23

Thought for the Day. As children of our heavenly Father and citizens of His kingdom, we have the privilege and responsibility of accurately representing the values and priorities of His family and kingdom in our relationships with one another.

In Romans 14:1–15:13, the Apostle Paul is dealing with the question of “disputable matters” (Rom. 14:1) in the church; questions and issues about which the Bible is silent; “gray areas” of the Christian life where the Bible gives no direct instructions about how we are to proceed.

As one writer put it, the Bible is “silent or ambiguous about many moral issues. These ‘gray’ areas have always been a source of dispute and conflict among Christians, even though the disputed practices change from time to time. What principles should guide us when our actions are criticized by others or when we feel critical toward them?” (*Jack Kuhatschek, Romans: Becoming New in Christ, p. 63*)

As we contemplate this passage, we need to ask ourselves, “Am I building others up in their Christian life or tearing them down? Am I encouraging or discouraging others in their walk with the Lord?” Paul gives us five important principles to help us answer these questions.

I. Act in Love (14:15)

- If we are engaging in a questionable behavior that is causing distress or grief for another believer, we need to ask ourselves, “Which do I love *more*—my *behavior* or my *brother or sister in the Lord*?”
 - 1 Corinthians 10:23-24 – here is the freedom and the responsibility of the Christian life.
 - “A Christian man is a most free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian man is a most dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” (*Martin Luther, On the Freedom of a Christian Man*)
- The issue is not, “How will this affect me?” but “How will this affect my brother in Christ?”
 - The reason we should be concerned is because this is a person for whom Christ died.
 - Therefore, we should value that person more than we value the behavior that is causing problems for him / her.

II. Avoid Discrediting the Faith (14:16)

- People have left churches because they were criticized about insignificant, non-essential matters.
- As nonbelievers watch believers attacking and destroying one another over non-essential, trivial matters, it brings disgrace to the name of Christ.
 - When we love one another as Christ loved us—sacrificially and unselfishly—we are a credit to Christ and to Christianity. (John 13:34-35)
 - “I have seen churches divided over matters that were really insignificant when compared with the vital things of the Christian faith. I have heard of churches being split over such minor matters as the location of the piano in the auditorium and serving of meals on Sunday.” (*Warren, Wiersbe, Be Right, p. 168*)

III. **Adopt God's Priorities (14:17-19)**

- As citizens of the kingdom of God, we need to accurately portray the priorities of that kingdom in our relationships with one another.
 - God's Priorities: Righteousness, peace, joy in the Holy Spirit, and mutual edification.
 - Peace is mentioned twice (vss. 17,19) – Peace, unity and harmony in the church are high on God's priority list. (Ephesians 4:1-3)
 - The key to unity in a church family is humility and self-sacrifice (Philippians 2:1-8).
- "Both the strong believer and the weak believer need to grow. The strong [or mature] believer needs to grow in *love*; the weak [or immature] believer needs to grow in *knowledge*." (Wiersbe, *ibid*, p. 168)

IV. **Don't Destroy God's Work (14:20-21)**

- The "work of God" refers to our fellow believers—our brothers and sisters in Christ. (Philippians 1:6; Ephesians 2:10)
- If we do spiritual harm to a brother or sister in Christ, we are disrespecting God Himself.
 - We seek to hurt others by attacking the work of their hands; something they have put a lot of time and effort into; something that they highly value. We hurt God by hurting the work of His hands.
 - Satan cannot harm God directly, so he attacks Him indirectly by attacking the work of His hands—you and me! When we attack and destroy a brother or sister in Christ, we are partnering with Satan in his efforts. And when we build up a brother or sister in Christ, we are partnering with God in His work.

V. **Don't Condemn Yourself (14:22-23)**

- **Vs. 21 – Be Considerate.** "What you enjoy in the privacy of your home is entirely between you and the Lord. All things are lawful; not all things are constructive. Know the difference and thank God for all the wonderful things He created for you to enjoy."
- **Vs. 22 – Be Convinced.** Examine your questions of conscience before the Lord. "Determine what Scripture has to say. Discuss them with trusted, mature believers. Consider the impact they have on others and yourself, both positively and negatively. Then, once you have settled the issue, you can enjoy your freedom with complete confidence."
- **Vs. 23 – Be Consistent.** "Consistently match your actions to your conscience. But don't be surprised to find that your conscience gradually changes over time. Some things that caused you no problem years ago irritate your conscience today. This is to be expected. Your conscience should never stop growing" [as it is informed by the Word of God and guided by the Spirit of God]. (Charles Swindoll, *Insights on Romans*, p. 299)
 - We bring God's condemnation upon ourselves by openly engaging in those activities that we know will cause other believers to stumble and fall.
 - We also bring God's condemnation upon ourselves when we engage in behaviors about which we have doubts or that violate our own conscience.