



Group Discussion Guide

Romans 14:13-23

For groups meeting July 5 evening through July 12 morning.

In second portion of Romans 14, Paul continued his instructions regarding unity and diversity within the body of Christ. He had used two different examples of preferences that should not divide believers, and he had reminded his readers that they all served the same God and one day would all bow before Him, giving them needed perspective about their current personal convictions. Because of these truths, Paul wrote that we who follow Jesus must not pass judgment on one another, and we must instead choose to live in such a way that we do not make it hard for others to follow him (v. 13).

Once again he addressed the topic of food as he explained he had reached a point of understanding there was no food that was “unclean” and therefore forbidden (v. 14). However, it was unclean for the person who believed it to be unclean. What was he getting at? If a believer had a conviction that eating a particular food was wrong, then it was wrong for that person and that individual should avoid it. Paul took it a step further. He wrote that if a believer that did not hold that conviction and knew that another believer did, and the one who did not hold that conviction still ate that particular food, he was “no longer walking in love,” (v. 15). Doing so would cause harm to the believer who did hold that conviction. While the argument could be made that it simply was not wrong, Paul wrote that it was better to abstain and therefore someone else would not speak out against it (v. 16).

Then, the apostle clearly stated that this was about much more than the mere act of eating or drinking something. This kingdom – the kingdom of God, which now was centered on the church – was about seeking after the righteousness, peace and joy that only the Holy Spirit can provide (v. 17). Letting go of individual preferences to seek these things ... that is the way of Jesus. And serving him in this way will bring the believer into favor with God and with man (v. 18). Paul wrote that we must chase after whatever is needed for peace with and building the faith of other believers (v. 19).

Paul reiterated his teaching from verse 13 in verses 20-21 with his use of the word “stumble.” With this illustration, Paul again emphasized to his readers that it was possible to live in such a way that made it difficult for other believers to walk with Christ. Choosing to eat or drink something that others thought was sinful could cause them to be hindered in their own spiritual growth. Paul also wrote about his personal choice on this matter in 1 Corinthians 8:13:

Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

This of course should be applied to anything we do in life, not just food or drink. Paul then wrote that a believer's own personal convictions should, in general, be kept between that believer and God. When there is no specific need to make these views public, they can remain unsaid (v. 22). Personal convictions that are settled are a blessing, while doubts about doing something reveal the need to refrain from the action in question (vs. 22-23). If there is a question about such things in the mind of a believer, then doing those things would in fact be sinful.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the connection between ceasing the practice of passing judgment on other believers and choosing not to do things that cause them hardship in walking with Jesus?
2. Paul was convinced he could eat anything without committing a sin (v. 14). Yet, he wrote that eating a certain type of food was a sin for someone who was convinced it was a sin. How did this truth factor into his teaching in verses 15-16?
3. If others are upset by something we do, we are no longer walking in love. How do we navigate this in a world where even believers seem to be offended by so many things? How does it help us to remember that if we continue to do something like this, we are in effect “destroying the one for whom Christ died” (v. 15)?
4. How does Paul’s instruction in verse 17 speak to your heart? What do we as believers need to do to ensure we are focused on righteousness, peace and joy instead of nitpicking the actions of other believers?
5. What does it mean to “pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (v. 19)? How can we put this into action in our lives, practically? What personal views are you willing to sacrifice for peace and helping others grow in faith?
6. If we truly follow God’s commands as given by Paul in this passage, how would it change the landscape of the church? How would that impact the world?