



Don't Destroy the Work of God (Part 1)

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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AM Assembly



Introduction:

Could you imagine what might happen if the curator of the Louvre walked in and found the Mona Lisa spray painted with a mustache and goatee? Or if they found it slashed in pieces? Or if he walked in and found the Venus de Milo crushed and broken? "Oh no," the collective art community cries. These are works of art, masterpieces. Why would anyone want to destroy them? We would all be shocked. And yet, if we are not careful, we can all be guilty of an even worse travesty. This year, we've been examining **Ephesians 2:8-10** and we have learned that we are God's workmanship. We are God's masterpieces. I hope we've increased our faith in God's workmanship within our own lives, motivating us to hang on to Him, pursuing Him. But we must not simply think of ourselves. We need to look around us. You are not the only masterpiece of God in this room. Look around you at God's masterpieces. And then take note of the warning found in **Romans 14:20**: "Do not...destroy the work of God" (ESV). Paul was talking about interaction between Christians. He was very specifically pointing out that when we see other Christians, they are also God's workmanship. God is working on them. We must not destroy God's work. That is, we must not do anything that makes God work naught in their lives. We must do everything to build up these masterpieces of God that are around us. Let's consider some highlights of **Romans 14** to learn how we should treat our brothers and sisters since they are God's masterpieces also. We'll be doing this over two lessons. In this one, we want to gain some foundational lessons from **Romans 14** that should govern our relationship with one another as God's workmanship. In our second lesson, we'll examine some specific behaviors Paul instructs.

Discussion:

I. This chapter is primarily about Jew/Gentile relationships.

- A. We are nearly 2000 years removed from the historical context of the Scriptures. If we are not careful, we will read into the Bible our modern cultural context and miss the real point of Christ's teaching. Very often, as we come to **Romans 14**, we read it in terms of modern disagreements and debates. I have no doubt that there is some application from this chapter regarding how we handle modern disagreements. However, we have to remember the original context if we are going to apply this chapter to our situation. Paul was not talking to people with 2000 years' worth of disagreements and doctrinal differences. He was not talking to Christians beset by denominational divisions. He was not writing to congregations that had split over pattern and authority issues. He was writing to a church in its fledgling years. This was just the beginning of the body of Christ and of the body of Christ in Rome.
- B. What we need to understand is that the main point of Romans and about this section in particular is that Jews and Gentiles can both be Christians and they need to learn how to get along. They had come from two totally different cultures. The Jews had some strict rules because of their years under the Law of Moses. There were a lot of hard issues to face as they learned how to be united. Read the first part of Romans and see that Paul's concern was not directly with explaining the gospel. His main point was that Jews and Gentiles had committed the same sins and needed the same Savior. They were saved by the same gospel (**Romans 1:16-17**). Then in **Romans 9-11**, Paul is dealing specifically with the fact that the Gentiles needed to accept the Jews into their Christian fellowship.
- C. Please notice the specific context of **Romans 14** is about this unity. While we talk about "Romans 14" as a shorthand for dealing with the issues it brings up, this section of Romans actually goes through **Romans 15:7**. Notice the conclusion Paul draws in that verse and then his reason for drawing it in **Romans 15:8-9**. "Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy..." (ESV). This section of Scripture is not mainly about how to deal with all those pesky doctrinal differences. It is about how two different groups of people, with two different religious backgrounds can come together into one single body and bring glory to God. Every application we make about this passage in today's debates and discussions needs to be filtered through this understanding first.
- D. In other words, **Romans 14** was not written to justify sweeping every doctrinal difference under the rug. It was written to unite two cultures into one.

II. This about those welcomed by God.

- A. There is no end of trouble that has come from this chapter and misapplications of it. Some suggest that every doctrinal difference is made pointless by **Romans 14** as long as people believe in Jesus. That couldn't be farther from the truth. Notice how the chapter begins. "As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions" (**Romans 14:1**, ESV). This chapter is about welcoming each other. As we noticed in our last point, it is specifically about Gentiles welcoming Jews and vice versa. Paul's main point is that God, through Jesus Christ, has welcomed Jews into His kingdom. Therefore Gentiles should welcome them as well (and vice versa).
- B. Notice this repeated point in **Romans 14:3**. They are not to despise or judge each other "for God has welcomed him" (ESV). Further, remember how this whole section ends. "Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (**Romans 15:7**, ESV). Please recognize that there is nothing about **Romans 14** that says we are to welcome those we are certain God does not welcome. This is about differences among those whom God has welcomed. I should never use **Romans 14** to gloss over some difference that I believe separates someone from Jesus Christ. As **II John 9-11** explains if I believe I am dealing with someone who does not have God because of whatever they are teaching, I must not welcome or receive them.
- C. I've known of multiple preachers who have tried to make lists of doctrinal issues that are covered by **Romans 14**. But it simply cannot be done. There is no list of issues that can be all-encompassing. The fact is you do not get to tell me what I must believe separates people from Christ. If I am 100% convinced that some issue keeps people from having Christ, then I must not welcome them because I believe God is not welcoming them. Thus, when **Romans 14** is practically applied, each of us will likely have our own list of issues that fit in **Romans 14**. We each have our own list of issues that we are not convinced is right, but we are not convinced separates people from God either. So when a preacher presents a list of issues that fit in **Romans 14** you are learning more about that preacher than you are about **Romans 14**. You are learning what differences he thinks doesn't matter. And that is all you are learning.
- D. Certainly, I believe we can learn biblical principles all over the Bible that teaches us about patience with folks we disagree with, even if we think the disagreement "really matters." We also need to act in humility as we remember that we might be wrong in our assessments. But as we apply **Romans 14**, we must be clear that if we are convinced someone is not welcomed by God, then we must not welcome them. That would not bring glory to God (cf. **Romans 15:7**).

III. We are all household servants of the same Master.

- A. Moving on from contextual issues that govern how we apply the text, we cannot go directly to the behaviors Paul instructs. We first need to consider some aspects of our relationships within Christ's church that are the foundation for the behaviors we must pursue.
- B. In **Romans 14:4**, Paul writes: "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?" (ESV). Paul is presenting a word picture. The word for "servant" here refers to a household servant, a domestic servant. The picture is that we are all servants in the same household. But which of us is the Master? None of us.
- C. While we are certainly supposed to provoke one another to love and good deeds (**Hebrews 10:24**) and while we are definitely supposed to discipline and withdraw our welcome from servants who rebel against the Master (**I Corinthians 5:9-13**), we must recognize that these people around us are not our servants. I am not the master. You are not the master. These brothers and sisters do not have to practice their servanthood to our satisfaction. God is not going to bring us in on the Day of Judgment and ask our opinion about how our fellow servants measured up. It further means that your spirituality is not the measure of maturity. None of us gets to set ourselves up as the standard of servanthood.
- D. Look around you. Those people you are looking at are not your servants. They are not here today to please you. They do not practice their spirituality to honor and serve you. They do it to honor and serve the true Master and we must keep that in mind.
- E. I know this is a hard balance to strike. I think of it like I do my children. Hardly a week goes by that I don't have to remind one of my children that they are not the parents. Their siblings do not have to measure up to them. However, there are certainly times when we want siblings to intervene. If Trina were about to stick a fork in an outlet, I don't want the others looking away because, "Well, Dad said I'm not the parent." We also recognize there is a big difference between Ethan warning Ryan about the potential outcome of some behavior and taking on the role of parent trying to get Ryan in trouble or control his behavior. In like manner, there is difference between us exhorting, encouraging, even warning each other and us trying to control each other as if we are the master. We aren't.

IV. We are brothers and sisters.

- A. **Romans 14:10** provides the second relational foundation. “Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother?” (ESV). This hearkens back to **Romans 14:3** as it talked about despising the one who abstains from meat or judging the one who eats meat.
- B. This is a second word picture. This time, rather than picturing us as the servants in the house, we are siblings in the house. We are the children. We have the same Father. Why would we judge and despise each other. We’ll talk about not judging or despising in our next lesson. What we need to see here is the relationship.
- C. The family picture is used elsewhere. In **Matthew 10:29**, Jesus presents us as family. We are a family that is there for each other when we have had to abandon our physical family for the sake of Christ or when our physical family abandons us because of Christ. Thus in **Romans 14** we need to see each other with this special bond. We have been given to each other as family to support, uphold, uplift, comfort, encourage. Why would we judge and despise?
- D. The family picture is used again in **I Timothy 5:1-2**. In this passage the picture points out that we are not to rebuke each other as if we don’t even know each other. Rather, we are to honor, respect, and love each other the way we would family. Sadly, some folks treat their spiritual family the exact same way they treat their biological family because they treat their biological family so badly. Paul’s instruction to Timothy is not based on how some families behave, but based on how we all know all families should behave.
- E. Finally, Paul demonstrates that this relationship really matters. In **Romans 14:13-15**, he talks about not put a stumbling block before our brother, not grieving our brother, and not destroying our brother. This relationship matters, so we must walk in love. Our brothers and sisters matter more than some food we wish to eat or some day we wish to keep. They are more important than some right we think we have. They are more important than proving how strong we are. They are more important than proving how strict we are. They are more important than proving how better we are.
- F. Look around. You are looking at family here. Are you treating them like family?

Conclusion:

I know we haven’t dealt with many of the questions people bring up about **Romans 14**. However, I hope we’ve hit some principles that actually help us answer the questions we need to answer about how to treat these folks around us in our daily lives and as we gather together in this congregation. Look around you. Apart from our relationship with God through Jesus Christ, upon which our relationship with each other is based, there is nothing more important than this relationship, than preserving these relationships, than improving these relationships, than strengthening these relationships. How are you doing with that?