



Don't Destroy the Work of God (Part 2)

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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PM Assembly



Introduction:

Look around you. What do you see? I hope you see people bought by the blood of Jesus. I hope you see people that God loved so much He sent Jesus to die for them. I hope you see people who are God's workmanship (**Ephesians 2:10**). These are masterpieces of God. Oh, I know we are all in progress. I know that the fullness of the masterpiece may not be visible yet. But I do know we are looking at a series of masterpieces that when God is done will outshine all the museums and galleries the world can boast. **Romans 14:20** tells us, "Do not...destroy the work of God" (ESV). This entire year we have talked about being God's workmanship. Today we are recognizing that we are not the only masterpiece in the room. We are in this congregation with the workmanship of God. How do we need to live with each other considering God is working on all of us? In the first part of this lesson, we considered some foundational principles from **Romans 14**. This chapter is primarily about Jew/Gentile relationships and any application we make today must be filtered through that understanding. This chapter is about those who are welcomed by God and is not telling us to overlook issues we are convinced actually separate people from God. God is the Master and we are not. We shouldn't treat each other as if we have the authority to control each other. Finally, we recognized that we are brothers and sisters in the same family and that relationship is more important than any so-called rights or desires. Having established these fundamental principles of the chapter, in this lesson we want to consider some behaviors God expects from us as we work with each other.

Discussion:

I. Welcome each other.

- A. Those whom God has welcomed, we are to welcome (**Romans 14:1, 3; 15:7**). God sent His Son to die for them. If receiving these people was that important to God, it should be that important to us.
- B. The word used for "welcome," "receive," or "accept" means to take into friendship or as a companion. It is talking about kindness and partnership. It is the same word used in **Acts 28:2** when the natives of Malta received the shipwrecked men with great hospitality and kindness. It is also used by Paul in **Philemon 17** as he urged Philemon to receive Onesimus as he would Paul, if he considered Paul his partner.
- C. Sometimes we look at folks from different backgrounds as suspect. No doubt, the Jews and Gentiles did. But we are to welcome each other. Whether black or white, Hispanic or Indian, American or Canadian or Mexican or Russian, rich or poor, Democrat or Republican or Libertarian, northerner or southerner, Purdue fan or IU fan, Colts fan or (shockingly) Patriots fan. Jesus died for each one of these. If any of these comes to Jesus in faithful submission, they are welcomed by Him, and we are to welcome them. We are to receive them with kindness, not just as fellow assembly attenders, but as friends and companions.

II. Welcome without distinguishing over doubts.

- A. As Paul described this "welcome" between Jews and Gentiles, he claimed they were to welcome even those who were weak in faith. The idea of weak faith in **Romans 14:1** is not about believing in Jesus weakly. Though surely we are to welcome those whose faith in Jesus is not strong so we may help them grow. However, in this context, the weak faith is talking about those who have doubts about the freedom to do something. For instance, Jews who became Christians, though they were free to eat all meats, would likely have doubts and struggles with that. Their faith that Jesus nailed that Law to the cross might be weak and so they would abstain from many meats. By the way, it seems quite clear that this is a matter of Jews avoiding certain foods because of the use of the term "unclean" in **Romans 14:14** which was the term used by God to describe things the Jews were supposed to avoid under the Old Law.
- B. The word translated "quarrel" in **Romans 14:1** in the ESV is used in **I Corinthians 12:10** to talk about "distinguishing" between spirits and in **Hebrews 5:14** to talk about discerning between good and evil. This term talks about making a distinction or separation. According to the ESV, Paul says not to do this over "opinions," other versions say over "disputations" and others over "doubtful matters." In this context, it seems the word refers to the inward reasoning of a person who hesitates or doubts. The same term is used in **Luke 5:22** to refer to the "questioning" or "reasoning" of those who couldn't understand how Jesus could forgive sins. It is used in **Luke 24:38** when the resurrected Jesus appeared to the disciples and they were troubled by "doubts" in their heart.

- C. In other words, Paul says not to welcome someone from a different background just to make distinctions about them or separations from them over the issues they have doubts about. This actually harkens back to what Paul had said in **Romans 12:3**. We must not think too highly of ourselves, setting ourselves apart or above others because they don't understand their freedoms as well as we do. Please be aware of an often made mistake. I don't know how many times I've heard someone come to **Romans 14** and talk about those folks who thought it was a sin to eat meat but were told to buck up and leave their brethren alone about it. That is not what Paul says. Paul does not say one person is strongly convicted it is right to eat meat while the other is strongly convicted that it is wrong to eat meat. Rather, one is strongly convicted it is right while the other doubts and hesitates. The conviction Paul seeks is that we each only do what we individually are completely convicted is right (**Romans 14:5**).
- D. Paul explains that these others are God's workmanship. Wherever they are in their faith about their liberties is where God has grown them at this time. Our job is not to try to take over as the master workmen in their lives, lecturing them, mocking them, molding them in our image, but to simply welcome them. Neither is our job to hold them at arm's length, avoiding them, or separating from them. Think of what Peter did according to **Galatians 2:11-14**. He welcomed Gentiles until the men from James came, then he made distinctions and pulled away.

III. Do not despise each other.

- A. In **Romans 14:2-3**, the strong brother, the one whose faith is strong that he can eat these meats, is not to despise the people who abstain. That is, he is not to treat them with contempt, reject them, or treat them like they have no standing in the congregation. They are not to treat them like they don't measure up.
- B. Can you imagine Gentiles who grasped their freedom in Christ looking down on Jews who couldn't get past their heritage about certain meats? Or their fears that the meat was not prepared properly so they just ate vegetables? What if we converted some person from the United Pentecostal Church who simply could not get past their foibles over make-up, jewelry, or watching television? What if a Christian simply has a problem with watching television or certain shows? Could you imagine one who feels liberty to do so despising and ridiculing the strict person? I can. I've seen it done. I've been the victim and I've been the perpetrator.
- C. Why do we so naturally want to despise someone who avoids something we feel we have freedom to participate in? A Christian declares that they simply can't participate in reading Harry Potter or The Hunger Games and I immediately start talking about them and looking down on them. What about despising one of God's workmanship because they make a different choice when it comes to education? There are plenty of homeschoolers who despise public schoolers, and there are plenty of public schoolers who despise homeschoolers. Paul says not to do that. We are talking about God's workmanship. We are talking about people who are trying to meet out their service to God their Master. We are all making our choices to honor the Lord (**Romans 14:6**). Others aren't required to measure up to us.
- D. Rather than despising them, we are to outdo one another in honor (cf. **Romans 12:10**).

IV. Don't pass judgment.

- A. In **Romans 14:2-3**, the weak brother, the one who doubts that he can eat meat so he avoids it, is not to pass judgment on the one who eats. This is the idea of pronouncing judgment or subjecting to censure. This is exactly what Peter did in Antioch according to **Galatians 2:11-14**.
- B. This is not speaking against all kinds of judgment. In fact, according to **I Corinthians 5:12**, we are to make judgments regarding so-called brothers who rebel against God. Further, according to **I Corinthians 6:1-3**, when grievances come up between brethren, we should bring them to the wise among us to judge between the parties involved. Obviously, if you are convinced that a brother is no longer welcomed by God because of his rebellious sin, you are to make a judgment. So then, what is Paul talking about?
- C. If you avoid something not because you are certain God has condemned it but because you are uncertain God allows it, don't judge your brother who is involved in it. God is his Master. Let God deal with it. While **Romans 14** is going to go on to tell that brother about sacrifice, this verse demonstrates that the teaching of **Romans 14** is not given to you to make your brethren conform to your doubts.
- D. Certainly, if we are not to judge each other regarding our doubts, we must not make up rules to judge each other with. When the Pharisees took the limitation of 40 stripes (**Deuteronomy 25:3**) and mandated only 39 (cf. **II Corinthians 11:24**), they were adding to God's law. They were certainly not allowed to judge others based on their additional rules no matter how much sense they made. In order to protect yourself from false doctrine, you may decide to never read anything but the Bible. But that is your rule, not God's. In order to protect yourself from lust or hearing foul language, you may decide to never watch TV or listen to the ra-

dio. But that is your personal rule. How easy it is to place yourself on a spiritual pedestal because of your strictness and judge others as less than you. Paul says not to do that. These people are God's workmanship. God is working on them. He doesn't need you piling your personal rules on them. Remember, they are living and dying to the Lord, not to you (**Romans 14:8**).

- E. Certainly, we must encourage one another and warn one another as we all prepare to stand before the judgment seat of God (**Romans 14:10**). I for one do not want you overlooking sin in my life and letting me walk blindly into God's presence with that. In balance to that, we need to remember that in the end it is the judgment seat of God that our brethren will stand before and not our judgment seat. With that in mind we need to remember that if we make our brethren surrender to our judgment seat on the way to God's, when we stand before God's, He will use our hypocritical and hypercritical measure to judge us (**Matthew 7:1-2**).

V. Walk in love.

- A. **Romans 14:15** explains that we need to walk in love toward our fellow servants, toward our spiritual siblings. **Romans 12:9-13** provides some guidelines for walking in this love including brotherly affection, honor, rejoicing, and hospitality.

- B. However, in this context Paul mentions two contrasts that define walking in love.

1. *Build up, don't knock down*: In **Romans 14:19**, Paul says we must pursue what makes for mutual up-building. In **Romans 15:2**, he says we must please our neighbor that we may build him up. In contrast to that, he says we must decide "never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother" (**Romans 14:13**, ESV). In **Romans 14:20**, Paul says "it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats" (ESV). If you are like me, you want to rebel a little against this. After all, it is completely not fair that I would be asked to give up something I like, something I enjoy, something I am certain is perfectly legitimate and lawful. Yet, I need to remember what Jesus gave up so that I might be built up and saved. I need to remember what Jesus gave up so my fellow servants and siblings might be built up and saved. **Romans 14:15** reminds me of Christ's death, which was, of course, preceded by Him giving up the glories of heaven to live on earth as one of us. If He could give up the glories of heaven and give up His comfort and even His life while on earth, then surely I can give up whatever might cause my brother or sister to stumble. Surely I can sacrifice to build them up.
2. *Please, don't grieve*: In **Romans 15:1-2**, Paul said we shouldn't strive to please ourselves, but to please our neighbor, even if it means bearing with the failings of the weak. In **Romans 14:19**, he said we must pursue what makes for peace. By contrast, Paul tells us not to grieve our brothers and sisters in **Romans 14:15**. We need to be careful with this instruction. After all, there are times when simply proclaiming the truth causes sorrow and grief and that is not our fault. For instance, when Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell all he had, he went away sorrowful, which translates this same word (**Matthew 19:22**). Peter was "grieved" in **John 21:17** when Jesus asked him the third time if he loved Him. In **II Corinthians 7:8-9**, Paul was actually glad he had caused the Corinthians to grieve because it produced repentance. So we must ask how this grief in **Romans 14:15** is different. In **Romans 14:23**, Paul explains that anyone who eats while he doubts is condemned. If your actions prompt a brother or sister to pursue some action they are not confident in, you have caused them to sin. Do you feel grief when you believe you have sinned? I hope so. We are not supposed to cause that grief in any of our brethren. Rather, we are to seek to please them. We are to protect and help them. When they are done participating in whatever activities they join us in, they need to be confident they have been pleasing to God so they may feel the joy of bringing glory to God rather than the grief of disappointing Him. Paul uses Jesus as our example of this quoting **Psalms 69:9** (**Romans 15:3**). Read the context of that quote. Look at what Jesus endured to make sure that no one else would be brought to shame through Him and no one else would be brought to dishonor through Him (**Psalms 69:6-12**). We need to follow in His footsteps, loving our brethren as much as He did.

VI. Remember the goal: glorify God.

- A. In **Romans 15:5-6**, Paul prays that the Gentile and Jewish Christians in Rome will live in such harmony that they may with one voice glorify God. In other words, God does not want a Jewish assembly and a Gentile assembly. He wants a unified assembly of both Jews and Gentiles gathering together, lifting their voices together as one to bring glory to God. The goal is not simply the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles. The goal is bringing God glory. God is not glorified when we divide.
- B. Remember Jesus's prayer in **John 17:20-21**. His prayer was our unity because that would testify that He is from God. But when we pursue our own glory and will, scandalizing our brethren, hindering them, causing

them to stumble, despising them, passing judgment on them, we diminish the testimony of Jesus's greatness. We must conduct ourselves in ways that allow us to gather together and bring God the glory together.

- C. This principle is perhaps the most far-reaching one in the text. How much division throughout the years could have been avoided if Christians had willingly sacrificed what they believed were their rights in order to put the glory of God first? Certainly, we don't want **Romans 14** to be used to take churches hostage to the whims of the biblically illiterate. But at the same time, what we should most want is to be able to bring God the glory together in one voice. Unity brings God the glory. And while we face 500 years of increasing division and we may be unable to bring all the factions that claim to be Christian together into one body, surely we can at least work to make sure the body that is here and now in this place pursues unity, that each and every member so loves each other that we will put God's glory ahead of our rights and desires. May we always pursue the ability to come together in unity to bring God the glory as with one voice.

Conclusion:

Look around you. These people are God's workmanship. This group is God's temple. How awful would we think it was if someone destroyed a Rembrandt or a Michelangelo? How horrified would we be if someone ruined a da Vinci or a van Gogh? How much more horrified should we be at the prospect of destroying God's workmanship? How much more horrified should we be at the prospect of destroying the masterpieces that God valued so highly He sent His Son to die for them? And how much more horrified should we be if we were the ones that took the hammer and chisel to God's work and destroyed it? Let us walk in love with each other, pursuing such harmony and unity that we can forever come together in one voice, glorifying God. Let us live and work together remembering that we are living with and working with God's workmanship.