

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver Street
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001
www.fcfonline.org

WHY WE SHOULD NOT JUDGE OTHERS

Romans 14:5-12

By

Steven J. Cole

September 23, 2012

© Steven J. Cole, 2012

To access previous sermons or to subscribe to weekly sermons via email go to Sermons tab: www.fcfonline.org

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture
Quotations are from the New American
Standard Bible, Updated Edition
© The Lockman Foundation

September 23, 2012
Romans, Lesson 93

Why We Should Not Judge Others Romans 14:5-12

Years ago, when ice cream was a bit cheaper than now, a 10-year-old boy approached the counter of a soda shop and asked the waitress, "What does an ice cream sundae cost?"

"Fifty cents," she answered.

The boy reached deep into his pockets and pulled out an assortment of change, counting it carefully as the waitress grew impatient. In her mind, she had "bigger" customers to wait on.

"Well, how much would just *plain* ice cream be?" the boy asked.

With noticeable irritation, the waitress answered, "Thirty-five cents."

Again the boy slowly counted his money. "Then may I have some plain ice cream in a dish, please?" He gave the waitress the correct amount and she brought him the ice cream.

Later, the waitress returned to clear the boy's dish and when she picked it up, she felt a lump in her throat. There on the counter the boy had left two nickels and five pennies. She realized that he had had enough money for the sundae, but sacrificed it so that he could leave her a tip (adapted from *A Lifetime of Success* [Revell], by Pat Williams).

That story shows that we often treat people wrongly because we judged them wrongly. We need to treat all people with respect and kindness, because we don't know all the facts. Especially, we don't know what's in their hearts. We don't know their motives.

As we saw last time, the apostle Paul was very concerned that the believers in Rome learned to accept and not judge one another. He spends more time on this in the application part of Romans than on any other subject. After mentioning the issue of eating or not eating meat, Paul brings up a second matter where believers in Rome wrongly were judging one another: observing certain days as holy (14:5). Then, mentioning both issues, Paul deals with the mo-

tives behind those who do or do not do these non-essential things. He assumes that they are doing or not doing them “for the Lord” (14:6). Then he explains that all believers are under the lordship of Jesus Christ (14:7-9). As Lord of all, He also will be the Judge of all, to whom each of us will give an account (14:10-12). Thus, we are wrong to judge our brothers and sisters.

So that we’re clear, I repeat what I said last week, that Paul is not condemning all judgment. Rather, he is dealing with the subject of judging others on non-essential matters where the Bible gives no commands. Paul corrected the Corinthians because they did not judge a sinning man in the church (1 Cor. 5). And Paul was not tolerant of the damnable doctrinal error of the Judaizers (Gal. 1:6-9; see, also, Rom. 16:17-18).

So on moral issues where the Bible gives clear commands or on essential doctrinal truth, we would be wrong *not* to judge others. But there are many other secondary areas where we must be gracious and tolerant with those who differ with us. We are not to judge them or treat them with contempt. In our text, Paul is saying, Since Jesus is Lord and we all will give an account to Him, we must not judge other believers on non-essential matters where the Bible gives no commands.

Note four things:

1. There are non-essential matters where the Bible gives no specific commands.

Paul brings up (14:5) the matter of one person regarding one day above another, whereas another regards every day alike. Then he adds, “Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.” Paul never would have said such a thing if he had been talking about the clear moral commands or essential doctrines of Scripture. Can you imagine him saying, “One person thinks that to have sexual relations outside of marriage is a sin, whereas others don’t have a problem with that; each person must be fully convinced in his own mind”? Or do you think he would have said, “Some say that we are justified by grace through faith alone, whereas others say that we must add our good works; each person must be fully convinced in his own mind”? Hardly!

Rather, Paul is dealing here with non-essential matters where the Bible does not give specific commands or clear teaching. These matters may have an effect on how you live your Christian life. Paul calls those who abstain from eating foods “weak in faith” (14:1) and he would put those who observe certain days as holy in the same camp. Obviously, weaker believers need to grow stronger in their understanding and practice. But these non-essential areas do not affect one’s salvation. Both the weaker and the stronger believers have been accepted by God (14:3) on the basis of faith in Christ. Both are servants of the Lord (14:4). And both are seeking to please the Lord (14:6). But they hold to different views on these secondary matters.

There are some pastors and commentators whom I greatly respect, but with whom I differ on their understanding of verse 5. They argue that Paul was referring to some of the Jewish festivals, but that he could not possibly have been referring to keeping Sunday holy as the Christian Sabbath because that is a part of God’s moral law, the Ten Commandments. Since God’s moral law is never abrogated, Paul could not have been referring here (or in Gal. 4:10 or Col. 2:16) to observing Sunday as the Christian Sabbath. They also argue that the Sabbath was a creation ordinance, stemming from God’s resting on the seventh day. Thus it applies to us today.

But I find these arguments unconvincing for several reasons. First, regarding the Sabbath being a creation ordinance, there is no commandment or example of anyone before Moses’ time keeping the seventh day holy to the Lord. God commanded Abraham regarding circumcision, but He never mentioned keeping the Sabbath. Although it is mentioned in Exodus 16 (before the Ten Commandments, Exod. 20:8-11), the Sabbath was unique to Israel as God’s covenant people.

With regard to the Ten Commandments being God’s moral law, the Jews would have viewed *all* of the commandments in the Mosaic Law as being morally binding. They would not have divided the law into moral, civil, and ceremonial categories, as many scholars do (I formerly did so, also). For the Jew, the law was a whole. To reject any of it would have been unthinkable. Also, commands that we might label as “moral” are often mixed together with other

laws that we might view as “ceremonial” (e.g., Lev. 18:19 & Ezek. 18:6 in context). But the Old Testament does not label any laws according to various categories. So if we’re under the “moral law,” then we’re under the entire law. You can’t break it up into pieces.

But Paul is clear that we are not under the Mosaic Law as a system of relating to God (Rom. 6:14; 7:1-6; 2 Cor. 3:6-18; Gal. 2:19; 3:10; cf. also, Heb. 8:6-13). If the Sabbath commandment were still in effect, it is incredible that in writing to Gentile believers, who did not understand the Mosaic law, Paul would say (Col. 2:16), “No one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day.” Surely he would have put in an explanatory note, so that the Gentile Christians would not be confused. And if the Sabbath law was still binding, how could Paul have said what he says in Romans 14:5 without some note of clarification? In light of the strong emphasis on the Sabbath in the Old Testament, why is there not a single command in the New Testament to Gentile churches to observe Sunday as the Christian Sabbath?

Also, I have observed that when Christians emphasize keeping Sunday as the Christian Sabbath, they easily fall into the same kind of legalism that plagued the Jews with regard to the Sabbath. By Jesus’ time, the Jews had devised all sorts of ridiculous rules about what you could and could not do on the Sabbath. Jesus often deliberately violated their rules to show them their errors and to teach that He is the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). I have read well-meaning books that argue that Christians should observe Sunday as the Sabbath, but invariably they get into lists of what is permissible on Sundays: To think or talk about anything other than spiritual subjects is to violate the Sabbath. To stop by the store for a gallon of milk on your way home from church is to violate the Sabbath. Pretty soon, we rival the Pharisees!

Having said that, I must point out that the Lord Jesus appeared to the disciples on the first *Sunday* when He arose and on the following *Sunday*. The early Christians met on the first day of the week (Sunday; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2), arguably to testify to Christ’s resurrection. The apostle John refers to “the Lord’s day” (Rev. 1:10), which everyone acknowledges to be Sunday. The au-

thor of Hebrews (10:25) exhorts us not to forsake assembling together, as is the habit of some.

Thus there is the *principle* that we should regularly gather on Sunday, the Lord's day, for worship, teaching, the Lord's Supper, fellowship, and prayer (Acts 2:42). It's also profitable to use the Lord's day to seek and serve Him in ways that the other busy six days of the week do not allow. Set aside your normal work and chores and spend more time in the Word, in prayer, and in reading good Christian books. Visit shut-ins, have other believers over for a meal and fellowship. Do things to refresh your soul with the Lord. (For more on this, see my sermon, "God's Day of Rest," from Gen. 2:1-3, on the church web site.)

But Paul allows for a measure of freedom on this matter. The key thing, he says (14:5), is, "Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind." This means that you shouldn't just do what you do by habit or because everyone else does it. Rather, take the time and effort to study the Scriptures and to think it through biblically. Do what you do because you believe that it glorifies God, it's not sinful, and you're applying biblical principles to this non-essential issue as best as you can.

It's important that you not violate your conscience, because to do so is not to act in faith, which is sin (14:22-23). As you grow in your knowledge of the Word, your conscience becomes more informed. You will see that keeping or not keeping certain days is not the issue; rather glorifying God in all that you do is the issue (1 Cor. 10:31). But on these non-essential matters, don't judge your brother; judge yourself. Obey God as you understand His Word, seeking Him for more understanding.

2. In these non-essential matters, your motive is crucial: Do what you do for the Lord.

Romans 14:6: "He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God."

The recurring phrases here are, "for the Lord" and "gives thanks to God." As believers, we belong to the Lord and we live for the Lord. Our aim is always to please Him. If you observe a

special day as holy, such as Christmas or Easter (neither of which are commanded in the Bible), you should do it as unto the Lord. If you don't feel compelled to observe special days, you still should live every day as unto the Lord. The same applies to feasting or fasting: you should do it as unto the Lord with a thankful heart. It's your motive that matters. Unlike the pagans, who do not honor God or give Him thanks (Rom. 1:21), believers live for God's glory with thankful hearts.

When Paul says (14:7-8), "For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's," he means that all of life, including dying, is to be lived with a God-ward focus. When you get saved, Jesus becomes your Lord. You recognize that He is the sovereign over your circumstances. Nothing happens to you apart from His kind and loving will. Nothing, whether "tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword," can separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:35). So, rather than living to please ourselves, as we did before we met Christ, now we live every day for Him (2 Cor. 5:9, 15). Since He has all of our days numbered (Ps. 139:16), when it comes time to die, we die for Him.

By the way, this means that suicide is never right. God is the sovereign over life and death. As believers, we should want to glorify Him in our dying as much as we have glorified Him by our lives. The Puritans used to talk about "dying well." They did not have modern medications to dull their pain, but they wanted to glorify God in their suffering and with their dying breath.

To come back to the principle of our motives in these non-essential matters, here's how it applies. You ask, "Can I go to a movie that contains profanity, sexual immorality, or violence?" The answer is, "Can you go to that movie 'for the Lord'? Will going there help your relationship with Him? Will it glorify Him?" You ask, "What kind of music should I listen to?" "Which TV programs and how much TV should I watch?" "How should I spend Sundays?" "Which Bible-believing church should I join?" "How should I spend my free time?" Apply this principle to any non-essential matter where the Bible does not give a direct command: Can I do it for the Lord and His glory? Your motive is crucial.

3. Jesus is the Lord of all; thus we all will give an account of our lives to Him.

Romans 14:9: "For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." Christ, of course, was the Lord of all before He came to this earth. He is the eternal Son of God. But in coming to this earth as a man, Jesus subjected Himself to death on our behalf. When God raised Him from the dead, He conquered death once and for all. God highly exalted Him to His right hand and put all things in subjection to Him as the crucified and risen Lord (Eph. 1:19-23; Phil. 2:5-11). By virtue of His death and resurrection, He is "Lord both of the dead and of the living" (14:9).

This means that He is the Judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:5). As Paul told the Athenians (Acts 17:31), God "has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." Or, as Jesus Himself told the Jews (John 5:22-23), "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him." By the way, that is a strong claim of Jesus' deity. You see the same thing in our text, where Paul freely moves between "Lord" (referring to Jesus) and "God" (referring to the Father).

In Romans 14:10, Paul says (according to the best manuscripts), "For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God." In 2 Corinthians 5:10, he says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" Since God and Christ are one (John 10:30), it's the same judgment seat. We all will give an account of ourselves to God and Christ.

Perhaps you're thinking, "But I thought that there is no condemnation for Christians (Rom. 8:1). I thought that we will not come into judgment (John 5:24). How is it, then, that we all will stand before the judgment seat of God?"

Paul cites first a phrase from Isaiah 49:18, "'As I live,' says the Lord," followed by Isaiah 45:23, "Every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." Then Paul concludes

(14:12), "So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God." The point is, God is the sovereign Lord of all and hence He has the right to judge all, including believers. For believers, it will not be a determination of heaven or hell, but rather a judgment of our works. Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15:

Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

I'm not sure what it means to "suffer loss" at the judgment, but I don't want it to happen to me! It must involve a moment of deep regret and shame over what I have done or not done with the spiritual gifts that God has entrusted to me. But, clearly, I should live in light of that certain day ahead when I will stand before the Lord to give an account. Have I lived in light of His purposes? Have I used my time, talents, and treasure to seek first His kingdom and righteousness (Matt. 6:33)? Will I be able to say, with Paul (2 Tim. 4:7), "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith"?

4. Since God is the Judge of all, we must not judge other believers or regard them with contempt.

Romans 14:10, "But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God." Again, this does not refer to judging our brothers over matters of sin or serious doctrinal error. We must judge one another on these matters. In this context, it refers to not judging one another over non-essential matters where the Bible gives no commands. This calls for discernment. The fact that I will stand before the judgment seat of God gives me the courage to confront a believer who is in sin or who is promoting serious error when by nature I would not do anything (Ezek. 33:1-10). It gives me the courage to teach difficult truths from God's Word that I would be prone to skip.

But the fact that I will stand before God's judgment seat should also cause me to refrain from speaking against a brother who may be doing or saying something that is not clearly commanded in Scripture. If I think that what he is doing or saying is spiritually immature or will cause him or others spiritual harm, I may need gently to come alongside and offer correction at the proper time. But if it's a neutral matter, then I should assume that he is doing it for the Lord and let the Lord be his judge.

Conclusion

A traveler, between flights at an airport, bought a small package of cookies. Then she sat down and began reading a newspaper. Gradually, she became aware of a rustling noise. From behind her paper, she was flabbergasted to see a neatly dressed man helping himself to her cookies. Not wanting to make a scene, she leaned over and took a cookie herself.

A minute or two passed, and then came more rustling. He was helping himself to another cookie! By this time, they had come to the end of the package, but she was so angry she didn't dare allow herself to say anything. Then, as if to add insult to injury, the man broke the remaining cookie in two, pushed half across to her, ate the other half, and left.

Still fuming some time later when her flight was announced, the woman opened her handbag to get her ticket. To her shock and embarrassment, there she found her pack of unopened cookies! Sometimes, we judge others very wrongly! (*Leadership*, Spring, 1991, p. 45.)

Perhaps our text can best be summed up by saying, "Don't judge your brother on non-essential matters, because God will judge him. Judge yourself, because God will judge you" (paraphrased from F. Godet, *Commentary on Romans* [Kregel], p. 459).

Application Questions

1. How can we determine whether a non-essential matter is spiritually harmful or not? When should we talk with a brother or sister about such matters?
2. Where are you at on the matter of Sunday being the Christian Sabbath? Could you use Sundays more profitably than you do?
3. What are some areas where you are prone to judge other Christians or to look on them with contempt?
4. Do you live in light of standing before Christ for judgment of your works? How can we make this more central in our daily lives?

Copyright, Steven J. Cole, 2012, All Rights Reserved.