

40. Learning How to Accept Others

In our last topic, we saw that we are to help our physical and spiritual children learn to accept others. We saw that we are to accept both those who are strong in the faith and those who are weak in the faith because God has accepted them. Instead of judging other Christians, we are to make it our goal to live to please the Lord by the way that we live. In our topic today, we are going to focus on how we accept others.

Romans 14:13 says, “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in *our* brother's way.” This verse both concludes the previous verses and also introduces the following verses. It concludes the previous verses because it reminds us not to judge one another anymore. The fact that Paul used the word “anymore” means that the Christians had been judging one another. Here, we see that we are to stop condemning other Christians. As Romans 14:4 says, “Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.” Each person is responsible to give an account to God instead of to you or to me.

Instead of judging one another, we see that we are to make it our goal to avoid putting a stumbling block or to do something that would cause another Christian to fall. This introduces the following verses. It is important to understand what a stumbling block means. 1 Corinthians 8:9 says, “But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.” As Christians, we have liberty because we are no longer under the law. However, we are to be concerned about other Christians. We are to realize that if we do certain things that those things could cause a weaker Christian to stumble. Instead of causing others to stumble, Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Here, we see that we are to use our liberty to serve one another through love by choosing to avoid those things that would cause a weaker Christian to stumble.

Romans 14:14-15 says, “I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that *there is* nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean. Yet if your brother is grieved because of *your* food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.” Peter had to be convinced by the Lord to stop calling certain things unclean. Acts 10:14-15 says, “But Peter said, ‘Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.’ And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’” God had to help Peter understand that God can cleanse anything. From the viewpoint of Peter, the wild animals that God had shown him were unclean.

For the Jews, it was considered a sin to eat the meat of an unclean animal. As a result, if any Christian considers a certain thing to be unclean or a sin, that Christian should avoid eating or doing that thing. As Christians, the entire Bible can be summarized by three things. In Luke 10:27, we see that we are to love God with our whole heart, soul, strength and mind. In that same verse, we are told to love our neighbor as ourselves. Then, in John 13:34-35, we are to love one another as Christ has loved us. As Christians, we know that once we become Christians, we are no

longer under the law and so nothing is unclean in itself. However, if we are taking root and walking in the love of Christ, we will show the liberty that we have in Christ by serving the weaker brother in love. As a result, we may choose to avoid certain things that might cause a brother or sister to stumble.

In these verses, we see that if we grieve a weaker Christian and cause him to stumble because we eat certain foods, we are not walking in love. Paul encourages us not to destroy a weaker Christian for whom Christ has died by insisting that it is all right for us to eat that food or to do any other thing that would cause our brother or sister in Christ to stumble and fall back into a life of sin. Instead, 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” We are to make it our goal to bring glory to God by all that we do. If something we do would cause another Christian to stumble, then we are to show love by not doing that thing.

That is why Romans 14:16-20 says, “Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things *is* acceptable to God and approved by men. Therefore let us pursue the things *which make* for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed *are* pure, but *it is* evil for the man who eats with offense.” There are various things that it might be all right for us to do because they are not sin. However, if they will cause weaker Christians to stumble, we should avoid doing those things for the sake of the weaker Christians. That way, the things that we do will not be spoken of as evil. Instead, we will see what is best for the whole kingdom of God.

Then, we are given three things that are always beneficial to the kingdom of God and possible for us to do through the power of the Holy Spirit. First, we see that it is possible for us to practice righteousness when we are walking in the power of the Holy Spirit. Second, we see that we will have an inner peace when we are yielding to the Holy Spirit. Third, we see that we will be filled with joy when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. In fact, our lives will bear the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23 when we are walking in the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23 says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” Our lives will bear the fruit of the Spirit when we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we serve Christ by walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, we see that this is acceptable to God. We also see that it will be well-pleasing in the sight of other people. As a result, we are encouraged to pursue two things. The word that is translated “pursue” means to *seek eagerly*. First, we are encouraged to pursue peace. James 3:18 says, “Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” As we practice righteousness, that makes it possible for us to show others how to experience the peace of God in their lives. Second, we are encouraged to pursue the things that will build up others. Some things do not build up or edify others. 1 Corinthians 10:23 says, “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.” In contrast, 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.” We are to follow the example of the

Thessalonians and do the things that will build up others.

We are also reminded that we are not to destroy the work of God for the sake of food. This is a part of learning to serve one another in love. God has worked in the life of every Christian whether that Christian is strong or weak. As a result, we are not to halt the work of the Lord that is happening in the life of the weaker Christian by causing that Christian to stumble. That is why we want to make sure that each thing that we do on this earth has a pure motive. We want to show our children the importance of avoiding those things that would cause a weaker Christian to stumble just to satisfy their own desires and please self.

Romans 14:21-23 goes on to say, “*It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.*” Here, we see that if we are doing all that we do to bring glory to God, we will avoid certain things. We will avoid things that cause a brother to stumble. To cause a person to stumble means to put an obstacle in their path. We will avoid things that cause a brother to be offended. To offend a person means *to cause him or her to distrust and fall away*. We will avoid things that will cause a brother to become weak. We cause a person to become weak when we cause that person to become powerless or without strength.

When we are strong Christians, it means that we may have strong convictions for our own lives. However, those are personal convictions that are between us and the Lord. Those make it possible for us to have a clear conscience before God in our own lives. However, that does not mean that we are to try and impose our convictions on other Christians. We also want to help each weaker Christian develop his or her convictions before the Lord. We want to help them learn how to let the Holy Spirit lead them through their conscience regarding the things that they choose to do and the things that they choose to avoid. Isaiah 26:3 says, “You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose mind is stayed on You*, because he trusts in You.” Our goal is to help every Christian learn to experience inner peace because they have learned to trust the Lord to guide them instead of looking to other people to guide them.

If we try and impose our personal convictions on another person, they will not hold those convictions because of faith. Instead, they will hold those convictions to please us. That will not help them develop spiritual maturity. As a result, we want to help both our physical and our spiritual children learn to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that they learn to walk by faith. 2 Corinthians 5:7 says, “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” A mature Christian learns to walk by faith. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to accept others so all Christians can learn to walk by faith.