



# Finer Grounds Bible Study

## Romans

### Lesson 22: Romans 14:13-23

As we approach this section it is important to remember that Paul is continuing the train of thought he began in 14:1. Throughout all of chapter 14 he is discussing matters of opinion, and how we should interact as brethren when there is disagreement. In the first 12 verses of chapter 14 he focused primarily on the way we think about each other: we are not to judge or despise those who have different opinions from our own. Beginning in verse 13, in typical Paul style, he's going to describe what this should actually look like in our lives.

While the idea of not judging each other based on opinions is an important concept, to really bring God's expectation home Paul uses the specific example of eating meat and celebrating holidays. He will continue to focus on the idea of eating meat throughout the end of the chapter. Keeping in mind the struggles between the Jews and the Gentiles, and the constant pressure of the Judaizers, it is logical that this would have been a significant issue for the church in Rome. While we may not struggle with this exact issue in the 21<sup>st</sup> century American church it is important to consistently ask how this principle will apply to us today.

**What are some areas of opinion that we are divided over today?**

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**How can we better promote unity in regard to this issue?**

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Keep these areas in mind as you study the principle Paul is teaching in this section.

**Before You Begin read Romans 14:13-23 and mark any key words or phrases.**

#### Read Romans 14:13

Here Paul is making it clear that this was a significant issue in the first century church. This isn't a hypothetical situation, but rather an issue that was causing significant division in the Lord's church. These brethren have been judging and despising each other over matters of conscience (opinion.)

In this verse Paul uses two very different words to describe what has been happening: stumbling block and hindrance. The word, "stumbling block," is very effectively translated, and carries the idea of a stone left in the middle of a road that someone could trip over. In this situation harm can be done to another simply because of a lack of attentiveness. "Hindrance," however, is a slightly stronger word, and carries more of a connotation of baiting a trap. This almost gives the impression that there were some who were intentionally flaunting their differences to hurt and discourage each other. He also says to, "decide," never to be a stumbling block or hindrance. This is a conscious, intentional effort to be sensitive to our brethren's needs.

Social media can be a wonderful platform to stay in touch with friends and family all over the world, and to encourage and strengthen each other. However, it is also a platform in which many push stumbling blocks and hindrances.



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**How can we be sure that our social media accounts are a source of edification and exhortation rather than stumbling or hindrances?**

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**What is the answer Paul provides at the end of verse 13 for overcoming this division?**

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## Read Romans 14:14

Sometimes we hesitate to put things bluntly because we don't want to offend people. Paul had no such hesitation. In regard to the matter of eating meat Paul plainly stated that nothing you can eat is unclean. (This sounds remarkably similar to what Jesus taught in Matthew 15:11, and he certainly offended people.) Was this likely to upset the Jews? Absolutely. Yet Paul taught the whole truth in love.

That being said, Paul did not stop there. He continued on to say that if you believe something is unclean, then for you it is. He didn't tell the weaker brethren who believed eating meat was wrong to suck it up and deal with it, he told them not to violate their conscience. I believe this is a lesson we still need to learn today. In matters of opinion so often I have seen the "stronger" brethren tease or pressure the "weaker" brethren to give in, because in their mind it doesn't matter. Sisters, shame on us. We should never encourage someone to violate their conscience, but rather we should support and encourage each other to stand on our convictions, even if that conviction is a different opinion than our own.

## Read Romans 14:15-16

Why is all of this important? Because it is about so much more than what we eat. A matter of opinion can become a salvation issue if someone is put in a situation where they feel they must violate their conscience. Paul's wording here is very strong; we can destroy each other over matters of opinion. If we treat each other in this way, we are no longer walking in love, which also defies everything we were told to do in chapter 12. Yet the consequences don't stop there. If this is the way, we treat each other then what we consider to be good (our convictions/faith) will be considered evil. The word for "evil" here has a connotation of blasphemy. We can taint the way we are viewed, and the way those in our sphere of influence view the church, by grieving our brethren.

**Are we guilty of putting our preferences ahead of our brethren's emotional/spiritual well-being?**

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**How do we balance standing for Truth with not being a stumbling block?**

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## Read Romans 14:17-19

**What does Paul mean when he states, "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking?"**

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Since chapter 12 Paul has been emphasizing righteous living, and he comes back to that idea here in verse 17. Righteousness must be at the



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heart of all we do as Christians, and that certainly includes the way we interact with each other regarding matters of opinion. Verse 18 is particularly powerful, “Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.” The word for “acceptable” means “well-pleasing”, and “approved” means “proven” (same word as in 2 Timothy 2:15). These are powerful words demonstrating that living in this way will positively impact our relationship with both God and man. (This also means that both will be negatively affected if we do not serve Christ in this way.”

**Keeping in mind the context, what would it mean to “serve Christ?”**

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**How does Paul tell us to fulfill this command? What should this look like?**

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## Read Romans 14:20-21

This concept is important enough that Paul pretty much restated what he had just said in verses 14-19. It also sounds very similar to what he says in 1 Corinthians 6:12. Simply restated: just because you can doesn’t mean you should. Just as Thumper’s Mama told him, “If you can’t say nuth’n nice, don’t say nuth’n at all.” If our action could cause our brethren to stumble, we shouldn’t do it.

While earlier in verse 15 Paul discussed the idea of “grieving” our brethren, here the matter at hand is much more serious. When it was simply making our brethren sad, he said, “hey, walk in love.” Now the issue is that this difference of opinion is actually causing our brethren to

stumble in their faith. As Wayne Burger from the Bear Valley Bible Institute stated, “Paul is talking about when people stumble, not grumble.”

This is an important balance to be mindful of. We have all met those people who are just cantankerous. Nothing makes them happy, and they can always find something to complain about. Paul isn’t telling us that we can never do anything that upsets anyone, this is why in 12:18 he specifically states, “so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” I have seen women step out of their role and absolutely dominate congregations because it just wasn’t worth dealing with their adult tantrum when they didn’t get their way. Paul is in no way condoning such an attitude here. We must keep in mind that he’s dealing with the idea of those who are newer (weaker) in the faith struggling to differentiate between doctrine and opinion. Paul is teaching that if we can forego a Christian liberty to help keep a brother or sister from stumbling in their faith, then we should do so without hesitation.

One common matter of opinion that is hotly debated is the idea of homeschool or public school. While I certainly believe that each family should prayerfully make the decision that is right for them, I also believe that this issue has at times become a stumbling block. When we shun or shame families who have chosen a different path than our own, that’s a problem. Sisters, it is not good for the sake of worldly education to destroy the work of God.

Another example is whether or not a woman works outside the home. Once again, each family should make the decision that best suits their needs, and we should not shame or condemn a family who has made a different choice than our own. As sisters in Christ, it is our God-given expectation to not treat each other in a way that will cause stumbling or discouragement, and we



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need to keep this in mind as we interact with each other regarding these sensitive issues.

**What are some specific ways we can be mindful of not causing each other to stumble when discussing sensitive issues?**

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## Read Romans 14:22-23

As we mentioned in the last lesson it is important to keep in mind that “faith” is used in various ways in Scripture. While at times it refers to *the* faith, which would be doctrine, at other times it simply refers to our personal convictions. In keeping with the context “faith” here is personal conviction or opinions (especially considering that to interpret this as “doctrine” would be to violate the countless commands to teach we have in the New Testament.) Paul is in no way telling us to keep our doctrine, the good news about Jesus to ourselves. What he *is* saying is that if we have divisive opinions, we don’t need to be trumpeting those to anyone who will listen (even on social media).

Verse 23 sums up the entire section: if we violate our conscience, we sin. One of my particular convictions is that many forms of dancing are sinful, as they generate lust and frequently call for inappropriate physical contact between unmarried men and women. With that being said, I have absolutely no problem with a married couple dancing in the privacy of their own home. In theory. However, it has been so ingrained in me that it’s inappropriate that for most of my married life (20 years) I wouldn’t dance with my husband. My poor husband was raised differently and absolutely loves to dance, yet he has never pushed the issue. Why? Because he understands and respects the fact that it would be unacceptable for me to violate my conscience,

even though we both agree there would be nothing sinful in the action itself. Because whatever does not proceed from faith, from conviction, is sin.

Even our opinions should have some basis in Scripture. Remember from our last lesson that both those who ate and those who abstained did so out of a desire to be pleasing to God. If we have any action/conviction that we are attempting to leave God out of, that is unacceptable. While as we have seen there are areas that are grey, areas of opinion where God’s word does not clearly give us direction, our decisions should always be based on biblical principles to the best of our ability.

**What does verse 22 mean when it states, “Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves,” and how does this fit into the context of what Paul is teaching?**

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**What are your personal convictions? Do they come from faith, or are they based in something else?**

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**Paul has spent 23 verses telling us not to divide over matters of opinion, and not to judge and condemn each other based on opinion. Ask yourself what do you get more upset over: matters of opinion or matters of doctrine?**

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Take some time to examine your personal convictions and what Scripture says about those issues.

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