

The Footsteps of Faith Series

Lesson #22 “Pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another”

Romans 14:1-23

Scripture: Romans 14:19 “So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.”

Introduction:

The Church just received its new edition of the “Churches of Christ in the United States”. This is a wonderful book that we keep in our library. Anytime you want to go on vacation you can look up where you will be on the Lord’s day and see a listing of all the churches in that area.

Interestingly enough with each of the churches in this book there is some kind of designation to explain their fundamental beliefs.

- * Like ME for mutual edification....these churches don’t believe in having a paid preacher
- * Then there are those who don’t support institutions like orphan homes or preaching schools.
- * Then there is those who think having fellowship halls is wrong.
- * Some think bible classes are wrong
- * Some think only one cup should be used on the Lord’s table
- * Some support missionaries and some don’t
- * The list goes on forever.

*** I never stopped to think of how much division there really is in our brotherhood.**

When I was going to Sunset School of Preaching one of the local Churches of Christ had what they thought was serious scriptural problems with Sunset and they took it upon themselves to become the brotherhood watch dog and write little news papers and do mass mailings. They called it “Contending for the faith”.

Being concerned about truth myself I read earnestly.....They even had a meeting at there church building and invited us so a bunch of us loaded up and went. After a quite long presentation I quickly saw that the speaker didn’t have any deep insights at all but was rather promoting brotherhood legalistic philosophy. After that I started referring to that group as “Contentious for the Faith”.

F. LaGard Smith wrote a book on the subject called “Who is my Brother”. It is a really good read and I would recommend anybody to read through it. The book basically gets down to asking the question about where we should draw the line in the sand as far as fellowship or should we at all.

Transitional Statement:

God cares about the way we as Christians relate to one another and God calls us to pursue peace and to build each other up, not to destroy godly work with petty differences.

I. Accept the weak in faith

Romans 14:1a

“Now accept the one who is weak in faith,”

A. Let's think about the *“weak in faith”*

1. Why are some Christians weak in faith?

a. There are all kind of factors.

-Maybe some haven't been Christians very long

-Maybe some have never applied themselves in the matters of Righteousness.

-Maybe some are in a spiritual slump, waning under the pressures of life.

b. But ultimately, weakness of faith comes from only one place.

-The lack of God's word in our lives

-Romans 10:17 *“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”*

*So God's word is the avenue by which trust and conviction in God comes.

c. The weak, struggle many times just to get by in the valleys of despair.

2. On the other hand, a strong faith, is absorbed in God's word and through His word a strong faith has mountain top experiences

a. The strong have a deep desire for God, a trust and devotion of heart

B. Here God tells the strong in faith to accept the weaker in faith.

1. Accept, means to receive or take to ones self

a. And also includes the element of leading

2. So the strong are suppose to help the weak become stronger in faith, leading them through God's word from their valleys of despair to spiritual mountain tops.

a. Not reject them because they are not at the same place in their faith

b. Not running off and leaving them to fend for themselves.

c. Not accepting them as they are

d. Certainly not compromising the truth

e. But, being receptive and patient with them.

f. Willing to help the weak experience what God has given the strong

C. So the strong is suppose to extend a helping hand to the weak.

II. Then we need to focus on what is really important.

Romans 14:1b “...but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.”

A. First, our acceptance of a weaker Christian must be from the right motives.

1. Not because we have to !

a. Not to prove we are right....and have figured it all out.

-And we are going to build a coalition around us

b. Not with from some lofty high perch we have placed ourselves on

c. But because we want to....knowing it pleases God.

2. Time and time again I have learned so much from people weaker in faith.

a. I think the thought here is that we should value their thoughts and ideas.

b. Listen to them carefully, learning where we can

c. And help where we can

B. But the word “opinion” here stands out greatly and sets the tone for the rest of the discussion of Romans chapter 14.

1. Opinion has to do with those things that are debatable and open for discussion.

C. Now,..... within God’s word there are some things that we know for sure and are not debatable.

1. Like Baptism, if your not washed in the blood of Jesus through the waters of baptism according to scripture your not saved. Acts 22:16

2. Like God’s forgiveness. It requires confession....1 John 1:9

3. Like love, we can’t move through this world in hate and proclaim godliness in our live.

4. Like repentance, we can’t say I’m sorry and continue to do the same things.

5. And we can’t hold, as truth, anything which God has not set forth.

* All of these things exist within a circle of truth that God sets forth so clearly that they don’t need any debate or discussion.

D. But then, there are things that are a matter of debate

1. Is it ok to have a fellowship hall or not.

2. Whether to have song books or not

3. Can we have a church building or not.

4. Should we have one cup on the Lord’s supper

5. Can we have bible class

6. Should we have Sunday night services.

E. Certainly the struggle here is understanding the difference between what is for sure and what is debatable.

1. Here again the only way we have any clue is through God's word.
2. I think in the past, and in the present, the church has been too quick to draw lines in the sand
 - a. But, in other instances too slow.
3. You see, God does not want us to put our foot down....where He has not put His foot down.
 - a. i.e., He doesn't want us to add to or take away from what he says.

1 Corinthians 4:6 "*...learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.*"

Note: The whole context being unity, which is the way we deal with each other.

F. So, what God is saying is don't get hung up on the debatable things.

1. That's not to say we can't discuss them
2. And we should certainly apply ourselves in the understanding of what is and isn't debatable.
3. Focus in on what is really important !

III. Then the kind of relationship that is suppose to exist between the weak and the strong.

Romans 14:2-3

2 One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. 3 The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.

A. Here we have two Christians.

1. Think of one as a BBQ guy and the other is a Salad guy
 - a. The BBQ guy is a meat eater, because he understands rightfully that God has made all things clean for him to eat....See the instructions to Noah when he gets off the ark.
 - b. Then you've got the Salad guy (weaker brother) doesn't understand God's word so he eats only Salad (Vegetables).
 - c. So we have two guys convinced about what they believe

- B. The instruction here begins with the Stronger in Faith (BBQ guy) and it say to him don't look at the salad guy and think of him as no account.
 - 1. Don't be tempted to think that your better than him and that he doesn't matter.
 - 2. Realize his struggle and be patient.
- C. Then, the instruction turns to the Weaker in Faith (Salad guy) and says don't judge, that is (try, condemn and punish) the BBQ guy
 - 1. Don't think that you've got the keys to all heavenly understanding.
- D. I think the underlying point is both parities should let love and patients lead the way, as they look to God's word for the answers.

IV. Then the reminder that God is the judge of His own servants.

Romans 14:4

4 Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

A. "Who are you to judge the servant of another" Rhetorical Question

- 1. We don't have the right to judge another persons servant
 - a. They don't belong to us.
- 2. And we certainly don't have the ability

B. I'm so glad that God reminds us that He is the Judge

C. Maybe it is a legalistic tendency to think we have to get every little thing perfect.

D. But Jesus reminds us that God is in control and that He is the Judge

1. Matthew 13:24-30 (Parable of the Tares)

"Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, " The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 "But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. 26 "But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. 27 "The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' 28 "And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' 29 "But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 'Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn."

- 2. Contrary to some popular belief we don't have to straighten every little detail out.

E. Here is a call for us to recognize the more important things and spend our time wisely accomplishing kingdom business.

1. The Scribes and Pharisees struggled with the same thing.

a. Matthew 23:24 *“You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!”*

2. Here God calls us to consider what is really important.

F. God is over all things and He is sovereign and in control Isa. 40

V. Each Christian should be fully convinced of what they believe

Romans 14:5-6

5 One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. 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.

A. Here we have one Christian holding one day as special and another Christian who thinks each day is alike.

B. You might think of one Christian observing Christmas and one who doesn't

1. Again a matter of debate.

C. But here God says that each person must be convinced in his own mind.

1. That is we must work at our understanding

a. Not just sit back and accept the status quo delivered by others

b. Never saying “that is just what we believe” with no understanding behind it.

2. You see, we must apply ourselves fully in the mental work that it takes to gain a real position.

a. That's just what the Bereans were noted for in Acts 17:11

3. And God calls us to be convinced of our findings.

4. Not just tailgating the crowd....or being a brotherhood parrot repeating the ideas of men.

D. So again we see the call to be deeply involved in God's word and convicted about what we believe.

VI. Our lives should be live for the Lord

Romans 14:7-9

7 For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; 8 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. 9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

- A. We should not be the focal point of our lives.
 - 1. Meeting our needs
 - 2. The consideration of our wants should not be first
- B. But our lives should be lived out in view of God's desires.
- C. Hence, If we live it is unto the Lord.....If we die it is unto the Lord.
- D. Did you catch "we are the Lord's"
 - 1. We are not our own.....we belong to God
 - 2. With this understanding, I can't help but to think, that many brotherhood barriers will be broken down.
- E. And, Christ is the Lord of all
 - 1. Here the Greek helps us understand that He is supreme in authority.
 - 2. And we should be thankful !

VII. Individually we will give an account before God.

Romans 14:10-12

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. 11 For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." 12 So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

- A. Here the question seems to be why do you think you have to iron out every little detail even in matters of debate.
- B. Every last one of us will stand before God Most High and give an account of our lives to Him.
 - 1. We will open the books of our lives and give all the plus and minuses to God
 - 2. And He alone will set all things straight.
- C. God tells us to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Phil 2:12

D. It could be that less debate over matters of opinion and more praise of God is what is in view here.

VIII. Therefore !

Romans 14:13-18

13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this — not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.

- A. Stop judging one another
- B. Allow our brothers room to figure out some things for themselves
- C. Don't be an obstacle / stumbling block in your brothers way.

14 I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

- A. We should be true to our conscience
- B. If we think BBQ is wrong then by all means don't eat it.
- C. We won't be a hypocrite before God.

15 For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.

- A. If we demand our rights in debatable matters.....we aren't walking in love
 - 1. Outside of God's presence
- B. And if we demanding our rights at all cost, it can destroy our fellow Christians

16 Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil;

- A. By Demanding our rights in debatable matters good will be spoken of as evil.

17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

- A. And Ultimately, these debatable matters really don't matter
 - 1. Eating and drinking are not in the spiritual realm

B. What matters is righteousness, peace and joy in Holy Spirit

18 For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.

- A. Serving Christ not hung up on matters of opinion...that's what is acceptable to God and even makes us approved of men.

IX. So then

19 So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

- A. Pursue peace.....go after it !
- B. Build each other up
- C. That's where our focus should be

20 Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense.

- A. Don't let petty debatable matters tear down the work of the Lord

21 It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.

- A. Give up your rights in debatable matters so you won't cause your brother to stumble.
- B. Give up BBQ if it makes your brother stumble.
- C. Give up the public celebration of Christmas if it causes your brother to stumble.
- D. Christ gave up His rights on the cross as a sacrifice for us who was weaker.

Conclusion:

22 The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

Let me ask you today

Are you a pursuer of peace?

Do you try to build others up?

Or do you let petty differences destroy God's work through you?