

Romans 14:1-14 Do not judge. Live for the Lord. 13th Sept 2026

Let's pray: Lord, may you lead and guide us by your Holy Spirit as we look at your word this day, in Jesus name. Amen

I was going out to dinner with a friend one night in Hobart and we were looking through the entertainment book for ideas...where we could get 25% off. I said what about this Pier One...it looks good. My friend informed me that Pier One was at the Casino, so she felt we couldn't go there. What a shame I thought when I realized it was in a lovely spot right on the water's edge. I know other Christian people who happily eat at the Casino...who is in the right here? I had been to wedding reception in a room at the Casino, I didn't say I couldn't go to that – though I hate walking past the gaming areas. And to be honest I don't really like going to the local RSL where there are gaming machines. What about buying a raffle ticket or taking part in a sweep for the Melbourne Cup? Or who is right when it comes to baptism practices – full immersion or a sprinkle? Should we go shopping on a Sunday or do yoga? There are so many different areas where Christians may have different views, one person's conscience says one thing, and another says something else. We saw this during Covid too; there were some Christians who were anti vaccines.

Today our Romans reading helps address this question about conscience...whatever we do we should do for the Lord. We should not judge our brothers and sisters, for we will all stand before the judgement seat one day. God is the one we are accountable to.

In the two previous chapters Paul has emphasized how we are to love one another, and he now gives an example of what that love looks like.

The beginning of the chapter 14 refers to the weak and the strong in faith. Some will eat only vegetables; some will eat anything. For those brought up in Jewish culture where you could only eat kosher foods and definitely no pork, it was hard to change your thinking. Remember the vision that Peter had in Acts 10, when all sorts of food were laid before him that he wouldn't normally eat, and he was told to get up kill and eat? The Lord was teaching him that nothing was unclean and that it was okay to eat with the Gentiles.

Paul goes on to talk about those who observe certain festival days and those who don't. In the Anglican Church some will acknowledge saint's days, lent, advent and so on...some churches and other denominations may not. The main thing says Paul is whatever you do – do it for the Lord – whether you eat vegetables or meat or celebrate a festival or not, do it all to honour the Lord and do not judge the Christian who may practice their beliefs differently to you.

When Paul is talking about those with weak faith, it seems he may be referring to those Jewish Christians who were holding on to traditional practices, and the law, rather than living in God's grace and freedom.

The newer Gentile Christians who didn't grow up with the same traditions may have been judging their brothers and sisters and likewise there were Jewish Christians who thought the Gentiles should adopt Jewish practices. Paul longs for the body of Christ to accept one another and not judge one another.

Over the centuries and still today Christians have always had different opinions on various practices. The reformer Martin Luther thought that drinking beer and music, song and dancing were all good. We know other reformers and protestant churches who went on to ban certain music and dancing and thought all good Christians should be tea-totallers! My mum was born to strict Methodist missionaries who would never touch a drop of alcohol. She went on to marry my Dad, an Anglican Priest, as was his Father. When she met her in-laws for the first time in England just days before the wedding, she was offered a glass of sherry and being respectful drank it and probably accepted a second, she loved to tell us how she ended up quite tipsy as she was not used to alcohol! With my father's influence, she grew to enjoy a sherry and a glass of wine.

Sadly, one denomination often judges another. Or even factions within denominations. And then there is debate over what constitutes a disputable matter, the more recent ones have been over same-sex marriage or women in ministry. I have studied with and had colleagues who don't think I or women in general should be in senior leadership roles in the Church, or preach to men. Regardless of our opinions we are to love one another. I am not going to

debate here what matters are or are not disputable, but I will be talking more about Paul's view on women as we get to the end of his letter...

While there are clearly some issues that are disputable or as John Stott says non-essential matters to the Christian faith, Paul has been laying out in his letter clearly what the indisputable, essential matters of faith are...that we are saved by grace through faith and not by works. So, while differences about what we eat or drink may not matter or what festivals we celebrate, or whether we practice baptism by immersion or not, what does matter is that we don't make or consider these things an essential part of being a Christian. It is our faith in Jesus and belief that he died and rose again for us, offering us forgiveness that we might have new and eternal life. In response we offer ourselves to him, we walk with him and follow him, our lives being transformed into his likeness.

Paul says that whatever we do we are to do for the Lord, we belong to him. We are not to live for what other people think or don't think. We are to live according to our conscience and if we have committed our lives to the Lord and have his Spirit living in us then our conscience should be in line with the Lord's...but it is ok if for someone else it is a little different. And if we or they get it wrong then the day will come when we will all be accountable to God. One day every knee will bow before the Lord.

Paul continues to encourage us with how we should love and accept one another in verses 13-14... *Therefore, let us stop passing judgement on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean.*

Let's go back to my opening example of eating at the Casino. We could say that the food there is not contaminated by the gaming machines and that if you are just going to eat there then that should be ok. And that is perfectly fine if your conscience is ok with that. But someone else may just feel very strongly that even eating there would be supporting the Casino and gambling culture. And that is certainly fine also...just don't judge one another and try to say that I am right and you are wrong, or I am holier than thou! And I would

say that if your conscience says it is ok to eat there but you are going to dinner with someone whom you know has a problem with gambling then it is probably wise to choose to eat elsewhere so that you will not be placing a stumbling block in their path.

While there is not a commandment that says *Thou shalt not gamble*, the bible does tell us to be good stewards with our money and gambling is probably not helpful. We also know that it is a big contributing factor to debt and poverty and relationship difficulties. While some things may be permissible, we need to ask if they are beneficial or constructive. A glass or two of alcohol is fine, but don't drink to excess, and don't let it be a stumbling block to someone else.

Paul continues with his exhortation for us to show love, in verses 15 – 19 he says this...*If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love... For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating or drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit...Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.* That is let us build one another up in the faith with love.

Remember who it is you live for. Keep our eyes on Jesus and remember that it is by grace that we are saved. Accept, don't condemn fellow Christians, because God has accepted them. As Jesus said in our gospel reading from Matthew 7, *do not judge or you too will be judged.* And theologian John Stott says, don't just use the golden rule – 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you', but – treat others as God treats them – with a lot of grace.

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

And He Lived and Died and Rose again – all for us!!

Let's pray: Jesus help us love as you love, to show grace to our Christian brothers and sisters. May we leave the judging to you knowing that one day we will all be held to account. Help us to live for you in all that we do, seeking your will and following your ways. In your name we pray. Amen.