

Romans 14:1-13

“What will the Supreme Court say?”

Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but* not for *the purpose of* passing judgment on his opinions. 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. 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.

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. 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.**

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. 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.”**

Imagine walking a path for the first time and stumbling over an object left by another person.

That's the subject of today's text.

We are “not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's or sister's way.”



In the last 150 years, trains, planes, and cars, eliminated countless steps.

Twenty-first century Americans often do their walking on treadmills and exercise machines—

Or to the refrigerator.

Except for rioters and protestors few folks walk anywhere now.

Malls went out of style a decade back.

They require too much walking.

People like to drive to the front of stores.

In the 1950s, nearly all golfers walked.

Many golf courses would not let you ride in a cart without your doctor’s written permission.

President Eisenhower changed all of that. **After seeing pictures of him riding in his golf cart, everyone wanted a cart, even the kids.**

We can blame Ike for considerable pollution and for overweight golfers of all ages.¹

Midwest farmers became famous for driving between their houses and their barns.

On the other hand, drive-through restaurants and takeout food now help folks survive the pandemic.

Somewhere in our collection of old things is a 1920 or 21 transcontinental road map showing roads across the U. S.

100 years ago, a paved highway across this country did not exist

When I was young, we walked a lot.

As I said before, until the last century and a half, people mostly traveled on two legs

Good roads scarcely existed.

The Romans built great well-marked highways, but most roads consisted of glorified cow paths.



When you come to a fork in the road while walking, choosing wrongly could put you in danger. You could also find yourself on a rocky road, suffer a broken foot, wrenched knee, or sprained ankle.

These things being true, it’s only natural that living compares to walking.

When the Bible advises “Be careful how you live, it literally says: “Be careful where you walk.”

Thus the term *peripateo*, “walk around” appears more than 90 times in the NT.²

The Book of Proverbs begins with a father counseling his son to choose the right life-path.

In Proverbs 1, he warned him against keeping company with violent friends: **“my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths; (16) for their feet rush into sin.”**

“Listen to mom and dad.”

“Choose good friends and walk the right road.”

Guidance about staying on the right path continues through Proverbs.

Romans 14 likens life to walking unknown paths.

Many set out, not knowing where they are going, but still going full speed ahead.

Some politicians talk confidently about finding what works and doing that.

¹ Ike promoted the Interstate Highway system.

² The same is true of Hebrew terms for walk in the OT

That's called pragmatism—doing what's practical. Pragmatists don't always bother to ask whether something is right, only, **"Will it work?"**

A New York plumber . . . with a limited command of English wrote the National Bureau of Standards and said he found that hydrochloric acid quickly opened drainage pipes when *they* got clogged and asked if it was a good thing to use. (he concluded that hydrochloric acid worked.)

A Bureau scientist replied:

"The efficacy of hydrochloric acid is indisputable, but the corrosive residue is incompatible with metallic permanence."

The plumber wrote back thanking the Bureau for telling him the method was all right. The scientist was a little disturbed and showed the correspondence to his boss, another scientist. The latter wrote the plumber:

"We cannot assume responsibility for the production of toxic and noxious residue with hydrochloric acid and suggest you use an alternative procedure."

The plumber wrote back that he agreed with the Bureau—hydrochloric acid works fine. A top scientist- boss of the first two—broke the impasse by tearing himself loose from technical terminology and writing this letter:

"Don't use hydrochloric acid. It eats hell out of the pipes."³

At least the pragmatist plumber had sense enough to check his practice with experts.



Many pragmatists don't learn the riskiness of the "it works" notion until it's too late.

How do we know what's right?

In Psalm 25, David pleaded with God:

1. First, we humbly follow God's path.

"Show me your ways, O LORD . . ."

When I was young, I fantasized about the life I wanted and had ideas about what would be good for me, but it wasn't always God's way. Many of us are far down certain paths before we discover their danger (At the time, we think that they help us progress in life).

I often idolized and envied successful people. Norma and I spent considerable time with rich, glamorous, powerful, and famous people. Few of them found lasting joy or fulfillment.

If you serve God and enjoy your family, you have contentment that eluded most of them.

³ F.F. Colton *Scientific Monthly*, 1949

The fulfilled folks we’ve known humbly walked God’s way and helped others on the path.

We walk the only one sure, safe path by praying every morning: “Show me your way, O Lord.”

Let me see the course of life you’ve set out for me Lord. “Teach me your paths.”

It helps to know that the word “teach” here doesn’t convey the idea of book learning.

**It relates to keeping an ox or a donkey on the path--
Goading it. Prodding it. And using a rod at times.**

We pray, “Lord, whatever it takes to keep me close to you and set me straight, I’m willing to endure.

“Guide me in your truth and teach me for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.”

Letting God guide and teach us every day leaves us no time to judge others.

The word translated *guide* contains a stronger, more vivid message than *teach*.

I’ve never been around bows and arrows much.

In David’s time they used bows and arrows for hunting and in warfare.

Putting a string on a powerful bow requires strength.

The word *guide* indicates a person putting one end of the bow on the ground and placing a foot on it in order to bend it and put the string on it.



The word also applies to stomping or treading to separate grain from sheaves as was later done mechanically by threshing.⁴

Some of us want out when things get tough.

But David said,

“Lord, I want to know your way.

Whatever it takes I want to follow the path you set for me. Thump me, prod me, bend me, stomp on me; whatever it takes, I’m ready.”

“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.

“Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.”⁵

First, we humbly follow God’s path for us.

2. Second, we assist others along the way.

When our kids were young, we spent vacations in Oregon so they could get to know cousins and the grandparents. Sometimes we rode the train the 1000 mile trip. Often Norma and the kids stayed an extra week or two and I rode back to L.A. by myself.

⁴ Photo shows neighbors of Bob’s grandparents in Oklahoma gathering wheat sheaves in the early 1900s.

⁵ Hebrews 12:11-13 NIV

On one of those trips, a big, dignified, handsome, army officer rode the same train. I tend to make snap judgments about people based on their looks.



Negative feelings took over me and got worse when I saw the colonel in the lounge car visiting with some attractive young women. Do you get the feeling that I suffered green-eyed envy? As you can tell, the Lord wasn't guiding me and I was hardly looking for his path. Later, as the train neared Fresno, CA, I walked to the vestibule hoping to step off a moment and get some fresh air. The colonel stood there with his bag.

Trying to be friendly for the first time, and a little curious, I asked if Fresno was his home. His answer shamed me and convicted me. With eyes filled with emotion, he said, “My wife died a few weeks ago and I feel lost. I thought I'd stop here and see if I could find some meaning in what has happened.”

Virtually every person faces challenges. The Lord sends us to encourage and help people find hope in Christ. We help others knowing they travel the difficult path, too. The Lord especially wants us to encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ.

“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider

how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”⁶

We don't just gather here to worship God. As we assemble, the Lord wants us to encourage one another in faithfulness and love.

First we follow God's guidance on his path
Second, we encourage others to follow the Lord.

3. We don't judge others; that puts stumbling blocks in their way and God will judge us.

Do you wonder about the connection between our judging and stumbling blocks?

Life is difficult for everyone.

If I create laws and standards that I expect you to fulfill, I'm placing rules for you I'm not authorized to give.

I am claiming God's place.

All of us are only servants.

We have only one Master and Judge.

“For we will all stand before the (Supreme) judgment seat of God. ¹¹ For it is written, ‘AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE

⁶ Hebrews 10:23-25 NIV

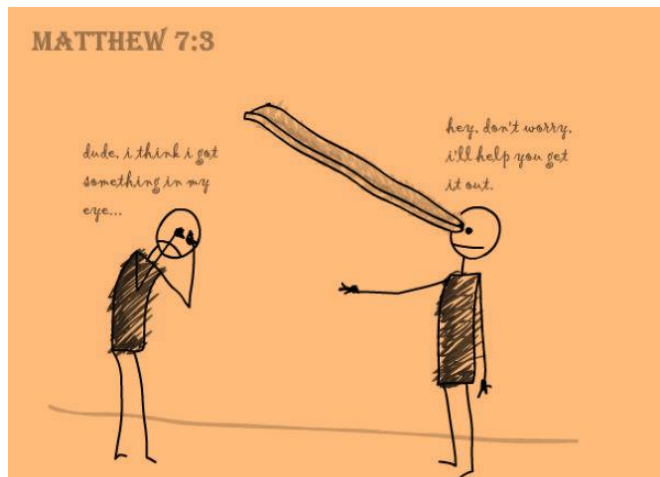
**SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY
TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD.”**

Jesus warned us about judging others.

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?

You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”⁷



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I can’t see well enough to tell you what you need.

Each of us must ask himself/herself:

“Am I walking the Lord’s path?”

“Is His word teaching me and guiding my life?”

Godly folks serve Him and help others as they go.

They don’t judge—put stumbling blocks
in the way of others

God will judge all of us.

**Norma and I thank God for the loving support
you give one another and so kindly extend to us.**

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⁷ Matthew 7:1-5 NIV