



Understanding

Romans 14

*Let Us Not Judge
One Another
Anymore*

NKJV

by

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Romans 14:1 – 4 – Romans 14, or at least some of the verses it contains, (**vs. 4, 12**) has become some of the most quoted and popular verses among Christians and non-Christians alike. *“Let us not judge one another anymore.” NKJV*

It is also one of the most misunderstood and misapplied passages of scripture in the entire Bible because it is taken completely out of context. This truth, found in Romans 14, is applied by most people to the subject of judging the sin of others.

Many misunderstand this chapter to be teaching that it is wrong to judge and call the sin of others “sin.” They think this passage teaches that since we are all sinners, it’s arrogance to point to the sin of others. They believe that a person’s obedience or disobedience to the Word of God is of no consequence to our fellowship with God or with one another.

If Paul is teaching that in this chapter, then he and the Holy Spirit are contradicting everything else that he wrote on that subject under the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus condemns the judging of one unsaved person of another unsaved person when He said to the angry crowd that was going to stone the adulterous woman, “let he who is without sin cast the first stone.” (**John 8:7**)

His point was that all were worthy of the just wrath of God, not just one or two really bad people who happen to get caught in sin. (**Rom. 3:23**) The crowd was applying one standard of judging to themselves and another to the adulterous woman. That’s not righteous judgment. (**John 7:27**) We

must apply God's standard to all. This is Jesus' point as well in **Matthew 7**. All have sinned and all are incapable of living righteously in their lost condition. Only faith in Jesus and His redemptive work on the cross can justify the sinner.

But the subject of judging sin in the life of the believer is another matter. The believer has been justified, forgiven and cleansed from the stain of sin and the penalty of sin. We have been given the power and ability as well as the responsibility to live godly. **(Rom. 6, 7, 8)** We have been raised to a place of privilege and blessing and have been given the ability and responsibility to judge what is proper conduct for the child God in the light of the Word of God. **(I Cor. 5: 12 / 6:2 – 5)**

We must judge righteously and apply the same standard of God's Word to all, starting with ourselves.

Let's quickly consider several passages that deal with the subject of judging sin in the life of the believer. **I John 1:5 – 10** – “if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.” Sin in the life of the believer breaks our fellowship, but not our relationship, with God and with other believers. Fellowship can only be restored when we obey the exhortation to repent. We are called on to judge our own sin. **I Corinthians 11:31** – if we judge ourselves, we will not be judged.

I Corinthians 5:9 – 13 – Paul rebukes them for not judging the sin of a Christian brother in their midst. Don't keep company with a brother who is living in open rebellion against the Word of God.

II Thessalonians 3:14, 15 – take note of

anyone who does not walk according to Paul's doctrine, break off fellowship with those who live in open rebellion against the revelation of sound doctrine that leads to sound living. **1 Timothy 5:20** – those believers, even in leadership, that are sinning, rebuke openly.

It is not hypocritical to judge the willful disobedience and sin of others. It is required. Such judging is not to be done with an attitude of arrogance that thinks that we are better and could never fall.

Galatians 6:1 – we are to restore those who have falling in sin with a spirit of gentleness and humility, knowing that we could also find ourselves fallen in sin if we become negligent and refuse to be led of the Spirit on a daily basis.

The purpose of our judging the sin of others is to help them understand the need to judge it themselves in order that they may be restored to a place fellowship, victory and blessing.

It is not a judgment of condemnation, but of agreeing with God about what is best for us and for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

I once was rebuked for stating that an individual who was living in adultery and fornication with his cousin's wife was living in sin and I could no longer maintain fellowship with him. "Everybody deserves to be happy," was the tart rebuke of another believer of my position.

The point is that there can be no true, lasting joy outside of the will of God, therefore we are not doing our brother or sister in Christ any favors by pretending that we believe they can find happiness in sin.

Not to judge a brother's sin is not to love him or God or the Body of Christ. The secret to judging the sins of others is to apply the same standard to everyone, including yourself. We are to judge ourselves and others according to what God has revealed to be right and wrong in His Word.

What is the subject of Romans 14? – there are several key things that you must keep in mind if you are going to understand the context of Paul's command not to judge our brother anymore.

A good way to approach this chapter is to first look at the specific people and situations that Paul was addressing and then we will be able to make some accurate applications of the principles and truths that relate to our modern day experience.

1) The subject is not sin or sinful lifestyles, but rather the differences in opinions among believers who desire to live godly lives, but who have differing opinions about the kind of lifestyle that best honors God. The subject is Christian liberties, personal convictions and different stages of spiritual growth.

Those differences arise in areas where the Bible is silent on its revelation about whether something is right or wrong. If the Bible does not strictly prohibit something or require it, then there is room for opinion about whether it is something that pertains to godliness.

I have to qualify that a little by saying that the Bible says nothing about a lot of things, but sets down clear outlines of what is right and wrong so that we can understand that many others things fall in those categories of sin. For example, the use of the drug cocaine is not mentioned in the Bible, but it would

fall under the sin of drunkenness.

Romans 14:5, 6 – The important thing is to be convinced by a study of the Word that what you do or do not do honors God.

The prohibition to judge your brother is not given concerning your brother's disobedience that clearly brings reproach to God, but rather concerning his convictions about what best honors God in matters that are not clearly defined by Scripture.

Romans 14:22 – 23 – don't force your convictions on others in these areas where Scripture is silent. Whatever you do or don't do, do it by faith, convinced that it is what God would have you to do or not do. When in doubt, leave it out. (That catch phrase is not original with me, but it is a good guide line.)

2) The two primary groups that Paul is addressing among whom there were differing opinions about what was truly indicative of godly living were the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers. **Romans 15:7 – 9** – Christ had received both Jew and Gentile and therefore we should receive one another.

The differences of what was the best godly lifestyle had to do with the differences in how the Jewish believers and Gentiles believers looked at foods, drinks and the observance of special days.

Some Jewish believers felt it was a demonstration of godliness to continue to follow the dietary laws of Moses that had been a part of their culture and lifestyle all their life and had been etched into their conscience to be things that pleased God. Under the Law they were things that were ordered by

God and pleasing to Him.

Some even went so far as to become vegetarians to avoid eating meat from the common market place that might have first been offered to idols. Some Jewish believers continued to observe many of the holy days on the Jewish calendar.

Those things were never forged into the conscience of the Gentile believers and were never required of them as expressions of godliness by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They had liberty not to be concerned with those things and so most of them were not.

3) The command not to judge your brother is a command not to arrive at a judgment that despises your brother or rejects your brother as a necessary part of the Body of Christ. Christ receives Jew and Gentile alike and so we must accept all who God accepts.

The Jewish believers looked on the Gentile believers as inferior and less spiritual because they didn't eat the way they ate and observe the days they observed. The Gentile believers who knew their liberty in Christ that (**vs. 14**) nothing was unclean of itself, despised the Jews for their hang-ups about food and drink.

It is wrong to reject a member of the Body of Christ and to judge his service to God as unworthy. Christ will judge the worthiness of the service of His servants – **Romans 14:10 – 12** If God approves of the service of a believer, who are we to reject them as our brother?

Instead of despising our brother, we should go the extra mile not to cause him to stumble by our liberties in Christ. **Romans 14:13**

Romans 14:17 - 19 – Godliness is not what you do or do not eat or drink, but **Righteousness** – right conduct, Biblical morality, honesty, integrity, motivated by love and selflessness. **Peace** – working in harmony with the rest of the members of the Body to the glory of the Head. **Joy** – things that are our expression of our calm delight in the Lord and that promote such expressions in others. Those things are the true expression of godliness.

4) Paul calls the Jewish believers, who insisted on what they did and did not eat and what days they celebrated as special, as being an expression of godliness as being weak in the faith and those who knew their liberty in Christ to eat whatever they wanted as being strong in faith. (**Rom. 14:1, 14, 15:1**)

It is interesting that Paul is making a judgment in the very chapter in which he tells us not to judge. It is one thing to judge to despise and reject a brother. It is quite another to judge in the sense of discerning whether some one's faith is mature or immature.

It is also important to understand that it is possible to be immature in faith, but not carnal and sinful. At least for a time. It's God's will that all of His children grow and mature spiritually through an understanding of God's Word. If we do not grow, we will become carnal and sinful. However, spiritual maturity is a process and those that are mature should be patient, loving and nurturing with those who have not yet grown to their level of spiritual maturity in

order that we might promote spiritual growth in them.

Romans 15:1, 2

5) Do not mistake this chapter on tolerance of Christian liberties to be a tolerance for legality. Legality is the doctrine that we are justified and perfected before God by the keeping of some external law. Paul never had a second's tolerance for such teaching. **Galatians 2:3 - 5**

6) Do not make the mistake of thinking that Paul was saying this should be the pattern for this Church age, that some Christians should follow the dietary laws of Moses if they want and some not. Notice he calls the Jewish believers with their convictions, weak in faith. Paul does not promote weak faith.

The pattern for today is to understand that the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace and joy and that we are to pursue these things.

He was simply giving a solution to the immediate problems that were arising in the early Church when all of a sudden Jews and Gentiles, from completely different backgrounds and customs, were being thrown together into one community.

It was possible for a Jewish believer to pursue righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit and at the same time be a vegetarian if that was his personal conviction of what was pleasing to God.

It was equally possible for a Gentile believer to eat pork and pursue righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The two camps should simply learn to get along and receive one another as the Lord had received each of them.

The law of love should rule supreme among God's people. Love will always cause us to be careful not to do anything that will cause our brother to stumble. It will cause us always to seek his edification and spiritual growth, understanding that we are one in Christ and that every member of the Body of Christ is important.

Modern Day Applications – Patience with Young People and New Believers – The spiritually mature must always be patient with those who have yet to mature in their understanding of God's ways.

Example: I'm glad that older, more spiritual saints did not despise me when I was growing up and when I first started in the ministry. I started preaching when I was about 18 or 19. I started singing and traveling with a Gospel singing group when I was 18.

I wanted to live for God and honor Him with my life. I wasn't living in sin or rebellion, but quite the opposite. The Lord had made my heart tender towards Him. However, some of the songs that I sang and some of the sermons that I preached back then I would not sing or preach today because I have matured in my faith and have a better understanding of what truly honors the Lord.

I am glad that there were older saints that didn't judge, despise and reject me because of my immaturity. Instead they patiently taught the Word of God that caused my faith to grow strong and mature.

There is a difference between judging to reject and judging to determine the need for more patient nurturing and teaching to bring about a stronger, more mature faith.

We do not want to discourage and despise the weak in faith, but at the same time we don't want to neglect our responsibility to guide them into deeper truth. The Holy Spirit will give us the divine balance to avoid both mistakes. **(II Timothy 2:22—26)**

Culture Differences – Different races and cultures bring in to their worship things that are typical of their heritage and that are not necessarily right or wrong in worship.

If you would attend a Paraguayan service, you would notice that they like to sing a lot. Is that carnal? Not necessarily. It can become carnal, but many good things can be corrupted. But since they are equally content to sit and hear the word of God preached and taught for hours, their singing is just a part of their cultural expression of praise.

Every assembly has its way of doing things, their order of service. Which is right? Which is wrong? There are certainly Scriptural guidelines for spiritual worship, but within those guidelines there is much liberty. We should not reject or despise others for those things that are different than what we prefer.

Personal convictions about scriptures that are not clearly spelled out for us doctrinally. The non-essentials. Of course, there is a problem that far too many Christians have of labeling all doctrine non-essential.

False doctrines that are clearly contrary to sound doctrine are not to be tolerated for a minute. Justification by faith alone, eternal security, fullness of the Holy Spirit, practical sanctification, service, sacrifice, the coming of the Lord, the resurrection are just a few of the essential doctrines on which there

must be unity for us to enjoy the fullness of fellowship.

Use of medical science – Among those of us who believe that Jesus heals today, there are many different opinions about how much, if any, of medical science we should avail ourselves to. This is an area of personal conviction and leading of the Holy Spirit and we should not despise or reject our brother or sister in Christ because of their personal practice in this area.

Degree of involvement in politics – It's important that we understand that we are a heavenly people and that the message of the Church is one of an upward, heavenly calling. However, within that understanding, there is room for personal convictions on what degree of involvement a believer can and should have in their earthly government.

There are many more such areas that are not clearly defined for us in the Bible. Don't judge your brother in these areas of Christian liberties of how best to honor and please God. Don't despise and reject him if his convictions in these areas are different than yours.

Instead, let us pursue the things that make for peace and lead to the edification of our brother or sister. **Romans 14:19** If every believer would be faithful to do this, then we would all enjoy the fullness of the blessing of **Romans 15:13** -

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” NKJV