

Men to Men Ministry

Teacher: Just Larry

916-337-2648

<http://theinsight.com>

Lesson 44 of 52 on Paul's letter to the Romans.

Goals:

1. To dig deeply into scripture to know the will of God rationally and systematically. We are here to think.
2. To understand the priority of the Kingdom of God.
3. To provide quality materials for home study and reflection.

Scripture Focus: Romans 14:13-23 NASB

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.

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.

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.

16 Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing 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.

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

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

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.

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

22 The faith which you have, have as your conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves of.

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.

INTRODUCTION

This scene should sound familiar if you've seen the movie City Slickers. It takes place between Curly played by Jack Palance and Mitch played by Billy Crystal while riding in a modern-day, dude ranch cattle drive.

Curly the old sage cowboy says, "You know what the secret of life is?"

Mitch the city slicker going on this dude ranch cattle drive to find himself, "No. what?"

Curly answers, "This." (holds up his finger)

Mitch: Your finger?

Curly: One thing. Just one thing. You stick to that, everything else doesn't mean s...

Mitch: That's great, but what's the one thing?

Curly: That's what you've got to figure out.

The inference is that each of us must find our one thing. You may call it by many different names: your passion, your purpose, your mission, your crusade, or your priority. Each of us must find our one thing. It is the WHY of your life. It is what you want your life to be about.

Maybe I watched too many cartoons, but growing up I was a defender of underdogs.

Somehow, I got the message, defend the weak or underprivileged. My Mom re-enforced this making sure I knew to protect my little brother and sister although, my sister knew how to whoop all of us brothers, and she killed any spider that threatened my path.

Everybody deserves a chance at their best life.

I now know at the far edge of my beginning; we are not some predestined automatons walking in a fog through the happenstance of my life. Neither is it what is given to you or even what you have earned. Further, I learned that wherever I go, there I am. I must take me with me wherever I go. I am not saying that is all about me, but my body, my mind, and my spirit need more than just existence.

Your body, soul, and spirit are the foundation of how we act and react to our lives. Your foundation isn't the stuff you have, it is who you are, it's your beliefs, it's your values, it's your rules, it's your mindsets and your metaphors, and it's your strategies and tactics for life. It is your toolkit you use to make the most of what you've got. That's the story behind my one-liner purpose with the Old cowboy Curley was talking about.

Some find a way to do what they love for a living. For others, they find a way to fund their lifestyle, and in turn, make time to do more of what they love. Yet others seem to do what they were born to do.

I feel happiest and most fulfilled when I am with you men. I am walking with you on a path to fulfillment. Happiness is a by-product of the process. It drives me to do my best while I have my best to give. Where people fall is when they ignore their passion or their lust for life or they don't capitalize on making the most of what they've got. Bringing your calling to

the surface, or doing more of what you love to do, even in a simple way or a small way, regularly, is how you light your fire, get on your path, and make a world of difference, starting with you. It's how you lead your life from the inside out.

Your one thing can become an over-arching theme for your life, that helps you make meaning and enjoy the journey as you go. The beauty is, to make the change, all you must do is start with the question ... "Who do you want to be? ... and what do you want your life to be about?" With that discovery start creating those experiences. You're the author of your life, the architect, and the director now points your camera at what you want more of.

This is the motto you'll pull out when times get tough or when you must remind yourself of your path which way to go or how to get back on your horse. It's how you'll inspire yourself with skill and lead your charge. Finding your why is your compass for life.

Tonight's lesson addresses Paul's Why. In our first lessons on Romans, we discovered who Paul was and we found his why. Romans 1:16,17 ***"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes; first to the Jew then to the Gentile. For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "THE RIGHTEOUS WILL LIVE BY FAITH."***

Commentary

As we learned last week, we studied one of the problems in the Roman church was a conflict between the weaker Christians who wanted to keep the Mosaic Law and the stronger Christians who seemed to want to isolate and judge the weaker.

Paul's main point is that we are to accept one another and not judge or look with contempt at those who differ with us over non-essential matters. He was talking both to weaker and stronger believers. The weaker believers were not weak in the sense of not being able to resist temptation. That kind of weakness is sin. Rather, they were weak in that they were hung up with scruples about things that the Bible does not command or with stipulations of the Jewish law that were fulfilled in Christ and thus no longer in effect. They tended to judge the Gentile believers who were not bound by these scruples. The stronger brothers (Paul classed himself with them, 15:1) realized that we were no longer under the Mosaic Law, and so they didn't have a problem eating non-kosher meat. They realized (1 Cor. 8:8), "But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat." But they tended to look with contempt on their Jewish brothers, belittling them for their petty rules.

Now (14:13-23), after an introductory summary that goes out to both sides (not to judge one another), Paul turns mostly to the stronger believers. He was concerned that they would flaunt their liberty in Christ to the detriment of weaker believers, who may be influenced to violate their consciences. Paul tells the stronger believers that love for their brothers should trump their use of liberty. As he states (14:15), "For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love." The principle is:

Love for others should govern our exercise of liberty in Christ when our liberty would cause a weaker brother to stumble.

Our focus should not be on our liberty or our rights, but on loving our brother. Love gladly yields its rights when it is necessary to keep a weaker brother from stumbling. But while the overall principle is clear, the difficulty is in the details. Let's work through these verses, looking at four things that love does not do.

1. LOVE TRIUMPHS OVER LIBERTY

a. Love does not judge others on non-essential matters but determines not to put obstacles or stumbling blocks in a brother's way. Romans 14:13

Paul is talking about non-moral matters where the Bible does not give clear commands. He is not talking about judging your brother regarding sin or serious doctrinal error. Not judging your brother means that you do not condemn him or question his salvation over matters of doctrine where the Bible is not clear or behavior where it gives no direct commands. You can have your convictions before God by working through the issue biblically (14:5, 22), but let your brother work out his convictions. You aren't his judge; God is his judge and your judge, too!

There are a few examples in our culture that we can use to illustrate this idea. One example is alcohol. **It is a sin to drink a glass of champagne at your daughter's wedding toast.** The Bible does not explicitly make a case for the prohibition of all alcohol for the believer. Drinking alcohol is a very hot topic among Christians that has been argued and discussed for thousands of years. God warns us to not be drunk and describes certain situations where someone should not drink, but the Bible never says that alcohol is wrong. Since the Bible doesn't forbid drinking alcohol, whether someone should drink is a personal decision to make for yourself. The Bible does say to limit it. You are not to be drunk or impaired.

Reference list for alcohol:

Ecclesiastes 9:7
Isaiah 62:8-9
Psalm 104:14-15
Isaiah 55:1
John 2:7-9
1 Timothy 5:23
Ephesians 5:18
Proverbs 20:1
Isaiah 5:11
Galatians 5:21

Nevertheless, this does raise a question: **Does the entire church become limited by the conscience and decisions made by the weakest in the congregation?**

The best case study is where you are with a new believer who had a problem with alcohol before he was justified. One of the reasons he turned to Jesus was the devastation and ruin he experienced with his addiction. He believes that is wrong to have one drink. You invite him home for a favorite recipe of Stroganoff which calls for a liberal quantity of wine in the sauce. Out of love for him, you don't include that ingredient. I will not give any person the opportunity to be untrue to their convictions. I will not be a stumbling block to his convictions.

b. Love does not cause a weaker brother to violate his conscience Romans 14:14

The Bible does give clear, absolute, and binding moral commandments. To violate these commands is to disobey God and defile yourself. Paul was a Pharisee, trained by one of the great teachers of Israel, Gamaliel. Paul was saying that all the Old Testament laws for clean and unclean foods were no longer in effect.

If Paul is so convinced that we're free to eat anything, then what's the big deal? Just eat what you want and don't worry about it! No, because Paul adds, "**But to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.**" In other words, it is wrong to violate your conscience, even if your conscience is not completely in line with Scripture.

It is important here to keep in mind the weaker brother was one who, in his mind, had decided that God was more important than having that single glass of champagne.

He does not have the liberty in Christ to do what you are free to do. But he sees you drinking and it tempts him to join in, even though he thinks that he shouldn't. So out of love don't flaunt your liberty in front of him and cause him to sin.

But you may be thinking, "Don't I have a right to drink a beer or a glass of wine? Why should I have to limit my freedom because of the weaker brother's hang-ups? Why doesn't he just grow up?"

c. Love does not insist on its rights to the point of damaging a weaker brother's walk with God (14:15).

If Christ loved this brother enough to die for him on the cross, then don't you think that you should love him enough to be willing to give up your ham sandwich (or glass of wine) so that you don't lead him into sin?" Look closely at your decisions when around others. Is there anything I am doing that may cause someone to doubt, or damage? My sacrifice of some liberty is nothing compared to Christ's sacrifice of His very life! Since Jesus called us to love one another as He loved us, the least you can do is to give up your right to certain liberties for the sake of your weaker brother.

The practical application is that we should be very sensitive about not doing anything that might cause a weaker believer to violate his conscience. If we have sinned in this way, we should do all that we can to help get him back on track with the Lord. Love does not insist on its rights if doing so would damage a weaker brother's walk with God.

The thought here is that love does not judge others on non-essential matters, but rather determines not to put a stumbling block in a brother's way. Love does not cause a weaker brother to violate his conscience. Love does not insist on its rights to the point of destroying a weaker brother's walk with God.

d. Love does not insist on its rights Romans 14:16

There is a very thin line between liberty and love. As a well-seasoned believer, I can say without contradiction, "When I was young it was all about liberty, but now it is more about love."

Some say that the "good thing" refers to the gospel, but in the context, it seems to refer to the liberty that we enjoy in Christ because of the gospel. Paul does not say who it is that speaks evil of your liberty that has caused harm to a brother.

It may be other weak believers, who say, "Look at what your liberty in Christ did! You have liberty, but where's your love?" Or it could be the strong saying, "I am going to do what I do because I can, and it does not matter who I hurt."

2. Keep the main thing the main thing Romans 14:17-18

In the Roman church, some were flaunting their liberty in Christ to eat whatever they wanted to eat, but they were not sensitive about how their actions affected their weaker brothers, who had not let go of the food regulations in the Law of Moses. The stronger brothers were putting their liberty above love, which should have been the main thing.

God's Kingdom is the main thing and it centers not on external matters, but on our relationship with God and with others.

a. It is easy to focus on external matters and neglect the main thing

In the time of Jesus' earthly ministry, the prime example of focusing on secondary matters and missing the main thing was the Pharisees. Jesus reamed them out (Matt. 23:23-24), "**Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!**" The law commanded tithing, but these men had gotten so carried away with tithing that they even counted out a tenth of their table spices! All the while, Jesus says, they neglected the heart of the law, which was justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

b. The main thing is God's Kingdom

This is the only reference to God's Kingdom in the Book of Romans. Here Paul is saying that the main thing is not exercising your liberty in Christ or your rights. The main thing is God's kingdom. But what does he mean by "the kingdom of God"?

i. *God's Kingdom is where He rules and I submit.*

A kingdom has a king, and Jesus is God's anointed King (Ps. 2:6-7). We are either in Satan's domain of darkness (Matt. 4:8; 12:26) or in God's

kingdom, subject to His King. Paul said (Col. 1:13), “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Jesus said that we can only enter God’s kingdom through the new birth (John 3:3, 5). Thus, He preached (Mark 1:15), “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” The gospel (good news) is that God sent His only Son to bear the punishment that we deserve for our sins. He forgives all our sins and imputes the righteousness of Jesus Christ to those who believe in Him. As we’ve seen, the gospel of God is the main theme of the book of Romans (1:1, 16, 17). So God’s kingdom exists now wherever Jesus reigns in the hearts of His people who submit to His rule.

ii. God’s Kingdom centers on our relationship with Him and with others

There are three words to characterize the Kingdom of God here in Romans 14: Righteousness, Peace, and Joy. Further, these three are expressed in our relationship to God and second our relationship to others.

In relationship with God, Paul could have been referring to the standing or position in Christ. Having been justified by faith (righteousness), we have peace with God through Jesus. Further, we have Joy in the hope of the glory of God.

Our relationship with God also changes our relationship with others. Because of our new standing as righteous before God, we seek to practice righteousness (Rom. 6:13, 18; 1 John 2:29; 3:7). Because we have peace with God, we are to pursue peace with others (Rom. 14:19; Eph. 2:14-22).

So these three qualities serve as a summary of being in God’s kingdom: we are rightly related to God and to one another, which are the two great commandments. These qualities are a benchmark by which you can evaluate whether you are focused on the main thing. Do you know that you are in right standing with God, that all of your sins are forgiven, and that you are clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ? Do you know that you are at peace with God? The answer to these questions is another question: Have you let go of the pride of trying to establish your righteousness and instead trusted in Christ alone (Rom. 9:30-10:4)? As Paul states (10:4), “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

iii. God's kingdom is about serving Christ, having God's acceptance and man's approval. Romans 14:18

Romans 14:18: "For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men." "This way" refers to the way that Paul has just described in verse 17: You serve Christ by focusing on righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. To serve in a way that is "acceptable to God" goes back to Romans 12:1-2, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

To be "approved by men" stands in contrast to verse 16, where others speak evil of those who have hurt their brothers by flaunting their liberty. But how can we be approved by men? Jesus said that the world will hate us because we're not like them and because He chose us out of the world (John 15:18-19). He told us to expect opposition from the world (John 16:2). So how do we harmonize this with being approved by men?

Paul seems to mean here that if we lay aside our rights and demonstrate genuine concern and love for our brothers and sisters in Christ, the world must at least acknowledge that we are genuine. They won't be able to accuse us of being hypocrites. It's the same as Paul said of elders, that they must have a good reputation with those outside of the church (1 Tim. 3:7). If he is a businessman, he must have a reputation for being honest. He must treat others with respect and kindness. Even if they don't agree with your Christian faith, they must admit that you treated them rightly (see 1 Cor. 10:32-33).

3. When someone wins no one wins.

When the Church is more about the individual, then the church will suffer. When one person becomes the standard and Wins in the world of strength, most wise, most learned, the most handsome, the greatest victim, the most humble, the most of anything, then all the rest will suffer. It is not about individuality but Unity.

Unity is only accomplished when we **pursue** four things:

Relationships,

Priorities,

Convictions

Conscience.

a. As Christians, we should pursue godly **relationships** Romans 14:19

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

In this context, Paul is mainly addressing the need for Gentile and Jewish believers to get along so that the church would not be fragmented along racial lines. The Jewish believers tended to cling to the Law of Moses, including its regulations about clean and unclean foods. It was difficult for them to let those things go. But the Gentile believers, coming to Christ out of paganism, didn't understand why there was all the fuss over food. They had no problem eating a steak that had been offered to an idol in the pagan temple before it showed up at the meat market. So the Gentile Christians tended to look with contempt on the Jewish believers for being legalistic, whereas the Jews tended to judge the Gentiles for being licentious.

The problem had two ramifications. First, if a Jewish Christian saw a Gentile Christian eating what to the Jew was "defiled" meat, it could lead to a break in their relationship. The Jew might think, "I'm not going to have anything to do with a so-called Christian who is so licentious!" Or, the Gentile believer might think, "I'm not going to be friends with a person who is hung up over such legalism. He needs to grow up!" And so, their relationship would be ruptured.

In a worst-case scenario, the entire church could be divided along the lines of the meat-eater faction and the vegetarian or kosher meat-only faction. But for Paul, it was central to the very concept of the church that it was composed of "Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman," with Christ as "all and in all" (Col. 3:11). To divide over secondary matters would send the wrong message about the power of the gospel and the testimony of Christ to the watching world.

So Paul gives this exhortation (14:19): "So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another." "Pursue" is not a passive concept. You don't pursue something accidentally. It takes deliberate effort and persistence.

God wants the church to be like a family, where there are grandparents, parents, and grandkids all coming together to enjoy one another's company and learn from each other. The younger people can benefit by learning some of the great hymns. Granted, some of those old hymns need to be put to rest, but some of them need to be passed on to the next generation. Perhaps the tunes need to be updated, but the words are rich and spiritually nourishing. Older people should rejoice when they see young people coming to Christ and let their youthful zeal warm their hearts afresh with the power of the gospel. So we need to yield to each other and be committed to preserving "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). But especially the stronger, more mature believers need to yield their rights to the younger saints. That is the thrust of Romans 14:13-23.

b. As Christians, we should preserve godly **priorities**: Romans 14:20-21

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.

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

The end of verse 20 is not clear as to its reference. It could be referring to the weaker brother who sins by eating meat that is against his conscience. But if we look in the greater context it refers to the stronger brother who eats and causes his weaker brother to stumble.

The second issue with translation is found in the phrase “the work of God”. It is only found in one other place in the New Testament (John 6:29), and then with a different sense. Scholars are divided here over whether it refers to tearing down an individual Christian or to damaging the church. In this context, Paul has been emphasizing that we are not to do anything to cause a brother to stumble, so it must refer on a primary level to the individual. But hurting a brother can also lead to damaging the entire church. His friends will take up his cause and your friends take up your cause, and soon the church is at war, leading to divisions over secondary matters. It’s frightening to realize that by our selfish behavior, we can damage a brother who is a work of God, a new creation in Christ.

So Paul’s point in these verses is that if we selfishly put our rights above a brother’s spiritual growth and above God’s kingdom, relationships will suffer and God’s work will be damaged. People will speak evil of what for us is a good thing (14:16). And so we need to preserve the godly priority of His kingdom, which focuses on our relationship with Him and with others, rather than on our rights about secondary

c. As Christians, we should maintain godly **Convictions: Romans 14:22.**

Romans 14:22: “**The faith which you have, have as your conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.**” Paul is repeating here what he stated in 14:5b, “Each person must be fully convinced in his mind.” Again, he is not talking about matters where the Bible gives clear moral commands. He is not saying, “If you think that adultery is okay, just be convinced in your mind.” Or, “If you think that stealing is allowed in certain circumstances, just have that as your conviction before God.” Adultery, stealing, and many other things are *always* sins for *all* people in *all* circumstances. Your conviction to the contrary does not make them okay. God’s Word, not our opinion, defines what is sinful.

Paul is talking about developing convictions in areas where the Bible does not give direct commands. The Bible never says, for instance, “You shall not watch movies.” It doesn’t say, “You shall not play computer games or watch TV for hours every day.” It does not say, “All alcoholic beverages are sinful,” although it does say that we should not get drunk or depend on alcohol for relief. You must develop convictions about these and many other things by extrapolating biblical principles that apply.

You will change in your understanding of these things as you grow in Christ. As a newer believer, you may not be bothered by going to movies that are filled with profanity, sexual scenes, or violence. But as you grow in your understanding of God’s Word, you will realize that certain kinds of movies are defiling and do not help your growth in Christ. So you develop a conviction that for you, those movies are off-limits. As you grow in the Lord, it will dawn on

you that you are wasting gobs of time that you could be spending furthering God's kingdom purposes playing computer games. And so you'll limit your time in that activity. It becomes your conviction before God. It isn't a legalistic rule. Rather, you are applying Paul's counsel (1 Cor. 10:23), "All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify."

Paul says that you are happy ("blessed" is a better translation) if you do not condemn yourself in any non-biblical activities that you believe God allows you to do. He means that if you have a conviction that it's okay to do (or not to do) something (in an area where the Bible gives no command), then you're blessed to hold and follow such convictions. It shows that you have thought things through biblically. You're not just following the crowd. And, you're not violating your conscience, which is his last point:

d. As Christians, we should develop godly **Conscience**. Romans 14:23

Romans 14:23: "**But he who doubts is condemned if he eats because his eating is not from faith, and whatever is not from faith is sin.**" Paul refers here to the weak brother, but he's still speaking to the strong brother, showing him why he needs to be careful with his liberty. If by his exercising his liberty, the strong brother causes a weak Christian to go against his conscience, he's influencing the weaker brother to sin. When Paul says, "he who doubts is condemned," I do not agree with those who say that Paul is referring here to eternal condemnation. Rather, Paul means it in the sense that Peter stood condemned (a different Greek word, but the same idea) when he acted with hypocrisy in Antioch (Gal. 2:11; see 1 John 3:20-21). He was guilty of sin. If a weak Christian violates his conscience, he has sinned.

Paul explains that the reason he has sinned is "because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin." While it's a general principle that we sin if we do not trust God in every situation, in this context, Paul's meaning is more focused. "Faith" here refers to a person's conviction before God (14:22). As Douglas Moo explains, "What he here labels 'sin,' ... is any act that does not match our sincerely held convictions about what our Christian faith allows us to do and prohibits us from doing." He adds, "Violation of the dictates of the conscience, even when the conscience does not conform perfectly with God's will, is sinful."

Over time, you should educate your conscience through a diligent study of God's Word. Your convictions will become progressively conformed to the principles of Scripture. But you should not go against your conscience, even if you see other Christians doing something that you think is wrong or even if they tell you that you're free to do it, because that isn't your conviction yet. If you act against your conscience, you're doing something that you think God doesn't want you to do. You're not acting in the faith which you have as your conviction before God. That, for you, is sin.

5427 words