

Sent: 4/18/2018 10:59:26 PM Eastern Standard Time
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Romans 14

As we have discussed in prior weeks, all theology--all teaching about God's plan (from all eternity) for all mankind (the focus of the first 11 chapters of Romans)--has implications for how we live!

As Douglas Moo has noted, theology "includes in its very nature an implicit call to transform one's life to adjust his thinking and action in accordance with the truth of God in Christ"! Nowhere is that truth more clearly depicted--and more crucially to be displayed--than in the relationships believers have with other believers in the church!

The apostle Paul writes in Romans 14:1 that believers are to "accept (in fact to "welcome with open arms") the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions (or reasoning)"!

John MacArthur provides some useful background and insight for understanding this text with this: "The diversity of the church displays Christ's power to bring together dissimilar people in genuine unity. Yet Satan often works on man's unredeemed flesh to create division and threaten that unity!

The threat to unity Paul addresses in this passage arises when mature (strong) believers--both Jews and Gentiles--conflict with immature (weak) believers. The strong Jewish believers understood their freedom in Christ and realized that the ceremonial requirements of the Mosaic Law were no longer binding. The mature Gentiles understood that idols are not gods and, therefore, that they could eat meat that had been offered to them. Nevertheless, in both cases, the weaker brothers' consciences were troubled, and they felt pressured and were even tempted to violate their consciences (a bad thing to train oneself to do). Knowing that the mature Jews and Gentiles would be able to understand these struggles, Paul addresses most of his comments to them." In addition, to us! For surely we all can see how analogous and applicable they are in today's church environment!

"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!" We are dealing here not with doctrine or moral issues but with "non-essential" preferences!

Even the apostle Peter (in Acts 10) and the leaders in the early church struggled with this and other issues associated the rites and ordinances of the Mosaic law, and their general upbringing in Judaism--including the question of whether Gentile converts needed to be "circumcised" in order to be saved! In a special Jerusalem Council, called to consider this question, they affirmed that Gentile converts should, in fact, not "be troubled" by having to be circumcised--but, interestingly, they did encourage them to "abstain from things contaminated by idols"! (Acts 15)

The issue of eating meats offered to idols, as well as the ways in which believers differed over the celebration of the Sabbath and other special days came down to differences among individuals as to their standing in faith (in terms of their understanding of "freedom in Christ, under the New Covenant)--and its connection with their consciences (the soul's "warning system"), and their convictions (what they strongly believed)!

Paul concluded that in these matters believers needed to become "fully convinced in their own mind;" to not judge each other; and to realize that "each one of us will give an account of himself (one day) to God"! (vv. 5-12)

"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. 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! 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!"

Paul says it more succinctly in I Corinthians 8:9--"But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak!"

In verses 21-23, Paul gives the bottom line: "It is good not to eat meat or drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles! The faith, which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith, and whatever is not from faith is sin!"

And thus we see the all-important connection between faith, conscience, and conviction, and how these play out in the life of a believer (even today) who truly has a desire to please his "Lord"--and the equally important "weaker brother principle"! I think it was J. Vernon McGee who Paul Logan quoted last night as once saying, "The ultimate freedom is your freedom not to exercise your freedom"!

This all comes back to "walking according to love;" submitting to the "Lordship" of Jesus Christ (vs. 6-9); "pursuing the things that make for peace and the building up of one another!" (vs. 19) and, as Moo pointed out, "displaying Christ's power to bring together dissimilar people (genuine believers!) in genuine unity!"

How pertinent to this scenario is seeing Jesus (in John 17:20), with His disciples, just prior to the cross, "lifting His eyes to heaven and praying to the Father:" "I do not ask on behalf of these alone (speaking of His disciples) but for those also who believe in Me through their word: that they may be one, even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so the world may believe that you sent Me!"

And Paul, in Ephesians 4:1-3, adding: "Therefore, I the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of your calling, with all humility, gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace!"

Moreover, in Colossians 3:14--"Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity!"

Paul Logan (the other Paul) closed last night's lesson with this thought: "Love God! Love man! The world is watching!"

More next week (from Romans 15:1-13) on these great principles from God's Word on Christian "liberty" and conduct--which are so obviously applicable to us as believers today, and to the church at-large!

Until we meet again, let us go with God and be a blessing!

Lowell