

When Christians Disagree – Part 2

Romans 14:13-23

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Paul is dealing with a problem that was going on between two groups in the church at Rome. The problem that existed in different forms and fashions still exist today. The two groups are described in Romans 15:1. He says, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities,” or the weaknesses, “of the weak, and not to please ourselves.” I want you to note the two groups. They are called the strong and the weak. Back in Romans 14:1 he said, “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations,” don’t get into arguments about things that are doubtful. I want you to notice in Romans 14:1 the phrase “doubtful things.” My King James Bible has the old English “doubtful disputations.” What is a doubtful disputation? It’s doubtful things. Things that aren’t black and white. We call them gray areas in the Bible. Those gray areas might be, “Is it okay for a Christian to dance?” or “Is it okay for a Christian to go to the theater?” “Is it okay for a Christian to wear makeup or to dress a certain way?” “Is it okay for a Christian to do this or that?” These things are not specifically dealt with in the Bible. They are a matter of Christian liberty. It is really not a moral issue but is in itself neutral and actually changes with culture.

In Germany, Christians have a different culture context for their faith. In different parts of the United States, there are Christian groups that don’t believe men and women ought to publicly bathe together, be at the beach together with the opposite sex, or be in a bathing suit. They have different rules and standards, and Christians shouldn’t listen to loud music with a beat. Anything with a beat, if it has a drum in it, is demonic, you know, the demon drums. If you listen to that music, you’ll get demon possessed, especially if you listen to it backwards—the demons will really jump out and take control of you. There are just all kinds of crazy ideas about what the standards are and what Christians can and cannot do. We need to learn to think Biblically, conduct ourselves lovingly, and stop fighting over things that are not essential or black and white in God’s Word.

The problem was that those who were strong and had greater liberty were probably Gentiles. They could eat meat, and they didn’t worship on special holy days. The weak were those that were Jews that were believers, and they had a more rigid legalistic relationship—don’t eat that, don’t touch that, don’t listen to that, don’t wear that, don’t look at that, don’t do that. Their relationship was a bunch of do’s and don’t’s. They were very strict and legalistic. Specifically, the problem was diet and days—the food that you eat and the days you worship on.

In verses 1-12, Paul was focusing on attitudes. He was saying to the strong that they were to receive the weak and not despise them. The weak brother was not to judge (Romans 14:3) those who were strong and had a greater liberty. We saw four reasons why we, the strong, should receive the weaker brother. I’m just mentioning them before we get down to verse 14. First of all, God had received them, verse 3. Secondly, God will help them to stand, verse 4. Thirdly, Jesus Christ is Lord, verse 9. They are going to have to answer to the Lord, not to us.

Fourthly, verse 12, we will give an account of ourselves to God. Tonight we see in our text that Paul moves from attitudes, receiving the weaker brother, to actions, not despising or causing him to stumble and fall by our actions. He moves from how the strong should regard the weak to how they should treat them. In a nutshell, Paul is saying to the strong that they should not offend or destroy the weaker believer in their faith in Christ (verses 13-23).

I want you to write these down if you're taking notes. There are four positive principles that we can apply in this relationship with one another about what is and is not acceptable in how we relate to one another in these gray areas. The first thing we do is live so as not to stumble others. That's the principle. The principle is: I live my life so that I will not offend you. I will not cause you to stumble, fall, or be offended; so I need to be thinking not of myself and my liberties but how I affect you. You might say that Christians do affect one another. The things we do, the way we act, our conduct, is going to have an influence on others. I want you to see this, verses 13-16. Follow with me in your Bibles.

Paul says, "Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather," it's really a play on words. Don't judge one another, but do judge yourself, "that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. 14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean." 15 But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat," or food, "for whom Christ died." By the way, the word "meat" is referring to food, but it most likely has the idea of meat. In verse 16 he says, "Let not then your good be evil spoken of." Go back with me to verse 13. Paul uses a play on words, as I pointed out, and tells us not to judge one another but rather judge ourselves. I'm not to judge you, but I am to judge my own heart.

In Matthew 7 Jesus says, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." A lot of people misunderstand what that means. That's talking about a critical, faultfinding, and you would use the word censorious spirit—a critical, censorious, where you're trying to censor people, tell them they're wrong, faultfinding, critical, judgmental toward other people. Jesus said if you do that then you're going to be judged as well. What we are to do is examine our own life and ask, "Are my actions or conduct, or the exercise of my Christian liberty (verse 13), putting a stumbling block or a skandalon, an occasion to fall, in my brother's way? Notice verse 14, "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself." What does he mean by that? He means that these are nonmoral issues. Food is not an issue of spirituality. Jesus said not what goes in your mouth defiles you but what comes out. You're not more holy because you only eat vegetables, and you're not more carnal because you eat hamburgers. Praise God for In-N-Out! Let's just thank Jesus right now for In-N-Out. Thank God. It doesn't have anything to do with your spirituality. Jesus said in reality what goes out of your mouth is what defiles you because that comes from your heart—from the heart the mouth speaks. If you want certain dietary laws, that's great. Go for it. Don't expect me to keep your rules for your standard of holiness. "If you want to be really spiritual, Pastor John, you won't go to In-N-Out anymore." I guess I'm just not as spiritual as you. Don't stumble somebody with your liberties. Be careful.

I'm hesitant to get into specifics, I did that last week, but one of those is alcohol—drinking wine or having a beer. I personally don't drink alcohol. I don't drink wine. I don't drink anything in any shape or form because I just think it's not healthy for you. It's not good for you. I don't think that it's good for you spiritually. It can bring you into bondage, but I can't turn to a verse or Scripture that says, "Thou shalt not drink wine." Some of you are saying, "Praise God! I'm so stoked I came tonight! I'm going to get the CD of this message already." I'm going to tell you right now, as far as I'm concerned, I wish the Bible said that. I wish there was a verse that said, "Thou shalt not drink beer, especially Miller Lite, okay?" Do you know how many times I've been introduced when I preach, "It's Miller time?" I've actually been introduced that way, but some Christians do that.

Tobacco is another issue. Can a Christian smoke a cigar? I don't smoke. I don't touch cigars, but the great prince of preachers, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, smoked cigars. In different cultures and places things change, but don't use your liberty to stumble someone. Be careful that if you exercise that liberty, it doesn't bring you into bondage. Ask yourself, "Can I do this and glorify God? Can I do this and will it stumble someone? Can I do this and will it help or hinder my walk with God?" The Bible does say that we should not be intoxicated. It does say that we cannot be drunk on wine wherein is debauchery. It is very clear. There are a lot of warnings and admonitions against drunkenness, and certainly drinking can start you down that path. I've seen a lot of Christians that have crashed and burned in their faith because they started in that liberty of using alcohol. They went down that path, and it was destructive for them.

Christians going to the theater to see movies and whether or not you can see an R-rated movie is another issue. We're doing the Q & A right now and just got a question about "Hacksaw Ridge." It's rated R, and can Christians go see that? What's the deal there? You can't find a verse in 2 Thessalonians, "Thou shalt not go see R-rated movies." "Oh, forget that—can't go. It's in the Bible." There are principles about what you think, see, and what you want your mind to be focusing on, and can I stumble or hinder somebody else? That's what we're reading about right now—live your life so as not to stumble someone else. We're not to be critical, judgmental, faultfinding, but we're not to be exercising our liberty with a disregard for how it may offend, stumble, or hinder someone else. Jesus said in Mark 9:42, "Whosoever shall offend," same word, cause to stumble, "one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were..." thrown off the end of the Huntington Beach pier—it says that in the Greek. So, if you cause a young believer to stumble by your liberty, you'd be better to dive off the pier and be destroyed because God is concerned about that. We ought to be walking in love not just our liberties to the casualty of other believers.

In 1 Corinthians 8:9, Paul said, "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak." In 1 Corinthians 8:13, he says, "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to stumble." When he says, 'I'm persuaded that there is nothing unclean in and of itself,' he's not saying that there aren't things that are sinful. He's saying in these gray areas of diet, days, and food (the areas that there is liberty in) there is nothing intrinsically sinful or evil in and of itself;

but to him that sees it as unclean, to him it is unclean. He will make that clear in a little bit. What he's talking about is if your conscience bothers you.

I mentioned alcohol and some other things, but there are believers here tonight (and I might be one with them) that feel Christians ought not to do that, but I have no authority to tell you what you should or shouldn't do unless it's black and white in the Word of God, unless it's in the Scriptures. I have my ideas of what is unclean, what I can or can't do, and I personally, not only as a Christian but as a pastor, live under stricter liberty for the sake of other people. Because of my position as a pastor, I don't want to exercise a liberty in any way that would cause someone to stumble or to be offended. Paul says, "Look, in and of itself, this food is not an issue. There is nothing in and of itself that is unclean." Remember when Peter was on that housetop in Joppa and God gave him the vision of the sheet come down from heaven with all these animals that, under Levitical law, were unclean; and God told Peter to get up, kill, and eat them. Peter said, "Lord, I've never eaten anything common or unclean." God says, "What I've cleansed that call not common or unclean." God was telling him that it wasn't really an issue as to eating these things. He was preparing Peter, of course, to receive the Gentiles at the home of Cornelius.

In verse 15 Paul says, "If thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably," or you're not walking in love. That's the principle. Walk in love—liberty but controlled by love—that you, "Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. 16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of." I want to point out how we can affect others, verse 13. We can stumble them. In verse 15, we can grieve them as well as destroy them, so think about that. Your actions can stumble, grieve, or destroy another individual. You need to be careful about where you go, what you do, how you act, how you conduct yourself, even the way you dress and the things you do. Don't just say, "Well, I don't care if it offends, stumbles, or is offensive to anyone, I don't care. I'm just going to do that. I know it's okay, and I don't care what they think." You're not walking in love. "Yeah but that's not fair, Pastor John, that I don't get to do what I want to do." Oh, that's too bad.

When you have children, you don't get to do what you want to do all the time, right? The more children you have the less you get to do what you want to do—I'm just encouraging you to have kids right now. You get married. It's you and your wife, and you can come and go, do whatever you want. Then the child comes and you have a carseat, a stroller, a playpen. I'm a beach guy. I remember when we had our kids and would go to the beach, it used to take four hours just to get from the car to the sand with all this stuff. I surf. I just grab my board, I go out and I know how to do that stuff. Then you have kids, you got a beach umbrella, stuff. It's like, "I don't even want to go to the beach anymore—let's just stay home!" Then you have two kids, and anywhere you go is like going across the United States. Then when you have three kids, anywhere you go is like going to the moon! Just to go anywhere, you know? And, around the house, you can't leave dangerous objects out anymore. Why? Because children don't know. They aren't discerning. You can't leave sharp things out. You can't keep your loaded shotgun on the dining room table. Your five-year-old might blow the wall out or something like that. You have to be thoughtful, "Oh, the kids might get that," or "that's dangerous," or "you've got to be

careful.”

I was thinking about that today. When we had kids learning to walk, they were falling and tripping. Our whole house looked like a padded cell. You know, it's cover the bricks on the fireplace, take the sharp objects away, and we actually got rid of almost all of our furniture. The whole house just looked like one big giant playpen so the kids could just bounce off the walls and everything. That's the price you pay when you have kids! It's funny. My wife and I are empty nesters now, our kids are all gone. We moved down here to Murrieta and we're redecorating our new house, getting new furniture. We saw a couch we wanted to buy, and the lady says, “Do you have grandchildren?” We said, “Yes.” “Well, you can't buy this couch.” We wanted to start crying. It's like, “What's the deal?” I lived in a playpen all my life now I can have nice furniture. Now I have grandkids and we can't do this. It's like, “Forget it! We'll just keep them outside.” You know, you sacrifice as a parent for the sake of the children. So, he that is strong ought to bear the infirmities of those that are weak. If you're a mature believer, a strong Christian, think about someone else. Deny yourself and be concerned about helping, loving, and not offending other people. Be a blessing, and don't be worried about disputing and arguing over these things that aren't issues.

Here's the second principle, and I want you to write it down as well; that is, we need to live as citizens of the kingdom of God. In other words, we need to have proper priorities and values. Let's not major in minors and minor in majors. Let's keep the main thing the main thing. Christians must have proper priorities, verses 17-18, look at it with me. He says, “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. 18 For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.” The kingdom of God is not about your diet and your days. It's not your food, and for the first time he mentions drink—diet, days, food and drink. That's not what the Christian life is all about. Even as Christians we become like the Pharisees who majored on the minors, forgot the focus on the eternal, and focused only on the externals.

I can get a little amped about this because I've seen Christians for so long argue, pick and quibble about the stupidest things. This is kind of an in-house teaching tonight, okay? I'm talking to Christians. I can call us stupid because I'm one of them. We argue about things that are just so silly like the Pharisees and the scribes. In Matthew 23, Jesus said they tithe their mints and their spices but they omit mercy and faith—the heavier issues of the law. Jesus said they're blind guides. They strain at a gnat and, while they're doing that, swallow a camel. Jesus was using humor there, by the way. He actually was using humor. I think people laughed when they heard that. So, here's this guy pouring his tea. He's straining it out because he doesn't want to get anything in there. He doesn't want a gnat to get into his tea because it's against the law to eat meat, so you can't have a gnat fly in your mouth! He's being very careful, but all the while he's swallowing a camel! He makes a big deal out of a little thing, and you're stumbling over something that's all the more greater.

Christians fighting over whether or not churches should allow Christmas trees. I've been around long enough that I remember in our church in San Bernardino the first time we actually

brought Christmas trees into the sanctuary at Christmas. Some of you might be thinking, "You're kidding!" No. I'm not kidding. People thought that I'd committed the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the Prophet, and the Lord was coming at any moment. "Pastor Miller has apostatized! He brought pagan trees into the sanctuary! You know, 'Ichabod' is going to be written over the door of the sanctuary." It's a tree! "Yeah, but it's demonic and we worship Jesus. We don't worship the creation." Then don't worship the tree. Do we really need to debate and quibble about this? Shouldn't we love each other and seek to evangelize the lost? What do unbelievers think when they come into a church and we're fighting over Christmas trees? This is no joke, it's true—a church split over whether to have Christmas trees or not. They actually started to drag the tree out of the sanctuary, and the other group grabbed the tree. They actually got into a big fight over the Christmas tree—tis the season to be jolly. You try to invite your neighbors to our Christmas Eve service and the congregation is duking it out in the foyer! It's like, "What's going on?"

There's another church that actually split over a disagreement about what side of the platform the piano should be set. Should the piano be on the left or on the "anointed" right side? It created a church split. I've seen churches split over how to baptize—face forward or face backwards. Don't fight over stuff like that. Walk in love, and think about other people. Don't quibble over these things. The kingdom of God is described here as righteousness, peace, and joy, notice the source—the Holy Spirit. Let's focus on those things. Let's focus on righteousness, living righteously, honoring God by holy living, and the righteousness of Christ that is given to us by faith. Let's experience His peace, and let's demonstrate His joy to the world. You know, joy is the flag flown high from the castle of your heart when the King is in residence there. A joyless Christian isn't very attractive. Try witnessing when you're all bummed out. (In a bummed-out voice) "Hey, you need Jesus right now." "Why? So I can look like you? You look like you've been baptized in lemon juice."

When we come to church we should make a joyful noise unto the Lord. We should have thanksgiving in our heart. Bring a friend next Wednesday night. I'm going to preach a message on all the reasons we should be grateful and what being grateful will do to our lives—an attitude of gratitude. We should have that and focus on that. Let's not argue and quibble over things that are not in and of themselves intrinsically sinful, wrong, or evil. Let's focus on the life of the Holy Spirit who brings us God's joy and peace and not major on food and drink. Let's not worry about making the outside of the cup clean. Let's have a right heart before God. Notice verse 18, "For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men." We should do it from our hearts as unto the Lord.

Notice the third principle, verses 19-21, is to live to bless and to build up others. I love the point he makes that basically what motivates us for life is that I want to be a blessing to others. Christians must learn to help, bless, and encourage others, verses 19-21. "Let us therefore follow..." or pursue, "...after the things which make for peace..." he just said the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but it's righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, so the application is let us follow after the things which make for peace, "...and things wherewith one may edify..." or build up, "...another." The word "edify" means to build up one another. "For

meat destroy not the work of God.” I believe this “work of God” is referring to the church of God—the people of God in His church. “All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence,” or he doesn’t have a clear conscience. He is weak in the faith and feels that it’s wrong and sinful for him because he doesn’t do it in faith. In verse 21, he said, “It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.”

If there is something that I’m doing that stumbles, offends, or makes someone weaker, I am not to do it. Both the strong and weak believer needs to grow. The strong needs to grow in love; the weak needs to grow in liberty. I want you to notice Paul’s three exhortations. In verse 19, make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Instead of bickering over doubtful matters, we should seek to maintain peace and harmony in the church. Christians forget about this. We don’t really strive to maintain unity, and we split and divide over nonessential things that aren’t important. Instead of stumbling others by insisting on your rights, you should strive to seek to build them up.

Secondly, I want you to notice in verse 20, do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. What he means by that is don’t divide the church. Don’t live in such a way that is detrimental to the work of God and destroy it for something that’s not important, nonessential. It’s not that big of a deal. May God have mercy on us. For all things indeed are pure, but to him that has a weak conscience it’s evil. We need to be careful that we’re living to build others up and to strengthen and encourage others.

Notice thirdly, verse 21, don’t do things that will stumble or make others weak. “It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.” If I go to a movie that offends you, and I do it anyway, I’m not walking in love. If I drink and I offend you, or if I do something that offends, if my conduct is offensive to you, then I’m not walking in love. Those that have the weaker faith need to not judge those who have greater faith, but those who have greater faith need to be loving, accepting, and patient toward those that are weak.

There are some times (and I know this creates tension) that some of you may be wondering, “What about people that are just real legalistic and you just can’t please them no matter what you do?” I’ve met people like that—you’re never good enough, holy enough, spiritual enough, clothes are never right, conduct is never right. A lot of times they’re judgmental, critical, and faultfinding. It’s just difficult—people that are so legalistic—but we need to pray for them. We need to be patient with them. We need to be kind, and allow them time, Lord willing, to grow. Remember the parent-child illustration.

When your kids are first learning to walk and they stumble, you don’t just say, “Okay, you fell down get out of here. You’re not my kid anymore. I’m finished with you.” You’re just stoked they stood up! Right? Remember when they first let go of the furniture? It’s like, “Aaaah! They’re standing!” You call everybody up, “My kid just stood!” Then they take one step, then two steps, and they start to walk. It’s so exciting, but you’re patient with them. You don’t get all depressed

and bummed out. "What's the matter?" "My kid fell down. The first time he ever walked he fell, so I just kissed it off." No. You're just excited and you're patient. You wait for them. Again, we that are strong need to bear the infirmities of the weak. We need to be patient with those that are weak and pray for them, but be careful we are not stumbling weaker Christians but are devoted to trying to build them up. It's a liberty, but it's limited by love. We need to be careful.

I want you to notice a little phrase there in verse 21. He says, "it's good." "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother..." or sister, "...stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." Why is it good? The word "good," by the way, could be translated "beautiful." Let me give you four quick reasons why it's beautiful to live this way. It shows that there is love among the brethren. Secondly, it shows that arrogance is gone. We're walking in humility. Thirdly, it shows that we're living unselfishly for others. Fourthly, it shows that we have a right sense of spiritual values and priorities. This is how we should live in the body of Christ. We should be living in love, humility, unselfishness, and have the right sense of priorities and values. There are things far more important in the church than what kind of carpet we have, what side of the stage the piano is on, whether we sing choruses or hymns, or whether we wear suits and ties. I got a call one time from a critic that was all freaked out because women wore pants to our church and because they had makeup on. He was freaking out! "I see those she-devils going in your church all painted up! Jezebels," he said. I thought, "What's he doing? Spying from across the street with binoculars or something?" They get all freaked out. Again, they are like Pharisees. They make the outside of the platter clean but inside it's full of dead man's bones.

When the Holy Spirit is working in a person's heart they start to change their conduct, attitude, and even the way they dress and live. These are sometimes cultural things. In different parts of the country people dress differently. Styles change. You know, if you keep your clothes, 20 years later you'll be 'in'. Have you ever noticed how all the cycles come around again? It's so crazy! Kids are getting back into the retro-70s thing. It's like, "Dude, come over to my house. I'll give you my clothes that I've kept. All the cool stuff that you think is so awesome right now, I still have that in my closet." Fashions and styles change. Don't make a big deal out of stuff that isn't important. Keep your values and priorities right.

Let me give you my last principle, verses 22-23, live with a clear conscience. Don't ever violate your conscience. Your conscience isn't the sole guide of what is right or wrong, and a conscience is only as good as it's enlightened by God's Word, but as you are sometimes influenced by others, you shouldn't ever do anything that you feel in your heart is wrong violating your own conscience. Christians must not force their opinions on other people either, verses 22-23. He closes by saying, "Hast thou faith..." are you strong? He is speaking to the strong, mature believers with greater liberty, "...have it to thyself before God. Happy..." or blessed, "... is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth." If you have this confidence that it's okay to eat or drink that, do this, wear these clothes, or listen to this music then great, but do it between you and God. Don't flaunt your liberty because it may be a stumbling block to someone else. Have it before yourself and God, doing it as unto the Lord with a clear conscience and it doesn't bother you.

To those that are weak he says, verse 23, “And he that doubteth..., so he that has faith, verse 22, is the strong believer with liberty. In verse 23, he that doubteth is the weaker believer that doesn't have as much liberty and is a little bit more legalistic, “...is damned...” and that's not necessarily eternally damned or the loss of their salvation. It just means that he's judged by his conscience, “...if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” If you're not doing it as unto the Lord with a clear conscience then it is sin for you. If, as a Christian, dancing is bothering you then don't do it. If going into that movie theater is bothering you then don't do it. If seeing an R-rated movie is bothering you, don't do it. You need to ask yourself, “Is having that glass of wine,” or whatever it might be, convicts you then don't do that. Don't violate your conscience. You always want to keep your conscience clear. Paul is saying, if you have faith or a conviction, have it between yourself and God. Let God and His Word be the basis for your conviction that something is right. Never act out of doubt; act only out of faith and conviction.

There are things in the Bible that are clearly condemned. Let's not confuse that. Don't go away from here tonight thinking, “Wow! This is an awesome teaching tonight,” and you head right for the theater to see a movie that is inappropriate. There are things in the Bible that are forbidden, and we need to be obedient to God's Word. We need to have a conscience that is shaped by that. There are things that are gray. There are things that aren't black and white, and we need to pray, hear our own heart and conscience, and we also need to look around. Is it a stumbling block to someone else? If another Christian sees me doing this will it offend or stumble them or hinder their walk with God? We need to be thoughtful in what we do.

Let me summarize what I've covered tonight with six points.

1.Limit your liberty by love so you will not stumble others. Remember we affect each other.

2.Make the kingdom of God the priority of your life. Focus on eternals not on externals.

3.Help others grow by building them up. Like being a parent, be a spiritual helper. Help people to walk. Help people when they stumble. Help people when they fall. Encourage, nurture, strengthen, and bless them. Pray and ask God saying, “God, help me to live for others. Make me a blessing to my spouse. Make me a blessing to my children. Make me a blessing to my grandchildren. Make me a blessing to the pastor. Make me a blessing to the people of my church. Help me to be a blessing to those I work with.” Have you ever prayed that? When you're going to work on Monday morning, and your all bummed out, just say, “Lord, make me a blessing to my boss, coworkers, and everyone. Lord, out of my life may Jesus just shine.” Why are you laughing? Probably because when you go to work you're like, “That stinkin job! They don't pay me enough. I'd like to beat my boss up, and lay hands on him in Christian love.” Instead of just saying, “Lord, make me a blessing. I'm going to work today and it's a mission field. I'm going to reach the heathen—the unreached heathens in my office. Lord, let me shine for You.”

When you come to church on Wednesday night, it's not just to sing songs and listen to the

Pastor teach, look around. Find somebody that needs to be prayed for, encouraged, and maybe to be given a holy hug and ask, "How you doing? How's your walk with the Lord? Can I pray?" If someone's downhearted or discouraged, stumbled or fallen say, "Let me pray for you." Give them a word of encouragement. Give them an exhortation. Build them up, comfort, and encourage them. Don't just think about yourself. Don't just live for yourself. Turn outward and think about others.

4. Don't force your convictions on other people. If you have a certain style of music you think is the spiritual stuff, great; but don't make me listen to it to meet your standards. Don't torture me. Don't foster your convictions on other people when it's not a moral issue or black and white in God's Word.

5. Be considerate. I draw that from verse 21 where it's good to do nothing that would cause other people to stumble. Be considerate about how this affects other people.

6. Be convinced, verses 22-23. Be convinced in your own heart, mind, and thoughts that what you're doing is spiritual, right, and before God you stand or fall, and one day you're going to give an account to God. If you're going into the theater and your conscience is bothering you and you feel convicted, but it's okay because you see the head deacons over there so it must be okay—don't do that. Get out of that theater. Don't participate in anything that you're convicted about or you feel is wrong. Don't let others force you into those things.

Paul is basically dealing with the need in the church for us to get along. Someone said, "To dwell above with the saints in love, that will be glory. But to live below with the saints I know; brother, that's another story." God help us to learn to love and to serve one another. Amen?