

The Gospel According to Paul: Romans

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Concerning Matters of Conscience (14:13-23)

Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve (krino – judge, make a decision) this, not to put a stumbling block (proskomma, [pros + kopto] – to beat oneself in lament or travail) or a cause to fall (skandalon – an object causing one to stumble) in our brother's way. ¹⁴ I know (oida – acquired knowledge) and am convinced (pepeismai, [from peitho] – to be persuaded) by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean (koinon – common) of itself; but to him who considers (logisomeno – to think or reason) anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. ¹⁵ Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil (blasphemeo – to blaspheme); 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 serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify (oikodomes – to build up) another. ²⁰ Do not destroy (kataluo – tear down) the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure (kithara - clean), but it is evil (kakon – bad, not good, evil) for the man who eats with offense (proskommatos – to feel travail). ²¹ It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended (proskopto – to feel anguish) ²² Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves (dokimazo – to test or

examine). ²³*But he who doubts (diakrino – to question, not be sure) is condemned (katakrito – to give judgment against, condemn) if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith (ek pisteos – out of faith) is sin (hamartia – failure to hit the mark).*

A Cause of Offence

Because we are all servants and none of us are lords in the community of believers, and because all judgment (*krisis*) has been given to Christ, we are not to judge/condemn (*krino*) one another (14:13a). Neither are we to behave in such a way as to become a stumbling block, nor should our attitude and behavior be offensive to our brethren (14:13b). It is very important that we understand the concept of “offense” - *proskomma* [*proskopto*], *beat oneself in travail*, vv 13, 20, [also other terms Paul uses with the same sense – *skandalon* (something that causes someone to stumble) v 13, *lupeo* (pain, distress) v 15, *apollumi* (ruined/destroyed) v 15, *proskopto* (to feel anguish) v 21.

In 14:14, Paul identifies with the "strong/mature" in faith in their reasoning (cf. 1 Cor 8:4f; 1 Tim 4:3-5), but not their attitude. It appears that those who had no taboos concerning meat were of the opinion that those who would not eat meat were at fault in their refusal to eat. Paul thinks otherwise; there is nothing wrong with eating meat, but if a person believes it is wrong, he should not be forced to do what he believes he shouldn't do. Even though it is not wrong to eat meat, the greater good is shown in not eating; if by not eating one demonstrates more concern for his relationship with his brother than for the exercise of his right to eat meat. Paul's point here is that the reign of God is clearly more manifested in showing love (*agape*) for one's brother than in the exercise one's rights (14:15-21).

Paul appears to be saying that there are things one may believe that are not essential to faithfulness to Christ. If he does not attempt to impose his belief on others, he may hold it without a disruption of fellowship with those who do not share his belief. This is only true, however, with beliefs which are clearly not essential beliefs (e.g., those having to do with the identity of Jesus and recognition of his lordship, etc.).

The Greek word for fellowship (*koinonia*) is from the word *koine* meaning "common." Fellowship results from what we have in common.

Within a community of believers the beliefs they have in common (*koine*) are what give them their fellowship (*koinonia*). There are certain beliefs essential to following Christ (i.e., beliefs that Christ himself would share with us as essential to true belief in and faithfulness to God). These are apparently not under consideration in Paul's discussion here in Rom 14 and 15.

Faith Grows Through Knowledge

Critical to this whole discussion is our understanding of faith or belief as something that develops. One goes through various stages of faith as he develops toward maturity. There are people of "great faith" (Matt 8:10; 15:28) and people of "little faith" (Matt 14:31; 16:8). In Luke 17:5, the disciples asked Jesus to "increase their faith." In Acts 16:5 we read of the churches being "strengthened in faith." Paul, in Rom 12:3, refers to the "measure" of one's faith, and in verse 6 to the "proportion" of our faith. In 2 Cor 10:15 and 2 Thess 1:3 he speaks of one's faith as "growing."

From these statements it appears evident that faith is something that grows or develops from one stage to another. How? One's faith grows through informing that faith and through living out our faith in our lives. The more substance or content our beliefs possess, the greater and more developed will be our faith. Paul says in Rom 10:17 that faith comes by hearing, which in his Hebrew thinking would be *shema*, (which, with a different vowel pointing, is translated, "obey"). In the Rom 10:17 context Paul is discussing messianic salvation, so "faith," he says, "comes by hearing and/or responding to the word or message of or concerning the Messiah." A biblical scholar and minister of Christ of the 19th century Restoration Movement, wrote concerning faith, "Faith is the acceptance of testimony, the more testimony, the more faith," (Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System*, p 93). The more our knowledge of God increases and the more of that knowledge we live out in our lives, the greater and more mature will become our faith.

The importance of knowledge in the development of faith can be seen in a number of Paul's letters. In Eph 4:11-13 he writes,

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹²to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be

built up ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

So also in Phil 1:9-11,

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God.

This is a major theme in Paul's letter to the Colossians, "And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God;" and in 3:9-11, "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." This same idea can also be seen in the writings of Peter. In 2 Peter 1:3-8, he says,

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. ⁵For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. ⁸For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In 3:18 he instructs his readers to, "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen."

Pursue Things by Which You May Edify

The word(s) Paul uses for this whole concept of growing in faith is

oikodemeo (to build or edify) and *oikodome* (edification). These words had a very special meaning and usage in the early church, especially in the letters of Paul. Both words are taken from the Greek verb *oikeo* – to build a house (*oikos* – something constructed or built). The words *oikodomeo* and *oikodome* give the more definitive concept of constructing, building up in the sense of strengthening or making a building stronger and more stable; and especially in the letters of Paul they communicate the idea of building up through instruction, to build up or strengthen one's faith.

We see *oikodomeo* (the verb) in Acts 9:31, speaking of the growth of the church in its earliest period, "Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified (*oikodomeo*). And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied." In 1 Corinthians 10:23, Paul writes, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify (*oikodomeo*)." Then in 14:3-5, in discussion of the value of prophecy over speaking in tongues, Paul says,

But he who prophesies speaks edification (oikodome) and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies (oikodomeo) himself, but he who prophesies edifies (oikodomeo) the church. ⁵I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification (oikodome).

In 1 Corinthians 14:12-17, he says that the gifts that provide instruction for the church are the more desirable,

Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification (oikodome) of the church that you seek to excel. Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. ¹⁴For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. ¹⁵What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. ¹⁶Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? ¹⁷For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified (oikodomeo, i.e., to build up through instruction – mwl).

Paul concludes his discussion of the more desirable spiritual gifts in verse 26, “How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification (*oikodome*).” In 2 Cor 10:8, in discussing his apostolic authority and his gifts, Paul says, “For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification (*oikodome*) and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed.” In 12:19, he says, “Again, do you think that we excuse ourselves to you? We speak before God in Christ. But we do all things, beloved, for your edification (*oikodome*).” Then in 13:10 he says, “I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification (*oikodome*) and not for destruction.”

Here in our Romans passage (14:19), he instructs them to, “pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify (*oikodome*) another.” The same instruction is found in 15:2, “Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification (*oikodome*).” This emphasis on building up through instruction is found throughout Paul’s writings. In 1 Thess 5:11, he says, “Therefore comfort each other and edify (*oikodome*) one another, just as you also are doing.” Perhaps, his most explicit presentation of this concept is found in his letter to the church in Ephesus,

*He who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things. ¹¹And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying (*oikodome*) of the body of Christ, ¹³till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a complete (*teleios*) man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying (*oikodome*) of itself in love, (Ephesians 4:10-16).*

Faith is a developmental concept. Our faith develops through stages of growth. We go from elementary levels of belief to more developed beliefs as we acquire more and more information (or “testimony” as Alexander Campbell called it). The more we live out of our beliefs and the more our beliefs influence our thinking and behavior, the more mature in faith we become. This whole developmental process is what Paul calls *oikodome* – edification.

Conclusion

In Romans 14:22-23 Paul says,

Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves (dokimazo – to test or examine).²³ But he who doubts (diakrino – to question, not be sure) is condemned (katakrino – to give judgment against, condemn) if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith (ek pisteos – out of faith) is sin (hamartia – failure to hit the mark).

Taken in context, his comments do not seem that difficult to understand. "The belief you have," says Paul, "have it between yourself and God." He then adds a warning against violating one's conscience. The one who believes it is wrong to eat meat condemns himself if he acts contrary to his beliefs. This is the meaning of *diakrino*, it is doubting or have questions as to whether it is right or acceptable to do something. If you are in doubt, don't do it. That isn't just the advise given by Paul, it's common sense.

Paul concludes these comments with the words, "That which is not of faith is sin." All he is saying here is that all actions we believe to be sinful are violations of what we believe is right, if we do them. We miss the mark (*hamartia* – sin) when we compromise ourselves. Our integrity, our honesty with ourselves, our belief in ourselves, and our self-respect is compromised and violated by doing what we believe is wrong for us to do. To violate one's conscience is to violate one's moral integrity, and this has to do with one's moral character, which is his touchstone or point of contact with God, man's Creator.

Paul's instruction is that one should always live in consistency with his beliefs; even if those beliefs are not well informed or fully developed in

terms of content and experience, one should, never-the-less, not do something he believes is wrong for him to do. To such a one, the yielding to that which is evil to him is a violation of who he is as a being created in the image of God. This is why it is *hamartia* – sin or missing the mark.

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