

OUR PRESIDENT, A MINISTER OF GOD
Romans 13:1-7

Intro: When you noticed in the Tableau this morning that I was going to talk about our President, I hope that you did not think that I had decided to become political, or that I was going to speak against our President (even though there is much that he stands for which I cannot agree with). I have a very exalted conviction regarding the ministry of the church, and therefore I am not going to do either of those things. The pulpit is for the ministry of the Word. It is not to campaign for the election of any candidate. We are to stand for the truth, but we do not blockade abortion clinics. We proclaim God's Word, calling sin whatever the Bible calls sin, but believing that our greatest responsibility as individuals toward our country is twofold:

- 1) To live godly lives so that the world can see what it means to be a Christian.
- 2) To pray for our leaders and for our country.

Last week, speaking on Mother's Day, you may remember that I mentioned that our homes in America are falling apart because most people don't know what the Bible teaches about the home — about the role of fathers, the role of mothers, and the role of children. After all it was God Who made us male and female with the capacity to produce children, but somehow we think that we know more than God does about what home life is to be. Consequently, we are ruining ourselves, and most people do not seem to be listening to those few voices which are trying to turn us to the Bible and to God for our answers.

The same is true of government. How many of our politicians do you think have even read Romans 13? And if they have read it, how many of them believe what is written here and are acting upon it in their work. What the Bible says about the leaders of government, needs to filter right on down to the person with the least authority in government.

So when I speak of our President as a minister of God, I am not speaking about our current President, nor of any in the past, but of the office of the President. The Bible is very clear about the role of government, just as it is about husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, parents and children. And we are reaping the tragic results today in our country of ignoring what the Word of God has to tell us.

The teaching of Scripture is timeless. It never needs to be revised because it is the Word of God. God never changes, and so His Word does not change. And in spite of what evolutionists tell us, people do not change. From Adam's time on

down to the present hour people of all nations and nationalities have been sinners. The number one human problem in every nation throughout human history has been S-I-N! The answers to man's problems in the past are the same answers that we need to know today. But we very foolishly and very tragically are ignoring God, ignoring Jesus Christ, ignoring the Word of God -- and we are all paying a terrible price for it. When you read about the terrible things that are taking place in our country today, think SIN! When you see pictures of those dead bodies lying everywhere and even floating down the rivers in Rwanda, think SIN! When you see corruption in government, think SIN! When you hear of broken homes for whatever reason, think SIN! When you hear of rebellious children, think SIN! The effects of sin are everywhere, but we don't call it sin because we don't want to have to admit that there is a God, and that we are responsible to Him!

Several years ago a man said to me, "Dwight, you are answering questions that people aren't even asking!" And he was right. But I am going to keep on preaching the Word because, by the grace of God, here and there God moves upon people's hearts and they begin to answer the right questions.

Today we are going to be talking about government -- government according to God.

Before we look at our text, let me remind you of the very active role which God plays in every government on the face of the earth. Daniel 2:21 tells us that the Lord "removeth kings, and setteth up kings." Daniel 4:17 says that "the most high ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men." God humbled the great king, Nebuchadnezzar, by making him live with wild asses and feeding him with grass like oxen until he learned one thing. He needed to know that "the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whosoever he will" (Dan 5:21). And long before Daniel lived, King Solomon wrote, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will. And as the children of Israel were returning from exile, Ezra wrote in Ezra 6:22 that the Lord "turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel."

Now you have to understand this, and the only place you are going to learn it is from Scripture. This does not mean that the men God set up are good men, nor that they do good things. Sometimes God gives a nation bad men as a judgment against them. But get this truth firmly fixed in your mind: There is not a nation on the face of the earth, never has

been, and never will be, that is not under the sovereign power and control of our sovereign, Almighty GOD! And whether you believe it or not, it is true. That is where we have to start in the interpretation of history. That is where we have to start in looking at the nations that are on the earth today. God is at work everywhere, and in every nation. Things may get as rotten as can be, but God is still on the throne!

This is what Paul said in the first verse of our text for today:

I. GOVERNMENTAL LEADERS ARE ORDAINED BY GOD (Rom. 13:1).

This means that they are appointed by God, however they may have come to power, and regardless of the type of government that a nation may have. If you looked at the funeral service for former President Nixon, you saw four living former Presidents who had been ordained by God for that position: President Ford, President Carter, President Reagan, and President Bush. And you saw our current President. As different as they were from each other and from the one whose funeral they were attending, they all were appointed by God for the time that they held that highest office in our country.

Note that part of the verse 1 which says, "**For there is no power** (no authority) **but of God.**" Paul made no exception to what he was writing. And it is good for us to remember that the Holy Spirit led Paul to write these words when he was living under one of the most powerful and most corrupt governments which ever existed: the Roman government with its Caesars.

Now instead of going straight through this passage, I am going to skip around, but hopefully will cover the whole text before I am through this morning.

And so let me make a second point, and this is my subject for today:

II. OUR PRESIDENT IS A MINISTER OF GOD (Rom. 13:4, 6).

This is stated three times in our text, twice in verse 4; once in verse 6. (Read.) Paul used one word for "minister" in verse 4 (both times), but he used another word in verse 6. Therefore, if we are to understand the office of our President, we must get acquainted with the meaning of these words.

The word that we used for "minister" in verse 4 is the Greek word, διακονος. It is the word from which we get our English word, deacon. But what, basically, does this word mean?

It is one of the NT words for a servant. Our Lord is called a διδάκωνος in Rom. 15:8. Rulers are appointed by God to be servants. But the question then must be raised, Whose servant? And the answer is to be found in his appointment. He obviously serves the One Who appointed him, and that One is God. He is not primarily a servant of the people. Nor is he to be a servant of his wife, nor of his political party, or those who helped him get into power. Every president or king or dictator or whatever his title might be is a servant of God! His first and greatest responsibility is to do the will of God himself, and to lead his nation according to the will of God.

How many of our Presidents do you think have assumed the highest office in the land with that in mind. How many governmental leaders throughout the world have this idea about their work? Every leader of every country has been appointed by God to do His will. And our failure to understand this, and to carry it out, explains why we are where we are today.

But what about the word that Paul used in verse 6? This is the word λειτουργος. This is a word that Paul used of himself in Rom. 15:16. (The first "minister" is this word; the second, "ministering," speaks of one who acts as a priest and who is concerned with holy affairs.) So this means that the president or king has work which is in the nature of a priest, concerned about his people and their relationship to God.

Now if he is to do this he cannot be a part of excluding Bibles from our schools, or forbidding teachers and students to pray in schools. The President ought to do everything in his power to get the Word of God into the hands of his people, and he must encourage them to know it, to believe it, and to obey it.

Now it is important not only for presidents to know this, but also for their people to know this. Then, if they vote for their leaders, they are going to be looking for people who demonstrate that they know God and are concerned about pleasing Him.

Now we want to know:

III. THE PRESIDENT'S CHIEF RESPONSIBILITY (Rom. 13:3, 4).

We looked at the word minister a moment ago; now let us look at the word good. (Read vv. 3, 4.)

What "good" was Paul talking about?

Well, the text leads us to only one conclusion: that which is "good" in God's sight. What people call good, is often bad -- bad for them, bad for their families, bad for the community, and bad for the country. There is only one basis upon which we can decide whether a thing is good or bad -- and that is what is good to God, or what is bad to God. If it is bad, it is sin, and is not only to be resisted, but punished. If it is good, it is righteous, and is therefore to be encouraged and rewarded.

What kind of guidance does God give us through His Word about murder? What kind of guidance does He give us in His Word about abortions? What kind of guidance does God give us in His Word about homosexuality? And there are multitude of other and similar questions that need to be asked. You see, a president needs to know these answers, and guide the people of his nation accordingly.

It is apparent from this passage of Scripture that the farther we have been moving from God and Christ and the Bible, the more we have been moving toward our own destruction. And the Bible gives us plenty of examples of nations that have done what we are doing, and today they are no longer on the map.

Let me mention two more points: one having to do with the President; the other having to do with us as citizens.

IV. THE PRESIDENT AND THE PUNISHMENT OF WRONGDOERS (Rom. 13:2-5).

We can gather from this long string of verses that this passage on government was written primarily for the Lord's people. And yet, at the same time, we see how the Holy Spirit through Paul was laying out the responsibilities of leaders in government.

The leader of a government is responsible not only to lead his people in the ways of God as revealed in Scripture, but he is responsible to God also to punish those who refuse to obey. Notice that Paul was speaking about punishment, not rehabilitation. There are some signs that we may be getting back to punishment in our country, but for years we have been working on rehabilitation -- and the failure has been colossal! The Bible teaches that the best form of rehabilitation, if it is to come at all, is through punishment.

Where does the Bible teach "three strikes and you're out"? What kind of insanity is it that gives a criminal three opportunities to commit crimes before we lock him up, or put him to death? Nations that are soft on crime have a crime

problem. And presidents who fail to take action against the wrongdoers, do themselves come under the judgment of God. It is still wrong to lie. It is still wrong to steal. It is still wrong to cheat. It is still wrong to commit adultery. It is still wrong murder. Things that are right, and things that are wrong, never change with God. Society may get soft on many things that God considers abominable, but a majority vote against God by a nation means absolutely nothing except judgment to come.

So if our nation fails to punish the wrongdoer, we are headed for greater trouble, and ultimately extinction.

Finally, the last point is this:

V. THE CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD HIS GOVERNMENT
(Rom. 13:1-5, and then 6, 7).

It can be expressed in one word: OBEDIENCE. And we all need to realize that what is called, civil disobedience, is just what it says it is: DISOBEDIENCE.

And let us not think for the moment of those times when we claim that we must obey God rather than man. Many people have taken that expression to do what is actually wrong in God's sight. In most cases (and there are exceptions) -- but in most cases, a Christian is not going to get into trouble if in his daily life he sincerely seeks to do what is right in God's sight. And let us remember this! Get the will of God straight in your mind to begin with. That is what is most important. If you and I are forced by our government to do what is wrong in God's sight, we can face that when the time comes. But Paul was concerned that we get the basic truths about government firmly established in our minds.

Now I must add one thing that none of us really likes. And you find this in verses 6 and 7.

If you are going to please God, you must pay your taxes -- federal, state, property, etc. And we need to give due respect and obedience to those who say that we have to license and insure our cars. Or that we have to have a valid driver's license. No one likes to pay taxes, especially when we know that there is waste and corruption in government. But the latter is not our main responsibility. Our responsibility before God is to be submissive and obedient to our government.

Concl: Now let me say two things in conclusion. I have said one of these before, but I want to repeat it. We all know that there can come times of persecution for those of us

who know the Lord, and we may have to face great difficulties if we were ever told that we cannot worship God. But, forget that for now. It is not a problem that we face in our country. We may someday, but we can face it then. The main thing for us now is to understand what God expects of our leaders, and what He expects of us as His children. Paul's words actually apply to everyone, but only a Christian is going to pay attention to what he told the church at Rome two thousand years ago.

The other matter of importance is this: Having gone through the book of Romans up to this point, we know that Paul was not saying that people will have their hearts changed by government. That will never happen. What he was saying was that sin can be restrained to a greater degree if presidents and kings and governmental leaders understand their responsibilities, and citizens understand what God wants them to do.

The only One Who can change people's hearts is the Holy Spirit, and He always does it by bringing people to Christ. When the Holy Spirit changes us through what Christ did when He died on the Cross, then we are changed. We are made new inside and out. May those of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ behave toward our government in a way that is pleasing to the Lord. That is the way the Lord may use us to awaken others to what their real need is. And if you are one who has never seen that your real problem is sin, and that only through Christ can your sin be forgiven and conquered, I hope that you have seen that today and that you will humble your heart before God and receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior today.

Our leaders need Christ. Our country needs Christ. Let us pray for our leaders and for our country that God will be pleased to turn the hearts of many to His Son for the forgiveness of sins and to be covered with the righteousness of God.

THE DEBT OF LOVE

Romans 13:8-10

Intro: We are in the practical section of the book of Romans in which Paul was describing how we as believers should live. There is much valuable information in chapters 12 through 15 which we all need to learn and follow. These are not the only chapters in the Bible which give us guidance as to how we are to live, but these are very important chapters -- and they happen to be the chapters which we are considering on these Sunday mornings.

But I want to remind you that in the Scriptures doctrine always precedes the practical exhortations. What we believe about God and about Christ determines how we are going to live and what our objectives are in life. And yet we continually hear professing Christians saying that they are not interested in doctrine; they are interested in practical matters. This is exactly the path that theological liberalism took several generations ago. What people believed about the Bible became secondary, or even farther down the line. What the Bible taught about God and about Christ and about the Holy Spirit, was set aside in favor a so-called unity. What a person did in life became more important than what a person believed, that is, what their faith was. And so good works and human achievement became the basis upon which people's lives were judged, not whether or not they believed the Bible, or believed in the Trinity, nor whether or not they were trusting Christ for salvation. That was all set aside, and good works were placed on the throne.

Now no one can be opposed to good works. But we need to know what makes works, the things that people do, good! What men call "good works" the Bible speaks of as "dead works." Even religious works, things done in church, can be "dead works." And "dead works" amount to nothing in God's sight, and He is the One Who, after all, will determine the value of the way we spend our lives.

In the last verse of Romans 14 we are going to learn that "whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (v. 23b). The prerequisite of good works is faith in Jesus Christ. Paul wrote in Eph. 2:8-10 that we are not saved by our works, but we are saved "unto good works," and nothing is considered "good" by God which is not done after a person has received the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior.

So when we speak of the achievements of some prominent person, or even a person who is not so prominent, we need to ask, "But does he know that Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior?" To do good works you must first of all trust Christ as your

Savior, and then the good that you seek to do will be those things which are good in God's sight.

We are a generation of people who have left God out of our lives. Most people are bored if you try to teach them something from the Word of God. We have all kinds of people who are trying to tell us today how to behave, but very few who tell us what we need to believe about God, and about Christ, and about what the Bible tells us concerning ourselves. We don't want to learn about how to prepare for life after death; we only want to focus attention upon life now. And so multitudes of people are working they way right into hell as fast as they can go.

Talking about leaving God out of our lives, Lucille and I had a most delightful experience on our flight to California for our granddaughter's wedding, and on our return. And I don't mind telling you that we were on Alaska Airlines. Our flight going down was during the noon hour, and the same was true of our flight back, and so the flight attendants served us delicious lunches both ways. But the thing that impressed us, and more than impressed us, (it was a blessing to us), was this: on our trays were little leaflets with a verse of Scripture on them. I have them here in my hand. One of them has on it Psalm 9:2 as it is translated in the NIV:

I will be glad and rejoice in you;

I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

The other has Psalm 107:1:

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;

His love endures forever.

I have already written to one of the executives of Alaska Airlines to tell him what a blessing those little leaflets were to Lucille and to me. I don't know who in the organization was responsible for that, but we were glad to know that everyone on that plane had a little bit of the bread of life along with the delicious chicken which was served us. And I want you to know that both of those verses contained doctrine. When you call God, the "Most High," that is doctrine. That is teaching. And when you say that "He is good," that is doctrine, that is teaching. If He is the Most High, then He is greater than I am, and greater than you are, and we had better start thinking about what is good in His sight, and not just be satisfied to have the applause of people.

Now I have said all of this because today we are talking about love. And if there is one thing that is misunderstood as much as anything else today, it is love.

Paul was addressing himself in these three verses of our text to people who have received Jesus Christ as their Savior. He was speaking to people who had been declared righteous before

God through the work of Christ on the Cross. He was speaking to people who have been born again, people who have eternal life, who are new creatures in Christ. He had explained in verses 1 through 8 what our governmental responsibility is. And the word for us in our relationship to government is to submit. Cf. Rom. 13:1. Romans 13:1-7 tells things about our government that most of our politicians don't even know -- that they are ministers of God! Now, as we come to verses 8 through 10 he is telling us things about our attitude toward others in the society in which we live. He was talking about what our Lord said was the second greatest commandment in the Law. You will see it here at the end of verse 9. (Read.)

But I would remind you that the first and greatest commandment is this:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,
and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

Now we can't talk about loving our neighbors as God wants us to love them unless we love Him first, and we can't really love Him unless we love His Son, and we can't truly say that we love His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, unless we are trusting Him as our Savior. You and I cannot understand what God means by love until we know Him, know His Son, and know His Word.

Now let us look at our text.

I want to do four things this morning, and I hope you can see these four things in our text. First, I want to give you a definition of love. Secondly, I want to explain to you our duty in connection with love. Thirdly, I want to give the description of love which Paul has given to us in verses 9 and 10.

First of all,

I. WHAT IS LOVE?

I was interested to see that this word "love," _____ and its verb, _____, are found seventeen times in Romans, beginning with Romans 5:5 and going to Romans 15:50. It is found nine times in the doctrinal section, (5:5, 8; 8:28, 35, 37, 39; 9:13, 25 [2x -- "beloved"]), and eight times in the practical section (12:9, 13:8 (2x), 9, 10 (2x); 14:15; 15:30). But you will find this distinction as you look at these verses: In the doctrinal section the emphasis is upon God's love; in the practical section it is upon our love as believers.

However, what does it mean? It means that the love of God causes Him to seek for us our highest spiritual good. And

when we are admonished to love each other as believers, and to love our neighbors, it means that we must do all within our power to seek their highest spiritual good. We as Christians are not to live selfishly for ourselves, making sure that we have all we want and that we are guaranteeing ourselves a good time in this life. No, we are always to seek the spiritual blessing of everyone we are in touch with at any time.

Paul was not talking here about the fleshly, lustful, degrading kind of love which is so prominent in the world. He was speaking of the outward display of the love which God has shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit -- which is the first mention of love () in the book of Romans.

This is the kind of love that a Christian young man is to have for the Christian young lady that he falls in love with -- and vice versa. This is the kind of love that a husband is to have for his wife. Cf. Eph. 5:25-28. This is the kind of love that brothers and sisters are to have for each other. This is the love that is to characterize our Christian fellowship with each other. Love does not mean that we let people do anything that they want to do, and that we are only concerned about seeing that their desires are met. It means that behind our affection for them is the same objective that the God has in His love for us. Cf. John 3:16. And also Rom. 8:38, 39.

Now all of this must be seen in the light in which the Apostle Paul presents it here.

II. OUR DUTY (Rom. 13:8).

We can actually say that we have a twofold duty expressed in this verse. The first is to pay our debts. Many things can nullify our testimony to others as Christians, and one of them is debt. If you are obligated to a person, and are not keeping up with your agreement with him, it is rather foolish to try to talk to them about him about the Lord, and his salvation. It is very doubtful if he will have much respect for you.

Everybody has to be persuaded in his own mind as to what this verse means. Some will take it as meaning that they can never buy anything on time -- and if you feel that way, that is between you and the Lord. But others feel that it means that, if you do buy something like a house or an automobile on time, then you owe what you are responsible to pay on any given month, and you must keep your payments current. Debt can be bad for any of us, and we must all live within our means. Remember that you have a spiritual obligation to the

person you do business with, and you can't meet that obligation unless you pay your bills.

And so keeping our finances in order is a major part of our Christian testimony.

We can pay off our bills, but there is one obligation that we can never fully pay. That is our obligation to love each other. And when Paul wrote that "he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law," he meant that this is one major purpose that God had in giving the Law originally. And it means that loving others means that we are concerned about God's will, doing what pleases Him so that we will be in a position to seek the highest good of others.

And now the Apostle gives us:

III. THE DESCRIPTION OF LOVE (Rom. 13:9, 10).

As you read verse 9 you see that Paul was quoting from the ten commandments given by Moses to the people of Israel. The first four commandments had to do with their relationship to God:

- 1) Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
- 2) Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.
- 3) Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.
- 4) Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

These all had to do with their relationship to God. The remaining six commandments had to do with their relationship with each others, and I am going to give them to you in the order in which they are found in Exodus 12 and Deuteronomy 5. Check it with how Paul wrote them out here in Romans 13.

- 5) Honor thy father and thy mother. (He did not include this).
- 6) Thou shalt not kill.
- 7) Thou shalt not commit adultery.
- 8) Thou shalt not steal.
- 9) Thou shalt not bear false witness.
- 10) Thou shalt not covet.

Contrary to what some might say, Paul was not saying that we are under the Law as a rule of life. Twice in Romans 6, verses 14 and 15, Paul told us that we are not under law, but under grace. However, in our text Paul was pointing out that the divine standards for right and wrong have never changed, and will never change. It was wrong in OT times to murder; it is still wrong to murder. It was wrong in OT times to commit adultery; it is still wrong to commit adultery. It was wrong in OT times to steal; it is still wrong to steal. It was wrong in OT times to lie; it is still wrong to lie. It was wrong in OT times to covet; it is still wrong to covet.

By all of these Paul meant that if you are violating any of these commandments, you are not only ruining yourself spiritually, but you are displeasing God and will face His judgment, but what is just as serious, you are not seeking your neighbors highest spiritual good. And, if you are not seeking your neighbors highest spiritual good, you are disobeying God and dishonoring Him.

Think of that in connection with murder, adultery, stealing, lying, and coveting. We don't have the time this morning to talk about all of the aspects of each one of these sins and the various ways in which they can be committed, but remember that they express the sinful tendencies which we all have and which we as Christians have to be on our guard against.

It is interesting to consider why Paul put adultery ahead of murder when he surely knew the order given in the OT. It may have been because adultery was a problem among believers in those days even as it is today. Obviously the Spirit of God directed Paul to do as he did because of needs the Lord saw in the lives of His people then. Sin in the Church is the greatest hindrance to the preaching of the Gospel that there is, or ever has been. Those who commit adultery do so in the name of love, but it is a perversion of love. It is a violation of the marriage relationship. And what is the worst, it is gross disobedience to the God we profess to love and serve.

The second greatest commandment speaks of loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. God has given us a love for ourselves, a desire to be happy, to have the best, to protect our lives, to have the commendation of men. It is silly for people to talk about teaching us to love ourselves unless they are going to tell us how to love righteousness and to hate iniquity. But as Christians our love for ourselves is manifested by a desire to be what the Lord wants us to be. If we love others the same way, then we are going to be living, not to harm others with our sins, but to live so that others will see the joy and peace that comes from knowing God and seeking to please God.

The Apostle summed it up perfectly for us in verse 10: "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

Who is my neighbor? I think that the dictionary gives us a good definition. My neighbor is my fellow human being. We speak of our neighbors as those who live close by. Are we seeking their highest spiritual good? But my neighbor is any person that I have any contact with in the course of the day. It includes the people we work with, the people we do busi-

ness with, the people we may meet when we travel. When the lawyer asked our Lord who his neighbor was, the Lord answered with the story of the good Samaritan. The Samaritan had never before met the man who had been beaten and robbed by thieves, but because he came along the road where the man was on the ground, wounded and unable to help himself, the Samaritan became his neighbor.

Concl: We have a duty as Christians to our government, to be submissive to authority and to be obedient to the laws of the land. But we also have a duty to our neighbors, not to sin against them, but to seek their highest good. And the primary way we can do that is by keeping ourselves from sin so that we will not have any obstacles standing in the way of our telling them about salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

My enemy is my neighbor. The members of my family are my neighbors. You, my fellow believers, are my neighbors. And let me close by giving you the first four verses of Romans 15 which give us the Lord's will concerning the concern that we should have for each other in the Lord -- my concern for you, your concern for me, and your concern for each other. If we truly love each other as we love ourselves, then we are going to remember that we have a debt of love toward each other that we will never fully pay, a duty to see to it that the influence we have on each other makes it more delightful for us to know the Lord and to walk in fellowship with Him.

A WAKE-UP CALL
Romans 13:11-14

Intro: The believers in Paul's day were clearly like we are today, and a passage like we have before us today is evidence of that. For two chapters here in Romans Paul had exhorted the believers in Rome concerning many things having to do with a holy life, a life that is pleasing to God. If we had the time today it would be good for us to read all of chapter 12 and the first ten verses of chapter 13. And then we should each ask ourselves, "Do these verses describe me and the way that I am seeking to live?" It is the easiest thing in the world to read these two chapters, put our Bibles down, and give no more thought to what we have read. Or it is just as easy to listen to these chapters being taught in our morning services, and then do the same -- go home and fail to give any thought to what we have heard. If we were not only doers of the Word instead of just being hearers, the condition of the Church today would be very different and much, much better than it is! The same was true in the first century church at Rome. And so we can see in these verses that Paul was sounding A WAKE-UP CALL to the church at Rome.

We do not need to assume from this that there was something scandalous going on in the church. It does not mean that the people were not attending the services of the church. They may have gone to church more often than we do. But it did mean that they were not really awake spiritually. They wanted to hear the truth, but the truth was not making any great changes in their lives. The people knew more about practical Christian living than they were actually practicing. And so Paul issued A WAKE-UP CALL to the whole church.

We can tell from Paul's words that he was deeply concerned about the church at Rome. He had never been to Rome at this point, but he knew many of the people who were there. His words were strong and urgent, and yet spoken in such a way that he was identifying himself with their needs. Notice his words:

- 1) "Our salvation."
- 2) "When we believed."
- 3) Three times he said, "Let us..."

And so he was not pointing an accusing finger at them while he excused himself, but he evidently felt that there were ways in which he also needed to be more awake than he was, more spiritually awake!

And his appeal to them was on the basis of a question we could and should ask:

- I. WHAT TIME IS IT? (Rom. 13:11, 12a).

We all live with time. Our lives are regulated by time. Even as you sit there in this service, you are concerned about the time. If we ever get our own church, we are not going to have a clock on the front wall where you can see it; it is going to be on the back wall where only I can see it. I had a pastor when I was young who used to say that he didn't mind if people looked at their watches while he was speaking, but that he didn't like it if they put their watches up to their ears to see if they were still running. So much for that.

If you will think about how your days begin, I am sure that you will have to agree that one of the first thoughts that enters into you mind in the morning is, What time is it? If you wake up during the night, you ask yourself, "What time is it?" And if you don't actually ask what time it is, you look at that clock beside your bed to see what time it is, and are relieved if you still have another hour or two to sleep before you need to get up. We all have watches which we wear every day. And, if you have loved ones in other parts of the States, or in some foreign country, you are always thinking about where they are in their day. What time is it for them? Just the other day I was in a store and a young lady came up to me and said, "Could you tell me what time it is?" And I was glad to tell her.

What did Paul have in mind as far as our text is concerned? It had to be more than what I have mentioned so far.

In these verses Paul was suggesting that we need to know what time it is in the plan and purpose of God. Actually everybody in the world is on God's time. What time is it according to God? If that were an important question two thousand years ago, how much more important it is today! What time is it spiritually? What did Paul have in mind?

Look at the last part of verse 11 and the first part of verse 12. (Read.)

What did he mean that our salvation is nearer than when we believed? What did he mean that the night is far spent, and the day is at hand?

We have learned in our study of Romans that salvation includes three things:

- 1) Justification -- when we were first saved.
- 2) Sanctification -- God's work in our hearts ever since we were saved as He works in us to make us holy.
- 3) Glorification -- when we are with the Lord and His work of salvation in us will be completed.

Paul was speaking here about the finished work. He was talking about the time when the Lord will come, we will be caught up into His presence to be with Him and to be made like Him. Paul didn't know when that time would be. He knew that the Lord could come anytime. And he knew that when the Lord does come, we had better be awake spiritually. We shouldn't be telling ourselves that we are going to be more faithful to the Lord some day, and more obedient to Him some day. But what we know now we ought to be doing, what we know now that we ought to be, we ought to do and we ought to be!

Look at those word, "knowing the time."

The word that Paul used for which is translated "knowing" is sometimes translated seeing! In other words he was saying that you can look around us in this world and see that the hour is late. The night of the Lord's absence is almost over, and the day of His appearing is soon to take place. How do we know this? How can we be sure that what we are seeing is evidence that the coming of the Lord is near?

Well, we know it from the Word of God. Please turn with me for a moment to 2 Timothy 3, and let me read a few verses to you—just the first five verses. (Read.)

The Lord didn't come before Paul died. Nor did He come in the generation that followed. Nor in the generation after that. Hundreds of years have gone by, and still He has not come. BUT HE IS COMING! And one sure proof of the reality of His promise is that after nearly two thousand years there are multitudes of Christians in the world today who believe with all of their hearts that the Lord is coming! God has not let this hope die in the hearts of His people.

We today are two thousand years closer to the coming of the Lord than Paul was!

But let us take the text as it was written then. "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." When were you saved? When did you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior? Well let me tell you something: You are closer to the coming of the Lord now, much closer, than you were then. We are even closer to the coming of the Lord today than we were yesterday. And we are closer to the coming of the Lord at this hour than we were when we got up this morning. With every tick of the clock we get closer to the coming of the Lord. And some day He is coming, and it may be today!

And so it is high time that we wake up and do what we have been telling ourselves that we ought to be doing. It is "high time" for us to obey what we are told to do in Romans

12 and 13. The night of the Lord's absence is almost over, and He will soon usher in the day when He comes to take us to be with Him.

We have to be concerned about this world in which we live, but we shouldn't be surprised at any of the evil which we see. This is nighttime for the world. The darkness has blinded people's eyes and hearts. They have no idea why they are here, nor where they are going. Overt sin is increasing at a rate so fast that it is destroying us, that is, the people of the world. If people are to be awakened out of their spiritual sleep, the Church of Jesus Christ must be wide awake, and we must refuse to go to sleep as we await the coming of the Lord.

Now I come to the second part of my message, and I want to answer the question:

II. HOW DO WE GET AWAKE, AND STAY AWAKE? (Rom. 13:12b-14).

Paul tells us four ways that we can tell if we are awake, and the same four ways to tell if the Church of Jesus Christ is awake. Let us look at what they are.

A. "Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness" (v. 12m).

Paul was speaking here of "the works of darkness" as the clothing which sinning people have on. I doubt if any of us here today would go out in the streets even at night with only our pajamas or night gowns on. But this is how he described a Christian who still is playing with sin. A Christian in sin is a sleep-walker, and worse than that. We need to "cast off" everything that has to do with the life people live who have never seen the light, and who only know the darkness of this world.

I was interested to discover that the Greek word translated "cast off" is the word that was commonly used for putting people out of the synagogue. When they were put out they were excommunicated. They were cut off. The leaders of the synagogue refused to have anything to do with them. It indicates that we need not only to "cease from the practice of them" (our sins), "but detest and abhor them, and have no more to do with them" -- so said Matthew Henry (VI, 471).

Is this how you feel about your sin? Or are you excusing yourself for doing things which you know are displeasing to God? If you are awake, you will "cast off the works of darkness." And remember that Paul said, "Let us" -- words which all of us need to notice.

But it is not enough just to get rid of your sins, as commendable as that is. And so we come to a second exhortation from the Apostle Paul:

B. "And let us put on the armour of light" (v. 12b).

There is a passage which is very similar to this in Paul's first letter to the church at Thessalonica. Paul was speaking of the coming of the Lord when he said what we find in 1 Thess. 5:4-10. (Read.)

I would also remind you of what Paul wrote in Eph. 6:10-20.

We are in a warfare, a spiritual warfare. And we live in a world of spiritual darkness which makes our situation that much more dangerous. But we need to make sure that we have on the whole armor of God. If we don't, we cannot possibly continue to have victory over sin. And I hope that you remember from Ephesians 6 that the armour and the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, have to be accompanied by prayer.

Many people try to put off their sins without putting on the armor of God, and then wonder why they keep going back to their sins. They have forgotten the armor of light, and all of it has to do with the Word of God.

But then Paul added a third exhortation which has to do with the way we live:

C. "Let us walk honestly as in the day, not..., not..., not..." (v. 13).

It is rather amazing that Paul wrote to believers as he did, and yet we have the evidence before us.

You will notice that the three times the word "not" appears in verse 12, they introduce a pair of sins. And these sins fall into three categories of sins which we have with us today:

- 1) Sins connected with drinking.
- 2) Sins of sexual immorality and promiscuity.
- 3) Sins of quarreling and jealousy.

It ought to be enlightening and a warning to us to see the last category put with the first two.

There is a sense also in which in this list the first leads to the second, and the second leads to the third. Drinking leads to immorality, and immorality leads to quarreling which often leads to murder.

To "walk honestly" is to live in a way that is becoming to a person who claims to be a child of God. That excludes drinking. That excludes sexual immorality in every form. And that excludes the strife which results from wanting to have what others have, or not being able to get what we want.

Paul would not have said what he did here if it had not been needed in his day, and it is still needed in our day. A Christian who drinks is spiritually asleep and needs to be wakened up. Parents often can be weak in this area until their children start to follow them, and get into sins of the flesh. The only safe way to go as far as sin is concerned is to have nothing to do with anything that is going to lead us astray, away from the Lord.

But the Apostle has given us in verse 14 that which sums up all that we need and is the most wonderful of his exhortations.

D. "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ..." (v. 14).

How amazing it is that the Apostle Paul could write such words, that it is actually possible for us to put on Christ! What did he mean?

It probably will take all of us the rest of our lives to understand these words as we should. But stating it as simply as I can, I believe that this is what Paul meant. He meant that we should spend our lives seeking to know our Lord and to increase in our fellowship with Him to the point that we become like He is.

It is our responsibility to understand that we need to be like Christ, but we also need to understand that He is the only One Who can make us like He is. Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse said about this statement, "Everything we need is to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans, Vol. 4, p. 159).

When Paul wrote to the Galatian churches he said this in Gal. 3:27,

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

We have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ, and so we have put Him on. This is what makes the Christian faith different from all other religions. It is a life of personal, intimate fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Teacher and He is our Example, but He is more than this. HE IS OUR LIFE! In Him we find the desire and the strength to become like He is. The Lord was never asleep spiritually. He never needed to be awakened. And the more we are like the Lord Jesus Christ, the wider awake spiritually we will be.

Concl: A few moment ago I referred to Dr. Barnhouse who for many years was the pastor of the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. When he preached on this passage which we have been considering today, he took as his subject, IT IS LATER THAN YOU THINK. I am sure that the Apostle Paul would agree: It is later than we think! If any generation of the Lord's people should expect the Lord momentarily, we are that generation. None of the Lord's people have ever been as close to the coming of the Lord as we are. Therefore, we ought to be more concerned about our lives than any generation before us has been. If the Lord should come today, may He not find us asleep as He found Peter and James and John in the Garden of Gethsemane. But may He find us wide awake, seeking to please Him, and longing that we should be like He is. That is the purpose of our salvation.

SAFEGUARDS FOR OUR FELLOWSHIP

Romans 14:1-12

Intro: The Apostle Paul did not use the word fellowship here in Romans 12, but it is obvious that the fellowship of the people of God with each other was what he had on his mind and heart.

He was concerned about certain differences that exist among the people of God which can cause our fellowship with each other to suffer. There were two things in particular that apparently had been a problem. One had to do with food; the other had to do with the observance of days. And both of these were carried over from the Law. The Law had much to say about food that could or could not be eaten, and it certainly had a great deal to say about days that had to be observed.

We need to remember when we read a passage like this that Paul was not speaking of things that were sinful in comparison with things that are righteous. Paul was always very strong in taking a stand against sin of any kind. He never would compromise on sin. But there are things that people do, or do not do, because they love the Lord. And because they become matters of such strong conviction, they are inclined to accuse others who do not agree with them as being guilty of sinning against the Lord. However, in the matters which Paul was talking about, the issue was not sin. It was simply a fact that Christians often have very strong convictions about things where sin is not the issue, even though they may feel that it is.

In addition, we need to keep in mind that Paul was not speaking of things that are good for us physically, or not good for us. He was not trying to be a medical doctor. We need to follow the advice of our doctors regarding food that we can eat, or shouldn't eat. And I am quite certain that the Apostle Paul would agree with that. But what Paul was speaking about here was food that some believers claimed would give us a closer relationship with the Lord.

The twelve verses of our text seem to be divided into three sections. The first, in verses 1 through 4, has to do with eating or not eating food. The second adds the observance of days, and from that point on Paul was speaking about both days and foods. This is in verses 5 through 9. In the last three verses, 10, 11, and 12, Paul was speaking of "the judgment seat of Christ," or as some of the better manuscripts have it, the judgment seat of GOD.

Let us consider what Paul had to say.

I. ABOUT FOOD (Rom. 14:1-4).

Paul addressed himself to those who were strong in the faith. And he exhorted them to receive those who were "weak in the faith."

You have these two classes in every congregation. There is nothing to be ashamed of if you are "weak in the faith" as long as you have not been in that condition for too long of a time. A person who is "weak in the faith" does not understand the truth of the Word of God as he should. A person is "weak in the faith" doesn't know the Lord and his ways as he should. A person who is "weak in the faith" is immature, and needs to grow spiritually.

The tendency is for the mature believers to look down on the immature believers. The tendency is for the mature believers to be critical of the immature, and to reject them. Paul said here that they needed to be received! But the reception of the weak by the strong has this limitation: it is not to be "to doubtful disputations."

By "doubtful disputations" Paul meant that differences in the fellowship that we have as believers are not to be settled by one side debating with another side. Our differences are to be settled by the Word of God. We are not at liberty to enter into dialogue about the truth. We need to ask instead, "What does the Lord say?" And the only place to find that out is in the Bible.

Now what, basically, was the problem? We are told in verse 2. There were those who felt that they could eat anything. There were others who would only eat "herbs," i.e., vegetables. And will you note that Paul identified them as the "weak."

However, it is clear that Paul was talking about believers, believers who were concerned about pleasing God. And yet their differences threatened the fellowship of the church. How was this problem to be answered? Paul gives several answers throughout the passage, and we come to the first in verse 3.

Again Paul addressed those who were strong first, telling them what they must not do. They were not to "despise" those who would only eat herbs. What does it mean to "despise" a person?

The same word is translated to "set at nought" in verse 10. The verb means to treat with contempt. Often it includes mockery. You despise a person when you ridicule him. You

treat him like he doesn't know anything, and doesn't amount to anything. This is what Herod and his soldiers did to our Lord, according to Luke 23:11, when mocked Him, put a gorgeous robe on Him and sent Him to Pilate. We as believers are never to treat each other this way.

But Paul also had a word for those who only ate vegetables. He warned them not to judge those who felt that they could eat anything. This meant not only that they were forbidden to criticize, but they were not to condemn.

The reason: "For God hath received him."

We are never going to settle all of the differences that exist among us as believers, but one thing we must never forget is that if God has received a person, if they are truly saved, we must not be in a position of rejecting them.

And then Paul went on in verse 4 to say more about the attitudes that we are to have toward each other.

Paul asked a question. And we are expected to answer that question. What right do we have to condemn another man's servant? Paul was speaking here of mere human relationships. We have no right to despise another man's servant and perhaps recommend that he be cast out of his master's service. That right belongs to his master alone.

In Prov. 30:10 we read,

Accuse not a servant unto his master,
lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty.

The master may not feel as you do about his servant. That is certainly the case with the Lord. This one who was eating herbs was doing so because he felt that he was pleasing God. And the Lord understands that although we often forget it.

But the most encouraging part of verse 4 is the last statement: "For God is able to make him stand."

One of the traits of a mature believer is that he will look beyond the immature and see the Lord Who is able to do all that needs to be done in our brother's heart to make him mature so that he will be able to stand.

Oh, if we could only see those three words in connection with our needs: "God is able!" Then we would more likely see those same words over the brother who still eats only herbs. Sin affects our fellowship, but differences such as Paul was discussing here ought to be the means of drawing us closer together. Let us look at what the Lord has done for us, and then we will be more inclined to believe that the Lord can do

the same thing for our brother who may not have the understanding of the truth that he needs to have.

Verse 5 brings us to another issue:

II. THE OBSERVANCE OF DAYS (Rom. 14:5-9).

As you can see in the latter part of verse 5, Paul did not leave the eating problem behind, but he added the observance of days.

I wonder if this problem did not arise over the keeping of the Sabbath. Surely if we were to continue to observe the Sabbath as the Jews did in OT times, or if the Sabbath had been transferred to the first day of the week, this would have been the place where Paul would have said so. But he didn't. Instead, he dealt with the observance of days in the same way that he did eating food, or not eating food.

Paul began by saying that "one man esteemeth one day above another." This surely had to do with the Sabbath question. There were those in the early Church who were inclined to stay with Saturday as the proper day for worship. There were others (who would have been in this same group) who were of the opinion that Sunday, the day our Lord was raised from the dead, was a Christian Sabbath. And probably there were still others who were disposed to refrain from their normal duties of the week so that they could devote the Lord's Day to the ministry of the Word, to fellowship with the people of God, and to the service of the Lord.

Then there were others who were inclined to treat every day alike.

In this case Paul did not indicate who was strong and who was weak. I would be inclined to say that the people who were inclined to treat every day alike were the weak ones if they made no special provision to meet with the Lord's people. On the other hand, if they really were intent on pleasing the Lord every day, and would also meet with the Lord's people on the Lord's Day, then that would be acceptable, too. It would mean that they were just as determined to please God on Monday as they were on Sunday.

And so it seems that Paul could see good things on both sides of this dispute—but also that this was another threat to true fellowship.

What was Paul's counsel?

It was this: "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own

mind."

It is clear that Paul did not feel that these problems could be settled by making this a part of the church by-laws or constitution. He believed that God works in each of our hearts, and that the Lord teaches us to take the Word and, under prayerful guidance, godly teaching, and meditation, come to the right decision.

The fact that Paul was talking about people on both sides of this dispute who really loved the Lord, is brought out in verse 6. (Read.)

It is hard for us to accept this in other people. We are so inclined to feel that we are right that it is hard for us to believe that people can do anything besides what we do, and the way we do it, and yet still love the Lord. But they do! And we need to remember this.

Look at verse 7. (Read.) Here Paul was speaking about the eaters, and the non-eaters; the day observers, and those who treated every day alike. And He made this statement with respect to all of us. What did he mean by this? What does it mean to live unto ourselves, and to die unto ourselves?

Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15 can help us:

For the love of Christ constraineth us;
because we thus judge, that if one died for all,
then were all dead.
And that he died for all, that they which live
should not henceforth live unto themselves,
but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

It may come as news to some modern day Christians, but the Lord didn't save us so that we could keep on doing what we want to do, making our pleasure the goal and object of our lives. We have been saved to live unto the Lord, to please Him, to do His will, to obey His Word, to glorify His Name. Remember Romans 12:1, 2. (Quote.)

Paul made a very interesting statement in 1 Corinthians 8:8 which certainly applies to the problems he was writing about in Romans 14. Listen to what he said:

But meat commendeth us not to God:
for neither, if we eat, are the better;
neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.

In that passage Paul was speaking about eating meat offered to idols. But the point is this: our love for the Lord is not to be judged on the basis of whether we eat, or don't eat, or whether we observe certain days, or don't observe them. Our love for the Lord is determined by WHY WE DO WHAT

WE DO? If we are doing what we do because we love the Lord, and want to please Him, that is what counts. If we are weak and immature, the Lord is able to bring us to maturity. But if we know the great liberty that we have in Christ, we need to be careful that it does not become an occasion for our flesh to take over, and to make critical of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul was not excusing unfaithfulness, nor was he encouraging weak believers to stay that way. But he was concerned about the fellowship of the saints. He was showing how we can be in fellowship with each other even though we are at different stages of spiritual growth and maturity.

I must close with verses 8 and 9. We will get the last three verses of this passage next week, the Lord willing. But verses 8 and 9 were spoken about all of us who are the people of God. There are no distinctions here. Regardless of where we are spiritually, this applies to each one of us.

What applies? Listen as I read these verses to you again.
(Read.)

One thing can be declared about all of us who are saved: "We are the Lord's." We belong to Him. Nothing more amazing is ever stated in Scripture: "We are the Lord's." We don't deserve to be His, but we are! And we will never be anything else. "We are the Lord's." Let those words sink down deep into your soul.

Illus: Dr. Mitchell saying that he could not understand why Lucille would marry an old stick like I am. And he was right! But I am the Lord's. That is grace -- grace for me, and grace for you!

He is not only our Savior, but He is our Lord. He not only died to save us from sin's penalty, but He lives to save us from sin's power. So that whether we live, or whether we die, it is all to be "unto the Lord"! It is His pleasure that we seek. We delight in doing His will. Nothing should please us more than the opportunity to glorify and to magnify Him. This is why He died. This is why He arose from the dead. And this is why He continues to live -- "that he might be Lord both of the dead and living."

Lazarus was raised from the dead, but he died again. The Lord Jesus not only was raised from the dead, but he was "revived"! He lives, and He will never die! That is our security; that is our hope.

Concl: As I close, can I ask a question which all of us need

to answer. "We are the Lord's," but can people tell it by the way we live? Can our families see it in our lives at home? Do the people we work with realize that there is something different about us even though they may not know what it is? They ought to be able to. And young people, this is not something that starts a few years from now. If you belong to the Lord, your life should be different right now. Seek to please the Lord in all that you do, and you will never regret what you have done.

Joseph was probably in his late teens when Potiphar's wife tempted him to sin with her. Day after day she tempted him. Finally one day she thought that she had him, but his answer to her was this: "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9b).

Illus: Mom's words to me when going out with my friends:
"Remember Who He is to Whom you belong."

"We are the Lord's." Let us ask God to give us the grace to live for Him, and when it comes time to die, to die for Him. This is what pleases the Lord, and this is where you and I will also find our greatest joy and blessing. Don't forget those words, "We are the Lord's."

And remember that the point of what the Apostle Paul was saying is that our fellowship needs to be guarded with great care. Not only is it true that "we are the Lord's," but it is also true that our fellow-believers "are the Lord's." We are not to compromise with sin, but neither are we to make food or days the basis of our fellowship in Christ. We must be firm where the Scriptures are firm, but in other things we are to show grace and to live so that all of us will be edified in the Lord Jesus Christ.

AN APPOINTMENT WE MUST KEEP
Romans 14:10-12

Intro: It is very clear from Scripture that God is greatly concerned about the lives of His people. Faith in Christ is always accompanied by a transformation in a person's character, as well as in a person's behavior. The primary purpose behind all that we do as Christians is to please God. However, sometimes our convictions become the basis of contention with each other, and then our fellowship is threatened. And, as Paul has shown in the first part of chapter 14, sometimes we are inclined to major in things that are not clearly defined in Scripture, such as what we are to eat, and what and how we should observe certain days. Because of these differences, believers are inclined either to condemn each other, or to consider another person's convictions as worth nothing at all.

It seems very likely, as I expressed last week, that these problems arose out of the Old Testament when the Jews observed their feast days, their Sabbaths, and where it was clear that there were some things they were not to eat, as well as things which they could eat. Only gradually does it seem that believers realized what it meant that the people of God were no longer under the Law.

So it seems that it is right to say that the problems that Paul had been discussing in the first part of chapter 14 could be labeled as Jew versus Gentile problems.

As we go on in the chapter we are going to see that Paul taught that these things were not the basis of their fellowship. If a person felt that the Lord wanted him to eat only herbs, those who disagreed with him were not to criticize him, but to grant him that liberty. In the same way, if a person felt very strongly about the Sabbath, and how it should be observed, the others were to leave him alone. The important thing was for each Christian to be fully persuaded in his own mind. See verse 5. And where a person's convictions were due to his immaturity, the stronger ones were to remember that God is at work in all of our hearts, and that the Lord would bring the weak to maturity in Christ.

Paul was not talking about sin. There can never be any compromise with sin regardless of where a person may be in his spiritual growth. Paul had made it very clear in chapter 13 that it is still wrong to commit adultery, kill, steal, lie, etc. But what food we eat, and what days we observe are in a different category. The important thing for each of us to remember is that we are to do what we do because we want

to please the Lord Who is our Lord!

(Re-read verses 7 through 9.)

Today I want us to consider verses 10, 11, and 12. They have to do with the coming judgment of believers before Christ. It is called in verse 10 of the Authorized Translation, "the judgment seat of Christ." There are MSS, however, which have the judgment seat of God. We don't have to concern ourselves with this difference because 2 Cor. 5:10 speaks also of "the judgment seat of Christ," so we must assume that Christ is the Judge, but He is judging on behalf of God. In John 6:22, 23 we have our Lord's words regarding judgment. This is what He said:

For the Father judgeth no man,
but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:
That all men should honour the Son,
even as they honour the Father.
He that honoureth not the Son
honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.

But let us look at the text.

The first thing we have in verses 10 through 12 is:

I. PAUL'S REBUKE OF BOTH THE STRONG AND THE WEAK (Rom. 14:10).

Paul rebuked the church by asking questions.

Matthew Henry paraphrases the questions in this way, and I am going to update Matthew Henry's English so it sounds like we would say it today. Here is the paraphrase:

Why do you who are weak
judge your brother who is strong?
And why do you who are strong
set at naught your brother who is weak?

It seems from Paul's question that both sides were in the wrong. The weak were condemning the strong like they were judges pronouncing a verdict in a court of law. The strong were inclined to scorn the weak, and to act as though the weak were nothing, nor did their opinion amount to anything. So neither group had the right attitude, and the fellowship of the believers in the church at Rome was seriously threatened.

Now Paul asked these questions, introduced with the word why, because, as he went on to say, **"For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."**

It is important for us all of us, whether weak or strong, to do all that we can to get along with each other. Paul will get into that as we go on in the chapter. But the one thing that we always need to keep in mind is that the important thing about all that we do and all that we say is, is it pleasing to our Lord. Our primary responsibility in everything that has to do with our lives is that we must please the Lord. He has to come first. And the only way that we can know that we are pleasing the Lord is by what God has revealed for us in the Scriptures.

And we need to remember that another person's disobedience toward us does not free us to be disobedient toward them. By our salvation we are obligated to please the Lord even though no one else is pleasing Him. But this is not a legal obligation; it is a loving obligation.

It is good for all of us to keep this in mind. We must never say, "If he does what he is supposed to do, then I will do what I am supposed to do." Or, "If she does what she is supposed to do, then I will do what I am supposed to do." We must always be committed to do what pleases the Lord even though someone else may be taking advantage of us. We are going to stand before Christ, and we do not know when that will be. Therefore, as with everything that has to do with the coming of the Lord, we must be ready at any time.

"The judgment seat" in NT times was a slightly elevated place in public where a judge sat, and where people came before him to be judged. It is often referred to by the Greek word _____. This means judgment seat. We read in John 19:13 that our Lord stood before Pilate's judgment seat. Paul in Acts 18 and 25 was brought before Roman judgment seats (and, without doubt, on many other occasions also). Paul simply states this as a fact in verse 10.

But let us go on now to verse 11. Here we see:

II. THE CERTAINTY THAT WE WILL STAND BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST (Rom. 14:11).

Here Paul brought forth as his proof of what he had said in verse 10, the evidence from Scripture itself. He quoted Isa. 45:23. In Isaiah's prophecy it reads like this:

I have sworn by myself,
the word has gone out of my mouth in righteousness,
and shall not return,
That unto me every knee shall bow,
and every tongue shall swear.

Several things are important for us to understand about this

verse:

- 1) The Lord said, "I have sworn by myself." In Heb. 6:13 where the Apostle was speaking of the promise of God to Abraham, he said this about God: "Because He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself." Whenever God swears to anything, we can be sure of its certainty. Have no doubt but that we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. This has come from the very mouth of God. And so Paul was only repeating what God had said.
- 2) Not only did the Lord say it, but a part of His oath was that He would never change what He had declared. He said that the word had gone out of His mouth, "and shall not return."
- 3) The final part of the oath was that it would include everybody: "that unto me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear." Those who stand before the Lord will honor him, and will certainly tell the truth.

Paul must have also had this passage in mind when he wrote about the exaltation of our Lord in Phil. 2:9-11, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him..." It surely had to be one of the moments of our Lord's greatest humiliation when He was brought before the judgment seats of men. But it will be one of the times of His greatest glory when men come before Him and are forced to submit to His authority.

I think it is possible that both the Isaiah passage and the Philippians passage go beyond the Romans passage and what we are going to look at in a moment in 2 Corinthians. Paul was not trying to distinguish between judgments in Romans and 2 Corinthians. He was simply pointing out that God had sworn, and would not change His mind, that all of us as believers will stand before our Lord at His judgment seat.

So have no doubt but that you will be there, and I will be there, too.

Now the last point in our text for today is this:

III. WHAT WE WILL DO AT THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST (Rom. 14:12).

We are not going to report on our brother or sister; we will be there to give our Lord an account of ourselves.

I have been speaking about a 2 Corinthians passage; now I would like for you to turn there with me. The reference is 2 Cor. 5:10. (Read.)

When I was teaching the Gospel of John in the Tuesday Bible Class, we had several opportunities to notice the word must.

It is a translation of the Greek word _____. We learned that the Apostle John, often quoting our Lord, or John the Baptist, used this word to speak of a divine appointment. It often speaks of something that is established by the decree of God, and which cannot be changed. For example, when our Lord told Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). Our Lord said in John 3:14, "And as Moses..., even so must the Son of man be lifted up." In John 3:30 we learn that John the Baptist said, speaking of our Lord, "He must increase, but I (must) decrease."

Now in 2 Cor. 5:10 we have this word must. "For we **must** all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." This is AN APPOINTMENT WE MUST KEEP. We will be there when the Lord intends for us to be there -- not earlier, and not later!

But is this judgment to decide whether or not we will be received into heaven? No! Our salvation is not the issue; it will have to do with our works. Our salvation is absolutely secure, but the Lord wants to here about our works, "whether it be good or bad."

Several years ago I was studying this passage. I may have been teaching 2 Corinthians at the time. But I looked into the meaning of the word "bad." It is not the common Greek word for evil, or sinful, but a word (_____) which primarily means of no account, or worthless.

Archbishop Trench is recognized as one of the great NT scholars of the nineteenth century. For many years he was professor of NT Exegesis in King's College at Oxford. He was also the Dean of Westminster from 1856 to 1864, and in his later years was the Honorary Archbishop of the Church of Ireland in Dublin. Let me give you what he had to say about this word _____. He was discussing three Greek words which could be translated bad or evil. Here is what he said:

But there are words in most languages, and _____ is one of them, which contemplate evil...not so much [as] that either of active or passive malignity, but that rather of its good-for-nothingness, the impossibility of any true gain ever coming forth from it... This notion of worthlessness is the central notion of _____...which in Greek runs successively through the following meanings,--light, unstable, blown about by every wind ...small, slight...mediocre, or no account...but still bad predominantly in the sense of worthless (Synonyms of the New Testament, pp. 317, 318).

This definition of "bad" ties in perfectly with what Paul

said about the judgment of our works in 1 Cor. 3:10-15.
(Read.)

Good works are those works which please God, works which are based upon the ways of God as we see them in the Word of God. That which is done according to the ways of men, and that which is done for the glory of men, will be considered "wood, hay, and stubble" in the day when we stand before the Lord to give an account of our works.

Wouldn't you hate to stand before the Lord in that day to talk about the food that you ate, or about what you did, or did not do on certain days? What about all of the gimmicks that some are using today to get people to come to church -- contemporary music and drama and athletic games of various kinds? But what is even more subtle, what about the purpose that we might have to make a big name for the pastor, or to make the church large so that we might be able to boast that we have the biggest church in town?

Ask the Lord to examine your heart, and I must do the same, to see if we are guilty of being occupied with "wood, hay, and stubble," instead of "gold, silver, and precious stones." We are going to talk to the Lord about these things some day, and therefore we need to make sure that we are on the right track now.

Concl: What about the doctrine which we teach? Are we honoring man, or are we honoring God? Are we afraid to talk to people about sin? Are we appealing to their so-called "free will," or do we witness with our confidence that the Holy Spirit will use the Word to bring conviction of sin, and to grant them unto eternal life.

All of us are in danger of building upon Christ with "wood, hay, and stubble," and it behooves each one of us to make sure that we are not spending our time with a lot of works which are going to be burned up in the day when we stand to give an account of ourselves to the Lord. How much better it will be to have our arms full of crowns which we will be able to cast at His feet, giving Him all of the glory for using us and keeping us occupied with the things that really matter to Him.

Remember the verse:

Only one life, 'twill soon be past;
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Frances Havergal was gifted by the Lord to write hymns in such a way that she expressed the feelings that we all have toward the Lord. She wrote one hymn, and it is in our hymnal

(#494) in which she was speaking of our service to the Lord.
Let me read two verses from that hymn as we close -- the last
two verses:

Jesus, Master, whom I serve,
Though so feebly and so ill,
Strengthen hand and heart and nerve
All thy bidding to fulfil.
Open thou mine eyes to see
All the work Thou hast for me.

Lord, thou needest not, I know,
Service such as I can bring;
Yet I long to prove and show
Full allegiance to my King.
Thou an honor art to me:
Let me be a praise to Thee.

May the Lord make these words the prayer of our hearts, and
then answer our prayer that we may spend our days here on
earth doing His will, and bringing glory to His Name.

GODLY CRITICISM

Romans 14:13-18

Intro: For the past two Sundays we have been speaking about criticism -- the criticism of believers directed against each other. Like any other church, there were strong believers in Rome, and there were weak believers. Among the strong there were those who were some who were strong, others who were stronger, and then those who were the strongest. The same thing could be said about the weak. Some were weak, others were weaker, and then there were those who were the weakest. There are all degrees of strength or weakness among us the Lord's people.

The weak were inclined to "judge" the strong, and the strong tended to "despise" the weak. We saw this in verse 3. And Paul told them that they were both wrong, and that their criticism should stop immediately. They were having trouble over what foods they could eat, or not eat, and how certain days, presumably the Lord's Day, should be observed.

The last we saw in this chapter, going down through verse 12, was that Paul reminded them that each believer is going to have to give an account of himself to the Lord. We are not going to stand before the Lord about someone else, what he or she did or did not do, but we are going to stand before the Lord to talk about ourselves. See verse 12.

This brings us to our text for today -- verses 13 through 18. And here we come to a principle of Christian living which is very important. Paul indicates here that all of us will have our hands full if we will only practice:

I. SELF-CRITICISM (Rom. 14:13).

We are all inclined to be specialists in criticism. This is one of the many things which sin has done to us. When Adam was questioned by God about the forbidden fruit, Adam was not only critical of Eve, but he was critical of God. You will remember that he said to God, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (Gen. 3:12). In other words, he was saying that Eve was to blame, and that he was not, and that if God had not given Eve to him, the whole thing would not have happened. And so ultimately God was to blame.

We had a reference to man's tendency to be critical of God in Romans 9 when Paul was discussing election. Paul was discussing God's sovereignty in salvation, and that He had chosen to have mercy upon some, but not to have mercy upon others. People had often objected to the doctrine of elec-

tion saying that God had no right to find fault, then, with those who did not believe. Here was Paul's response to that criticism of God as stated in Romans 9:20:

Nay but, O man, who are thou that repliest against God?
Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it,
why hast thou made me thus?

You see, when you criticize Scripture, you are criticizing God! The Scriptures are His Word, and the doctrines of Scripture are His doctrines. It may strike you as unfair for God to choose some for salvation, but not everybody. But that is because you don't understand God. He didn't have to do anything about our salvation. But when He decided in eternity past to do something about it, He had every right to do what He decided to do, and we have no right to sit on judgment against Him.

The Bible is full of illustrations of man being judgmental against man, or against God. Cain was critical of Abel, and so he killed him. Joseph's brothers were critical of Joseph, and so they sold him into slavery. Aaron and Miriam were critical of Moses, and God judged Miriam with leprosy. Saul was critical of David, and that made his life miserable. Haman was critical of Mordecai, and that led to Haman's death on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.

Criticism is a part of human nature. We see it everywhere in the world. We surely need to be discerning. The Bible warns us about being fools. But criticism is another thing, and it is especially harmful among believers. And Paul absolutely forbids it. He indicated that they had been critical, but they were to stop it immediately and never do it again.

But then he went on to say this: **"But judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way"** (Rom. 14:13b).

What did Paul say here? He said that since we are all going to stand before the judgment seat of God, or Christ, we must quit judging each other, and quit it immediately never to do it again, and turn our critical eye upon ourselves. The implication here seems to be that our brother, or sister, might be different (in a good sense) if you and I were behaving different toward them.

Paul was not saying that we should go around feeling that we never do anything right, and that the world is worse off because we are here. But he was indicating that we always need to make sure that, inasmuch as it is possible by the grace of God, our lives should be examples which others would do well to follow.

This was the burden of David's prayer in Psa. 19:14, "Let the words of my mouth..." This is what he had in mind also in Psa. 139:23, 24, "Search me, O God..." This is what we are to do when we come to the Lord's Table according to 1 Cor. 11:28,

But let a man examine himself,
and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

In 2 Cor. 13:5 we read that Paul said this to the Corinthian church:

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith;
prove your own selves.

WHAT SO OFTEN HAPPENS IS THAT THE PERSON WHO IS SO CRITICAL OF OTHERS IS FAILING IN HIS OWN LIFE TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT NOBODY WANTS TO BE LIKE HE IS. WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT ONE OF THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVES EACH ONE OF US HAS BEFORE US IS THAT OUR LIVES ARE TO BE EXAMPLES FOR OTHERS TO FOLLOW, NOT STUMBLINGBLOCKS WHICH BECOME A HINDRANCE TO THEM.

What is a stumblingblock?

It is anything that a brother or sister in Christ might stumble over which keeps them from being what the Lord wants them to be. And so Paul was saying that the person we are critical of might be different if we were different. Paul was not assuming that we are responsible for all of the failings of other people, but he was saying that what we are, or what we say, or the way we act, may be a problem to someone else. I am sure that there have been times in all of our lives when we have been a stumblingblock to others. And it is painful for us to think about those times. And we need to be careful that this does not continue.

You see, Paul was saying here that we need to be careful about two things:

- 1) About being critical of others.
- 2) About being stumblingblocks to others.

Sometimes in violating one of these things we are guilty of the other.

Our Lord was speaking about criticizing others when He spoke the words which are recorded for us in Matt. 7:1-5 and Luke 6:37, 41, 42. Let me read the Matthew passage to you.
(Read.)

David's prayers in Psa. 19 and Psa. 139 indicate that we may be guilty of sin or be a stumblingblock to others when we don't know that we are. That is the reason that we need to examine ourselves, and that the Lord will aid us in our search, to make sure that we are not, even unconsciously,

doing anything that will prove to be a stumblingblock to others.

If we are to "judge" anything, we are, first of all, to question it. Then we are to decide if it is clean or unclean, which means acceptable or unacceptable to God. If it is unacceptable, we, of course, are not to have anything to do with it. But even if it is acceptable, we need to think (which is a part of judging) whether or not it might be a stumblingblock to someone else.

Now let me ask you to do this. This passage is not going to help us unless we do what the Lord tells us here that we should do. And we don't do this just once, and then forget all about it. This is something that we need to be doing constantly. We need to make sure that our good is not coming across to people as evil. See v. 16.

To help us arrive at a right decision, the Apostle Paul gives us his conviction on this subject:

II. THE APOSTLE PAUL'S CONVICTION (Rom. 14:14, 15a).

For him to say, "I know, and am persuaded," us a very strong statement. And we need to remember that these are the words of an apostle speaking under the direction of the Holy Spirit. They mean that he understood what he was saying, and that he was convinced it was the truth of God. He was presenting what he had to say as the truth!

"There is nothing unclean of itself." This is a statement that we need to take in its context. He was not saying this with regard to everything. If he had, he would have been saying that there is no such thing as sin. Paul would never have wanted his words to be taken in that way. There are many things that are unclean in themselves -- lying, stealing, coveting, adultery -- these, and many other things like them are unclean in themselves. Paul was talking primarily about what we eat (as the following verses show).

He probably was speaking of eating meat which originally had been offered to idols. It was sold in the marketplace, and there were those who felt that if you ate such meat, you were participating in idolatry. I think I mentioned last week that the Apostle Paul got into this subject again in 1 Corinthians 8. And there he said that we are not better if we eat it, nor are we worse if don't eat it. See 1 Cor. 8:8.

Now I take this as being the truth of God, and I believe that the remainder of our text shows that it is the Word of God. But there is something else that we need to keep in mind when

considering such a thing as eating meat, and, especially, about eating meat offered to idols. And the second part of this verse is just as important as the first. It is this: a brother (and we assume he meant a weaker brother) does feel that it is unclean. And because he feels that way, it is unclean to him.

Now let me give another word of caution: Paul was not saying that truth is relative, that is, that it means one thing to me, but it can mean something else to you. No, that is not what he was saying. He was talking about the conscience! An immature believer is seeking to please the Lord, and he feels that he cannot do that and eat meat offered to idols. We must not encourage him to violate his conscience, that is, to go against it. Such encouragement can prove disastrous to anyone IF he goes against his conscience. We can seek to enlighten him through the truth, but if he changes his behavior, it must be because he has seen the truth, not because he has been encouraged to go against his conscience.

Now if this weaker brother is "grieved" because we eat that meat, we are not walking in love -- and this is what we need to do.

In Ephesians 5:1-17 we have a lengthy discussion of what it means to walk in love -- what it means, and what it does not mean. If our actions are misinterpreted, then the weaker brother will be distressed, will be made sorrowful, because he thinks that we are displeasing the Lord.

Now for the moment, don't think of some of the problems that could come us, or some of the exceptions. Think about the principle that Paul was establishing here. We need to walk in love toward each other, which means that we need to be seeking the spiritual good, the highest spiritual good, of all who are our brothers and sisters in family of God.

In the remainder of the text which I have chosen for today we have:

III. PAUL'S PROHIBITIONS FOR THOSE WHO ARE STRONG IN THE FAITH (Rom. 14:15b-18).

A. The two prohibitions (vv. 15b, 16).

The first has to do with the weaker brother; the second has to do with the stronger brother.

1. "Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died" (v. 15b).

All of the more reliable recent translations retain the word "destroy" in this verse. Now we know that if Christ died for a person he will finally be saved; that it is impossible for a person who is truly saved ever to be lost. This is a statement of particular redemption. And the thought is, that since Christ died for this brother because of His love for him, how can we afford to act in any way toward him but in love -- that which would advance his growth in the Lord?

The Greek word which is translated, "destroy," is the same word which is translated, "perish," in John 3:16, 17. And it seems correct to say that in most cases the verb speaks of the loss of eternal life, or eternal damnation. But this cannot be the meaning here in Rom. 14:15 because of Paul's use of the expression, "for whom Christ died."

It is the word which is used in Luke 15:24 to describe the prodigal son. He was "lost," or had gone astray. This could be the meaning here. When the Lord Jesus spoke of "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," this is the word that He used for "lost."

We have the same thought in 1 Cor. 8:10, 11:

For if any man see thee which hast knowledge
sit at meat in the idols's temple,
shall not the conscience of him which is weak
be emboldened to eat those things
which are offered to idols;
And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother **perish**,
for whom Christ died?

So, although a weak brother cannot lose his salvation, he can be led astray by a thoughtless older brother. Paul used strong language here to show us how seriously he considered such a thing if and when it happened. And he wanted to impress the Roman church with its seriousness, too.

But there is another thing that Paul told them not to do:

2. "Let not your good be evil spoken of" (v. 16).

It is good to know that "there is nothing unclean in itself" (v. 14), but the good can become evil in its effect if a weaker brother misinterprets what the stronger brother does, and it leads the weaker brother away from the Lord and into sin. We need to keep our lives above reproach, and not let our liberty become an occasion for our flesh, or for anyone else's flesh. Cf. Gal. 5:13.

But I must hasten on to close.

Paul gave two reasons for his two exhortations:

B. Two reasons for the Apostle Paul's exhortations
(Rom. 14:17, 18).

1. "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (v. 17).

Spiritual life and growth is not measured by the food we eat, nor by what we drink. We are concerned about weightier matters: "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."

And the reason "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit are better, is because they are pleasing to God, and this is what is pleasing to God and that which really has the approval of people. Eating and drinking does not make us acceptable to God. Nor does it give us peace with God. Nor does this result in joy in the Holy Spirit. As a person advances in these three qualities of life and character, there is always growth and an advancement toward maturity.

But there is a second reason for Paul's exhortations:

2. "For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men" (v. 18).

Notice that Paul spoke of the way we live as serving Christ. And the way we serve Christ must of necessity be pleasing to God. Therefore, how we live is not a question of what pleases me, or of what pleases you, but of what is pleasing to God. And we find that what is pleasing to God also has the approval of the people we desire to please, especially the people of God. Although even unbelievers have to approve of the kind of things which are pleasing to God.

Concl: So instead of being critical of each other, we need to be critical of ourselves. This is GODLY CRITICISM. And we do it, not only that we might please God, but that we might a blessing to those who will follow us in our fellowship with Christ, growing up into Him.

We also must be assured that a life that is pleasing to God is the live that will be the most powerful witness to the people of the world.

LEARNING TO LIVE FOR OTHERS

Romans 14:19-23

Intro: When we first began to consider Romans 14 I mentioned that this chapter has to do with fellowship -- not primarily the fellowship of believers with God, but the fellowship of believers with each other. But we soon learn that there were some strong differences between the believers in Rome which were a threat to their fellowship. Basically it was because there were some believers in Rome who were spiritually mature, but others who were immature. They are described by Paul as the strong, on the one hand, and the weak, on the other.

Actually Paul did not use the word strong until the first verse of chapter 15, but it is certainly implied throughout chapter 14 that there were strong believers in the church at Rome. But weak believers are mentioned in 14:1, 2, 21, and, finally, in 15:1. (The word translated "weak" in 15:1 is different from the word Paul used in chapter 14, but the meaning of the two words is basically the same.)

Now obviously the weak brothers and sisters need to become strong, but Paul was concerned that the strong believers would not act in such a way as to make the weak believers even weaker. And so, while he told the weak not to judge the strong, and the strong were not to despise the weak, yet the problem had to do with how fellowship could be maintained in spite of the differences.

As long as a believer is weak, the strong must do everything to keep from being a stumblingblock to the weaker brethren. And yet, at the same time, the strong must seek to strengthen the weaker brethren in the truth so that the weak would become strong.

And so as we come to verse 19 the Apostle Paul set before all of the believers two objectives:

I. TWO OBJECTIVES FOR ALL BELIEVERS (Rom. 14:9).

These apply to the weak as well as to the strong. They are:

- 1) To seek peace always.
- 2) To seek to edify each other.

Both groups are responsible before God to seek these two objectives. It is not a one-sided matter.

- A. The first objective: "Follow after the things which make for peace" (v. 19a).

All of them, whether weak or strong, "have peace with God

through our Lord Jesus Christ." Christ bought our peace with God at Calvary. But we all need to aim at maintaining peace with each other.

Actually the word "follow" is a very strong word. It means to pursue peace. We aren't just to be thankful when we have it, but we must actively do all that we can to get it, and then, once we have it, do all that we can to keep it.

The writer of the book of Hebrews used this word in Heb. 12:14 where we read,

Follow peace with all men, and holiness,
without which no man shall see the Lord.

The Apostle Peter used it also in 1 Pet. 3:11 where he was instructing the believers to "seek peace, and **ensue** it."

It is clear that if the weak are trying to convince the strong, and the strong are trying to convince the weak, both are following a course which is destined to fail, and they do not have their sights set on peace. This did not mean that they could not discuss their differences. It simply meant that it must always be with a view toward peace, and not further contention.

But let me repeat: Every believer, whether strong or weak, is to pursue peace.

The second is this:

B. "Follow after the...things whereby one may edify another" (v. 19b).

No believer is so strong that he does not need to become stronger. And so the weaker brethren were to seek to make the strong, stronger. And the strong were to do everything possible to make the weak, strong.

What a lot of trouble we would be saved in the church if we would only remember these two exhortation. We need them both. Either one along has the potential for causing further difficulty. If we seek peace without seeking to edify, we can easily be guilty of compromising the truth. On the hand, if we seek to edify without being peaceful in doing it, it will only cause deeper divisions. How wise God is in what He has told us to do! If we discuss our differences in the right way, and for the right purpose, we can help each other, not cause a greater division.

Edification is a word which describes one of the main reasons for our fellowship with each other. The main purpose of our fellowship is, of course, to worship and glorify God togeth-

er. But edification must never be out of our minds. This ought to be one of the main reasons that we come to church. We need to learn. We need to grow. We need to become more like the Lord. And these things are true of every single one of us. We can be very intent on arguing our case so as to convince the other person, the weaker brother or sister, that we are right. But, if that is our motive, we can cause more trouble and do great damage to our fellowship. The person who merely wants to win an argument will soon find that other people will seek to avoid him.

The last four verses of the chapter are addressed to the strong. That is confirmed by the first verse of chapter 15. (Read.)

II. TWO EXHORTATIONS FOR THE STRONG (Rom. 14:20-23).

We had two objectives for all believers (to seek peace and to edify each other); now we have two exhortations for the strong:

- 1) Verse 20a -- "For meat destroy not the work of God."
- 2) Verse 22a -- "Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God."

In the first Paul was concerned about the way a strong believer might do damage to a weaker believer. In the second Paul was thinking about how a strong believer should handle his faith. Now let's examine Paul's words.

A. The first exhortation: "For meat destroy not the work of God" (vv. 20, 21).

The last part of verse 20 and all of verse 21 go with this first exhortation.

Notice how Paul described the weaker brother: He is "the work of God."

We often forget this. We see a brother who feels that he can't eat pork, or that he has to religiously observe certain days, and we forget that he is "the work of God." The Lord may have a lot to do in his life, but he has a lot to do in all of our lives. Isn't that right? But wherever he is right now, he is there because of what God has done in his heart. Paul told the Ephesian church, "We are his workmanship..." (Eph. 2:10). A Christian is not self-made; he is God-made! And wherever we are in our spiritual growth, it can truthfully be said of all of us, that we are "the work of God."

Years ago I heard a very dear Christian man give an illustra-

tion about a building which perfectly illustrated what we should remember about a weaker brother, and also about ourselves. Some of you have heard this, but I trust the repetition will be helpful.

The man was Dr. Bach who at the time was the General Director of The Evangelical Alliance Mission. He saw a sign outside of a building which was being erected, and it said this:

Under construction, open for observation,
but don't pass judgment until the job is finished.

Dr. Bach said that sign described every Christian.
(Explain.)

But let's go back to our text.

Now we can't actually "destroy" that work. Once God begins a work in anyone's heart, He is going to continue that work until it is finished. Cf. Phil. 1:6. And when God's work in any of our hearts is finished, no one will be able to criticize anything about us! No, we can't "destroy" it in the sense of causing him to lose his salvation, but we can hinder it, or we can sidetrack a weaker brother or sister by encouraging them to act against their conscience.

We had that same word "destroy" back in verse 15. In fact, we considered that verse just last Sunday. And you may remember that the root of this word is the same which is used of the "lost," prodigal son in Luke 15. And although in some passages it is used of destroying, or perishing, yet the meaning here is of causing someone to go astray. That is what we don't want to do! And that is the reason for what Paul said in verse 13. I hope you have been thinking about that verse all week. Maybe the person we are critical of wouldn't be like they are if he or she had a better example in us.

But notice Paul's explanation.

"All things indeed are pure." By that he did not mean that it is all right for you and me to go out and get drunk. He was saying that the OT restrictions on food no longer are in effect. As we learned from 1 Cor. 8, you are no better if you eat, or if you don't eat. That is not the way spiritual life is judged. But remember! If a person considers it to be wrong, it is not only wrong for him, it is SIN! And you and I must never be guilty of causing a weaker brother, or sister, to act against his conscience because then we are encouraging him to sin.

Our consciences are a very important part of our being. It

is a regulator that is put in each one of us, and we must not violate it. It is not enough to let our conscience be our guide, unless God has enlightened our conscience. But the Apostle John has given us this word about our consciences:

Beloved, if our heart condemn us not,
then have we confidence toward God (1 John 3:21).

Have you ever heard someone say something like this: "My heart just won't let me do that." What is that person saying? He is saying that his conscience won't let him do it, that he has convictions against whatever it is.

Paul said that this weaker brother loves the Lord, and wants to please the Lord, but maybe the Lord hasn't taught him all that He has taught you. So be careful that you don't encourage him to violate his conscience.

And so Paul said in verse 21 that even for you who see no harm in those things, and can do it with a clear conscience, don't do it for the sake of your weaker brother because, if you do, he might start the practice of ignoring his conscience, and begin to do what others do.

But now let us consider the second exhortation.

B. The second exhortation: "Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God" (vv. 22, 23).

This question is directed to the strong believer. "Hast thou faith?" This means, do you have the faith to understand that you can eat food that was once forbidden under the Law? If so, keep it. Don't go back on it. But if you don't do certain things that you could do under grace, then remember that God knows, and He understands why you aren't eating those foods, and He is pleased! We don't have to explain even to the weaker brother why we don't eat. The main thing is that we are not putting a stumblingblock in his way. He has to come to the faith that we have. Until then I don't want to cause him to fall by encouraging him to do something which he still feels is wrong. If he doubts, then he should not eat, because (and here is a definition of sin) "whatsoever is not of faith, **is sin!**"

Concl: How important it is for us to know where our fellow believers are spiritually, so that we will not push them ahead of where they are and cause them to sin by violating their consciences.

What Paul taught in this chapter he stated very clearly in his defense before Felix, the Roman governor, in Acts 24. The charge which was against him at that time, a false charge

did not involve other believers, but it was concerned with his behavior in the temple, and toward the Jews. He could easily have told the people that the Jewish leaders were false teachers, that they were not preaching the Gospel, and that the Temple was no longer God's dwelling place. But he didn't do any of that! He did preach the resurrection of the dead and a coming judgment. But he had not defiled the temple in any way. And then this is what he said:

And herein do I exercise myself,
to have always a conscience void of offence toward God,
and toward men (Acts 24:16).

Paul did not major in minors, but he majored in majors. He knew that there were things which he had a perfect right to do, but which, if he did them, would offend weaker believers. And so he did not do them because he would be encouraging them to sin. The work of God in their hearts would be hindered because he was exercising his liberty.

I had a friend in Seminary whose father was a Jew; his mother was a Gentile. But Ray himself worked a great deal with Jews. One day he told me that he never ate ham, nor bacon, nor would he pork roast. When I asked him why he said that it because he didn't want to be a stumblingblock to the Jewish people he was trying to reach. He could have eaten any of that with a clear conscience, but he didn't want to introduce the issue of food into his relationship with the Jews because that might keep them from seeing their need of Christ.

A Biblical illustration of the strong and the weak: Abraham and Lot — Genesis 13:5-18.

There are many ways that these things apply both to believers and to unbelievers. But I want to close by asking, Are you learning to live for others, that is, learning to live so that you can be a blessing, a help, to them, rather than being a stumblingblock? Of course there are things that we as Christians can't do, places we can't go, words we can't use. I repeat: Paul was not speaking about sin. He was speaking about avoiding issues which would keep people, whether believers or not, from seeing the real issues as far as the Gospel is concerned, or as far as the Christian life is concerned.