

Romans (14:19-21)

Act Humbly, Not Stumbly

Part 83 – September 24, 2006

ROMAN REFRAINS



Chapter fourteen can be divided into two refrains:

- A. [We must] Refrain from condemning one another.



Because of the range of perspectives and predispositions, we must have the right *attitude* toward each other. I shouldn't just endure you, I should accept you! I must be careful not to use *my* personal preferences (on disputable matters) to gauge *your* spiritual legitimacy.

Two refrains: We must refrain from condemning, and ...



- B. [We must] Refrain from offending one another.

Because of the range of backgrounds and "baggage", we must be sensitive to the issues of fellow believers. I shouldn't just accept you, I should accommodate you!



Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block ... in your brother's way.

– *Romans 14:13 NIV condensed*

I want to be a "stepping stone" instead of a "stumbling block". Therefore, I must not only graciously allow other believers to hold different views on disputable matters - I must be willing to *restrict* my religious freedoms for their spiritual welfare.

- This is love over liberty – and it warms God's heart.

And this is where we'll pick it up today:

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. – *Romans 14:19-21 NIV*

Why is so much responsibility put on the *strong* believer? Let's face it; the weak are going to stand *alone* before God without excuse.



There's an old saying that goes: The shepherd must pace the flock to accommodate the weakest lamb. – *Anonymous*

Q: Why do we get upset if a pregnant woman smokes and drinks?

A: Because she's potentially harming a vulnerable baby human; which in turn, brings distress and sorrow back onto the mother.

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification (14:19)

A. Some believers are weak in knowledge. (1 Cor 8:7a)

They might be ignorant of liberties the Lord allows; or maybe the pendulum is swinging back from a self-indulgent lifestyle.

B. Some believers are weak in conscience. (1 Cor 8:7b)

They might have a legalistic background, and their conscience is violated by freedoms that don't bother other believers.

C. Some believers are weak in will power. (1 Cor 8:10)

They might be struggling to break an addiction, or afraid they might fall back into one.



The stronger must make sacrifices for the weaker. It's implied throughout that the weaker believer's lack of strength (in knowledge, conscience, or will-power) is *temporary*. The weaker believer must grow in wisdom. The stronger believer must grow in love.

Paul's not looking for muttering martyrs! He's recruiting investors who will happily contribute to God's works in progress.

Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food (14:20a)

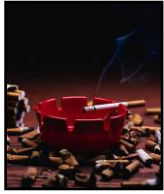
Jesus sacrificed His *blood*, and surrendered *infinite freedoms*. And He's inviting us to sacrifice and surrender our two-cents worth of freedom to assist Him in the completion of His children.

The next statement: "All food is clean" has been taken grossly out of context by some who say that believers don't need to observe *any* limitations on *any* substances that we put into our bodies. We can quickly balance this with Paul's words to the Corinthians:

Everything is permissible for me – but not everything is **beneficial**. Everything is permissible for me – but **I will not be mastered** by anything. – 1 Corinthians 6:12 NIV

Everything is permissible, but not everything is **constructive**. - 1 Corinthians 10:23 NIV

So, even though all substances can serve useful purposes, and none are inherently evil, we should consume with common sense.



Here's a rule-of-thumb for what to put into our bodies:

- A. Substances that are beneficial
- B. Substances that are not addictive
- C. Substances that are not destructive



I'm not picking on smokers ... I guess I should've used the French fries!

We should avoid substances that are not only destructive to ourselves but destructive to others as well.

All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble (14:20b)

Q: What if someone with an *eating disorder* sees me buying fries?

Q: What if someone with a *drinking disorder* see me buying a bottle of cooking wine?

And it doesn't stop with food and drink:

It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall (14:21)

Anything?! Anything that causes someone to stumble?! Cause that's a lot of things! That covers a lot of ground! What if an alcoholic sees me enter a bar just to get change for a parking meter and they misunderstand and are influenced by my actions?

Q: People have foot-fetishes; do I need to always wear shoes?

Q: Wait! People have *shoe*-fetishes; should I wear hip-waders?

Q: Is there a fetish for hip-waders? Wait, don't answer that!

Let's try to narrow this down a bit. First, let's remember who this "someone" is. It's the weaker "brother" (i.e. believer) Paul is writing to believers who *know* each other - who know each other's sensitivities and issues. (*We* know their issues - eating meat sacrificed to idols, and observing holy days.)



The Lord doesn't want paranoid people watching over their shoulder trying to read the minds of phantom weaker believers to decide if allowable actions will trigger a sin. Believers are not expected to read minds. Our freedoms and liberties are just that!

So, that's the "someone"; now let's see what it means to "cause".

Paul's readers were *arguing* and *pressuring* weaker believers to follow their example without regard to whether or not it would cause the weaker believer to violate their conscience. The sin of the stronger Roman believer was their *insensitivity* to the recognized vulnerability of the weaker believers.

- We're expected to be sensitive to *known* vulnerabilities.

If a jay-walker steps in front of my car and I hit 'em, *they* get charged with a crime. But if I see 'em in time to swerve, and I still hit 'em ... *I* get charged with the crime.



- We're called to *swerve* and protect.

When a vulnerable believer comes in between me and my freedom, I'll do what it takes to safeguard their faith.

Q: But how do I know if I'm causing someone to stumble, or if I'm just being judged and rejected by an offended believer?

In Romans, chapter nine, Paul calls Jesus a stumbling block!

They **stumbled** over the "**stumbling stone**." As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a **stone** that causes men to **stumble** and a **rock** that makes them **fall** ..." - *Romans 9:32b-33a NIV*

Q: So why does Jesus get to be a stumbling block?!

In the New Testament, the "stumbling block" or "stumbling stone" term is employed in two different senses: When the verb is *active*, it means: To give offense - remember when Jesus told His disciples that He'd be crucified?

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." - *Matthew 16:22-23 NIV*

In this instance, the fault is charged to the one who puts the stumbling block in the path of another.

But when the verb is *passive*, it means: To take offense. This is what Paul was describing in Romans, chapter nine. In this instance, the fault is charged to the one who judges, condemns, and takes offense where none is intended.

We have no control over that. But we do have control over our attitude and sensitivity toward the issues and vulnerabilities of our brothers and sisters in Christ.