

## Do Not Judge One Another

Romans 14:13

“Who are you to judge me?”

“If that isn’t the pot calling the kettle black.”

A young couple moved into a quiet and quaint little neighborhood. It was their first home and they were eager to get acquainted with those who lived around them. On their very first morning in the new home with boxes stacked in various corners, they sat at the kitchen table sipping coffee watching a neighbor lady hanging her laundry on the line to dry in the warm morning breeze. As they watched through the window the young wife commented on how dirty the laundry looked, telling her husband that someone should teach the neighbor how to wash clothes. The husband sat there quietly drinking his coffee. Each time the neighbor hung out her laundry, the wife made the same criticism about how dingy the clothes appeared and that someone really needed to teach her how to wash laundry properly. One morning as she grabbed her cup of coffee and sat down, she was startled to find that the clothes looked especially bright and clean and commented to her husband that someone must have finally showed the woman the proper way to wash clothes. Without looking away from his morning paper, the husband commented that he had gotten up early and cleaned the window.

With that to introduce our topic today, please turn to Romans 14:13 where we will consider the admonition “do not judge one another.”

Romans 13:14-14:23

Let’s consider three thoughts this morning.

Having a critical eye

Making a careful examination

Being a charitable example

## I. HAVING A CRITICAL EYE

I’m sure you have heard it before: “you aren’t supposed to judge others.”

“If you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say it.”

I suppose if we had a nickel for every time we heard someone say something along those lines we would, as the saying goes, be quite rich.

I find it rather easy at times to be judgmental. It seems to flow from our tongue as a native language. I’m going to go out on a limb here, and hopefully no one brought rotten tomatoes to throw at me, but I’m willing to say that it’s probably something we all find relatively easy. Oh, we may not mean it to be critical but it is. We may even justify it by claiming we’re only stating the obvious.

We judge people on how or what they drive.

We judge people on how they dress or how they dress for church.

We judge people on how or what they eat.

We judge people on how they act.

We judge people on how they raise their children.

We judge people on their work habits.

We judge people on their leisure activities.

We judge people on their attentiveness.

We judge people on their attendance or tardiness at services.

We judge people on their habits.

We judge people based on the number of tattoos they have.

We judge people based on how many piercings they have.

We judge people on the style of music they listen to or the books they read or programs they watch.

We judge men on how long their hair is.

We judge women if they wear make-up or if they wear too much make-up or wear too much jewelry.

They didn’t sing my favorite song today in church.

They sang my favorite song, but didn’t sing my favorite verse.

They use drums or they only use a piano.

The soloist was too loud.

The choir was off key.

The pastor was too long.

That person needs to...

That person shouldn't...

The list is endless.

I'm going to say this carefully – I hope I hit a nerve, scratched open a sore, brought to mind something for which you have been judgmental about or something for which someone has criticized you for. It hit a nerve with me. I hope it hit a nerve because I want us to pause and think about how what we do and what we say can have a lasting impact in the body of Christ and can unfortunately have eternal consequences for someone who looks in on our behavior and walks away from any interest in anything to do with God or Christianity.

Our text is more than just about a general judgmental spirit. It's about things we believe a person should or shouldn't do to make them more spiritual.

Here's the modus operandi of someone who is judgmental. They have two targets. The first target is to find someone else just like them who will listen and pass on what they heard. They can't wait to pass on some juicy piece that's sure to cause a stir. They don't like something and they want it known. Some share it under the guise of offering a prayer request. "Would you pray with me about sister so-and-so. Last Sunday she had on way too much make-up and jewelry for my taste. I'm sure God isn't pleased."

Others aren't so subtle. They come out with guns blazing hoping that their judgment of someone else will bring them crashing down because they want their way in some matter of great concern. Critics love critics. It's all about spiritual superiority. We have another name for it – legalism.

The second target is to find someone who has a sympathetic ear and will rally to their cause.

It hurts to be on the receiving end of criticism. Believe me when I tell you I know what it feels like.

But unfortunately, and admittedly I have also been on the giving end.

This has given me an occasion to seriously consider areas where in the past I have been judgmental.

In a moment we'll look at how we can tackle this propensity to judge others, to take seriously this admonition.

The times I am judgmental I justify it by saying that at least most of it is not face to face or said out loud for anyone else to hear. I think it while sitting in church or standing in the checkout line or while sitting behind someone taking their sweet old time at the gas pump.

We have a propensity; no we have a knack for judging others.

It's natural. It's easy. Some people might even think it's fun. A pastor preached one Sunday on spiritual gifts. After the service a woman came up to the pastor and informed him that she had the spiritual gift of criticism. The pastor asked her if she knew the story of the talents and asked what the man with one talent did with his. She said he went out and buried it. The pastor said to go and do likewise.

It can be so easy to have a critical eye when there is something in our opinion we don't like.

In the Greek the word judge primarily means to separate, to determine, to make a decision or determination about. We think of it in terms of a judge who hears a case and passes judgment on an individual based on the law. This admonition is in the present active subjunctive tense so that it would literally read "Let us no longer keep on judging or condemning."

Another translation reads: "Let us no longer have the habit of criticizing one another."

In other words stop doing it!

Now, let me make it abundantly clear that this

admonition does not mean we are never to cast a judgment on anyone any longer about anything. Think about how long a baseball game would take if there wasn't an umpire to judge balls or strikes or outs.

Think of the chaos that would ensue if there was no judicial system to enforce laws. It would essentially mean that there would be no laws to enforce. But that is not what Paul is talking about.

God didn't reprimand Moses for setting up godly men at the suggestion of his father-in-law, Jethro, to act as judges to help alleviate Moses' tiring schedule of judging cases that came to him.

In John 7:24 we read "Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment."

In I Corinthians 5:9-13 Paul advises the church to judge those within the church. It is clear that bringing judgement is acceptable. So what is this admonition here?

It seems like the crux of Paul's message is related to opinions about personal convictions having to do with what to eat and days of the week. Let's keep in mind that many of Paul's audience had come from a pagan religious system where they offered meat to idols and then it was sold in the market. Some of those converts to Christianity weren't bothered by that and they ate meat, while others objected to it and so there was judgment. The ones who didn't eat it for conscience sake only ate veggies and judged those who ate meat, while those who ate the meat because they didn't see anything wrong judged those who didn't eat meat claiming their faith was weak.

Let's be clear that Paul identifies two groups of people here in this passage. Both groups are believers. One group are weak Christians which we take to mean either they are new to the faith or they are immature in the faith who have shown little

spiritual growth. The second group referred to here are the strong, the mature Christians.

This passage is another reminder that these one another passages are *to and for* Christians. It's how we are to treat one another. If the world is outside looking in and wondering if Christianity is worth investigating and pursuing, what are they seeing in how we treat one another? If they see us judging each other for every little thing, that's probably something they don't want to have any part of.

The year was 1928 and the roaring '20's were coming to a close. Donald Grey Barnhouse recounts an incident following a message at a Bible conference where he was confronted by a couple of older women who complained to him that some of the younger women weren't wearing stockings. They wanted him to rebuke them. He looked at them and said that the Virgin Mary never wore stockings. They gasped in surprise "she didn't?" He continued that in Mary's time stockings were unknown. He then went on to give them a brief lesson in stockings noting that as far as could be determined they were introduced in Italy in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and worn by prostitutes. Because of its association with prostitutes it became a scandal when a lady of nobility wore them. By the time of Queen Victoria stockings were the badge of elite women in society.

Barnhouse went on to explain that by 1930 many girls went without stockings in the summer and nobody thought anything of it. As far as he could tell it did not lead to the moral decay of American society. He saw the legalism of the Victorian age ending.

Paul directs his comments to the mature believer, but not to the exclusion of the weak. Both have a mutual responsibility in this matter toward each other. The strong are to accept the weak for their convictions and the weak are to accept the strong for theirs. It is a call for both to accept each other in

love and fellowship and stop judging each other. The strong shouldn't flaunt their freedoms based on their convictions and neither should the weak condemn the strong for what they perceive as abuses of what they consider to be wrong.

That was much of the problem with the Pharisees who had taken the law and embellished it by adding hundreds of additional laws. Judgmentalism was something Jesus condemned them for.

So why do we do it? I think we do it because we want to put on an air of superiority. But unfortunately our judging others is not done in the spirit of love or the desire to help our brother or sister mature in their faith. Being judgmental doesn't contribute to harmony or unity in the body of Christ. It was a prevailing attitude that Paul addressed with the Corinthians.

Even Jesus spoke against this kind of attitude. Matthew 7:1-5

Now I want you hear me in what I'm about to say. What both Jesus and Paul are condemning in this admonition is our own self-righteousness that makes us superior to others through judging them based on a standard we set up rather than the standard of God's Word. There is only one standard by which anyone should and will be judged and that is God's Word. Where we get in trouble and what Paul is advocating is that we not judge others based on our own personal convictions or preferences.

When we start to emphasize rules over relationships then we are in danger of jumping on the fast track to judging others. Be careful. Let's not make our personal preferences the standard by which we judge others. Paul speaks to the mature, but he reminds everyone that God is the ultimate judge and when we judge others based on those man-made rules then God will judge us not based on the rules we made but that we had the audacity to think that

we could step in and play God. We will give an accounting to God for such a judgmental spirit. v. 10 "For we will all stand before God's judgment seat." v. 12 "So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God."

John MacArthur writes that "Judging is the unloving attitude of contemptuous superiority by strong believers and the equally unloving attitude of self-righteousness by the weaker believers by which they judge one another."

I take this passage to say that I need to be careful not to impose my convictions and preferences on someone else. The danger is that when a young or immature Christian sees me doing something I may believe I have freedom to do, that person may be led away from following the Lord because they begin to do that same thing and can be led into sin. If an alcoholic gets saved and stops drinking because he knows the affects alcohol has on him, I shouldn't flaunt that having a drink once in a while is okay even if I believe that Scripture gives me the freedom to do so. I don't want him to be led to sin against his conscience.

If an addicted gambler gets saved and stops visiting the casino because he knows the affect it has on him, I shouldn't invite him over for a night of playing euchre or pinochle.

It can be so easy to have a critical eye. So what do we do because it seems like we have to walk around on egg shells so that no one is offended, but then someone is going to judge us for walking on egg shells? Paul gives some advice.

## II. MAKING A CAREFUL EVALUATION

Let's look back at verse 13.

"Therefore" is a transition word. It's an invitation to act on what was just said. Notice what Paul says:

“make up your mind not to put a stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.”

A stumbling block means to strike against and refers to something we trip over. If you’ve had children you have invariably tripped over something the kids left in the middle of the floor.

We are to evaluate our life and remove anything that might cause someone else to stumble into sin.

He then says we aren’t to create an obstacle for others. An obstacle is something purposely put in the way to make it difficult to get past. In the Greek the word translated obstacle is skandalon, a word we translate in English as scandal. The Greeks used it to refer to the stick placed under a trap so that when it is moved causes the trap to fall onto its prey.

In other words, what we do should not cause someone else to become trapped in sin. Paul says we must be careful not to hold onto some personal preference that may lead someone else into sin.

What Paul suggests is a time of self-assessment, to examine our own life first. Before we go off and start judging others, we need to begin with ourselves. Let’s remember what Jesus said in Matthew 7 about judging others. It’s a rather humorous picture of two guys. One has a speck of sawdust in his eye; the other has a beam protruding out of his eye. Notice that they’re both made from the same material. Now the guy with the beam is trying to help the guy with the speck get that removed. Jesus says that the guy with the beam should first remove it from his eye so that he will be able to clearly remove the speck from the other guy’s eye. It insinuates that we should take care of ourselves first before helping the other.

When I was counseling at camp I always carried a hanky. It wasn’t to blow my nose; it was to remove gnats from my camper’s eye. Gnats are thick up there. Think of the cloud of dust around Pig pen’s

feet only around your head. We would be out playing ball or on the volleyball court and at least one camper would get a gnat stuck in the eye and the game would have to be paused so it could be removed. We didn’t worry about gnats they swallowed or that went up the nose.

We have no right to judge someone else if we have not first spent time in self-evaluation. We must remove our own sin before we attempt to address the sin of someone else. Clean our own window first.

Take a look at another passage and notice admonition along with the risk involved.

Galatians 6:1

I believe if we took this time of honest self-assessment to heart there would be a lot less criticism in the body. It’s my opinion that we stop short of being totally honest in some areas or we evaluate ourselves based on the wrong standard. We judge ourselves compared to others instead of judging ourselves by the only standard that matters. Our self-evaluation needs to begin and end with God’s Word allowing God’s Spirit to convict us and change us.

That’s what King David did.

Psalm 139:23-24 “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Psalm 51:10, 13 “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me... Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.”

David is giving an open invitation for God to search and root out any known and unknown sins. David goes on to say that only after God has done a work in him would he be able to teach others where they may need to grow.

So while the admonition is to stop judging others, it means to stop judging them on my self-righteous man-made standard and only after I have done a thorough job of putting myself up against the mirror of God's Word am I able to consider coming along side in the spirit of love to help someone else who is living in sin.

If we allowed God to use the spotlight of His Word think of the change that would result in us. Instead I'm too busy looking at God's Word and thinking about how someone else doesn't measure up or worse yet, using my own standard to judge them. Again, Paul says stop it.

If we did an honest self-evaluation based on the standard of God's Word there would be fewer church splits, hurt feelings and people leaving the church. There would be a lot fewer casualties in the pews. There might be fewer accusations of hypocrisy by outsiders who conclude we say one thing and do another, who watch us stab one another in the back.

It's all too easy to have a critical eye. One way to overcome this is to make a careful evaluation of our own life in Christ. Does it measure up to God's Word?

An honest, careful self-evaluation is one action we can take. There is another. I think the answer is twofold and with this we'll conclude.

### III. BEING A CHARITABLE EXAMPLE

Let's start with verse 19.

“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.” (NIV)

“So let's agree to use all our energy in getting along with each other. Help others with encouraging words” (The Message)

“So then, let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up.” (NLT)

“So let us concentrate on the things which make for harmony, and on the growth of one another's character.” (Phillips)

“So let us then definitely aim for and eagerly pursue what makes for harmony and for mutual upbuilding (edification and development) of one another.” (Amplified)

Here's part of the problem as I see it. I want people to change or conform to my way of thinking. If they do what I want then there will be peace. But this verse says that the responsibility of seeking peace falls to me first. Our goal, our aim should be to pursue peace in the body, to do everything in our ability to bring peace.

The word “pursue” in the Greek means to compel or urge, to set in rapid motion, to hasten or zealously follow. It suggests a sense of intensity and depth in doing whatever is necessary to bring peace within the body. It is something every Christian is to strive for, not just the mature. In other words Paul is saying don't drag your feet, get busy and make it happen.

When we have taken the time to examine our walk before the Lord, the product of such assessment is peace. It is a peace that builds solid relationships between believers that becomes a witness to a watching world.

Let me mention one other important component that is vital in this pursuit of peace that aids in overcoming a critical spirit. It is something we have already addressed and is the foundation by which all the other one another passages rest. It is that we love one another. A Holy Spirit developed love for others in the body of Christ will drive out a judgmental attitude.

Let me close with this compelling thought for us to consider from the pen of Augustine: “In essentials

unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity (love).”

We can take the necessary time to do a proper self-evaluation before we address someone who may be in sin, but if we don't approach them in love our words will seem harsh and condescending instead of compelling them to walk faithfully with Christ. When we approach them in love, the result will be peace.

Let me ask you to consider this morning if this is an area where you need God's help. That would be a great start in self-assessment.

Have you been loving toward others in the body of Christ or have you had a critical spirit that needs to be confessed?

Have you pursued after peace in the body of Christ or have words or actions been hurtful even divisive?

Will you confess that today and pursue after peace in the body through the love of Christ working in you and through you?