

## Romans

Dr. Charles "Buddy" Parrish  
May 28, 2025  
Romans 14: 13-20



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Vss. 13- 16

- In short, what Paul is saying in these verses is that it is vital to keep the main thing, the main thing. Satan rarely is able to destroy a church from the outside, but is very effective at destroying a church from the inside and his strategy is always the same and usually effective: cause the destruction of a church from the inside out by replacing The Way of Christ (vs. 18) with something else, something purely secondary if not completely trivial. I have seen churches destroy themselves over questions like whether or not the parking lot should be paved, the Lord's Supper, music, clothing, or whether to accept a large gift and how to use it. Recall that last week I shared that our church in Atlanta was started in 1913 after splitting from another church over foot washing. All of those things are at least secondary to or in direct opposition to the New Commandment Christ gave to us found in John 13:34: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another".
- In the church of Rome, the issue was food and whether it was right to serve and eat food at church gatherings when many in the church would be offended by, some foods they considered unclean and a sin to eat. But Paul saw this as a secondary issue that it was and sought to correct both sides of the fuss, as they were allowing food to become the main thing instead of The Way of Christ remaining the main thing.
- To the Gentiles and to the Jews in the church whose faith had grown beyond the Do's and Don'ts of the old Law, Paul first says to stop being arrogant and judging those of a weaker faith. AND do not put stumbling blocks in front of your sisters and brothers' way. In other words, don't be so sinfully arrogant as to cause them to fall and perhaps even drive them away from the Faith. Again, I have known of many people who after a conflict at their church never went back to that church or any other, reasoning if that's the way Christians act, I want no part of it.
- Paul goes on to agree with the Gentiles and Jews of a stronger faith, that the Lord has made all things clean, but that a person's perception is reality to them. If they perceive that something is a sin to eat or drink or do, then it is a sin to them. And if you try to force the issue (vs. 15) "you are no longer walking according to love", no longer walking in The Way of Christ, but are in fact committing a sin yourself by destroying someone for whom Christ died, over something trivial.
- One may argue that it is their right or that because of the freedom we enjoy in Christ, that they are right to do such and such. But in truth, as bondslaves of Christ, we have no rights and our freedom

in Christ only gives us all the freedom we need to live and act as Christ lives and acts. We are free to love others as Christ loves us. Remember that there is no greater love than we lay down our lives for others, setting aside what we want for the welfare of others.

Vss. 17-20

- In verse 17 Paul drives home his point about keeping the main thing, the main thing. In the Kingdom of God, the top priorities are not eating or drinking, or anything having to do with materialism, but rather the main thing consists of righteousness, peace, and joy. By righteousness Paul means living out the love of Christ where we put others first and ourselves last, where loving my brother is more important than winning the argument with him, and where his continued growth in Christ is my primary concern. And when Paul speaks of peace, he speaks of the Jewish idea of **Shalom** which is not simply the absence of conflict, but an overall sense of well-being, something that is intensely positive where one is living both in right relationship to God and to others. Joy is a common theme of Paul's. I roll my eyes at critics who say that Christianity is boring and nothing more than a fountain of negativity. Clearly, they have never read the New Testament and know nothing of the joy we have in Christ. But this joy is unlike what the world thinks of as joy, which tends to be very self-centered. Our joy is relational. I like how William Barclay puts it: "Christian joy is not an individualistic thing; it is an interdependent thing. Joy comes to the Christian only when he brings joy to others, even if it cost him personal limitation."
- Finally, Paul says something that may have been more profound than he fully realized: "...pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another." If a church allows Satan and sin to walk through its doors and is divided and is primarily characterized by conflict, bitterness, and spite, tearing each other down rather than building one another up, then it has lost the privilege to call itself a church. You see this repeatedly in the letters to the churches in the Revelation, where Christ is going to "remove their lampstand" if they do not repent, cleanse the church of its sin, and pursue the things which make for peace. So many times, we commit grievous sins which strike against the Kingdom of God all in the name of being right and winning the argument.