

ACCOUNTS IN GOOD ORDER**Romans 14:10-19**

Intro: Two weeks ago I shared about a man named Al who had been bitterly estranged from the church for over sixty years because his father had been driven from his church for the sin of having a radio. There are many ways the people of God have torn the Church apart and Al was a victim of one of those ways. I used him as an example because he is from our BIC tradition and that is what I know best. But the Anabaptist/Pietist tradition is in no way the only tribe that has struggled with divisive and legalistic teaching. Satan has carefully spread dissension everywhere so we don't have a corner on the market by any stretch. But we are a great example of what can happen when we major in minors.

Ron Sprunger shared this picture with me the other morning as we discussed this talk. It is from the Mennonite World Conference in Amsterdam in 1967 and it shows two delegates to the meeting. Notice the contrast: One in a cape dress and head covering and the other in a short skirt and smoking a cigarette. Both Mennonites and, more importantly, both Christ Followers. Christ Followers come in differing packages, but we are redeemed by the same Cross. That is why, by the time I finish his series next week we will have had eight messages on the subject of building one another up. Everything we do as the people of God must be with the intention of building up the Kingdom of God. And that means we need to keep away from those things that tear us apart. Our text gives us some insight into that. Listen:

(Read Romans 14:10-19)

So then each of us will give account of himself to God. Are your accounts in good order? Jesus preached in his Sermon on the Mount, *For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye?* Matthew 7:2-4

Paul had to remind the Romans of the same issue over 20 years later, and, lo and behold, Christ Followers STILL need reminding over 20 centuries later. It's a perennial issue – so let's look at it so that we all can keep our own accounts in order.

First . . .

We should let God deal with our fellow Christ Followers

- We've talked about this in a previous talk in this series based on Romans 15 where I needed to set up some context. Paul has been teaching the Romans who were struggling with those who felt it was okay to eat meat offered to idols in pagan temples and also which holidays and feasts should be observed. He strongly points out that Christ Followers should not cause one another to stumble just because their faith is stronger.
- But as he continues on the thought, he takes it a bit further. David Guzik points out that Paul progresses to the point of pointing out the responsibility of both parties. He writes, *"The strict Christian found it easy to judge his brother, writing him off as an unspiritual meat-eater-compromiser. The free Christian found it easy to show contempt against his brother, regarding him as a uptight-legalistic-goody-good. Essentially, Paul's answer is "Stop worrying about your brother. You have enough to answer for before Jesus.""*
- Jesus would have said, *"What is it to you?"* It was after the resurrection, when Jesus showed up on the beach as the disciples were returning from a fruitless night of fishing. As the morning progressed, Jesus carefully and tenderly restored Peter, who had denied him and abandoned him, to full apostleship. In that conversation Jesus also shows Peter his future and even his death. Peter, referring to John, who was apparently close by, asks Jesus, *"Lord, what about this man?"* John 21:21b and Jesus responds, *"If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"* John 21:22. And that is his message to all of us. What is it to us? What it is, is that we walk in obedience and allow God to deal with our brothers and sisters in Christ.
- Herschel Hobbs writes, *"We have enough to consider in ourselves without throwing stumbling blocks in the path of others. I have enough trouble keeping myself straight! Christian love is the guiding principle."*
- So Paul's message to both parties, both those who are strict and those who are free, is this . . .

Both sides are right

- In their own point of view, and in reality. In Paul's words, *I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.* Romans 14:14. Kenneth

Foreman says, “*Paul is personally sure that the more liberal point of view is the right one. Nothing isn't clean, that is unfit for a Christian to eat, in itself. It is quite true that a steak is only a steak; there are no steaks infected with heresy! ... But Paul lifts the question clear out of the self-centered level of what I think, what's good for me, and sets it up on a different level altogether, the high level of love. What will your action do to this weaker man? Remember he's your brother. Suppose he follows your example, as he's very likely to do? Then he will be going against his conscience, and that will cause his ruin. If the strong man complains that this ties down his freedom, Paul reminds him that Christ did more than give up freedom—Christ died for him.*”

- Our responsibility is to one another. Our love for one another is what drives our relationship rather than the things we disagree on. We need to use our freedom to build each other up, not to tear each other down. I used this quote from Augustine several weeks ago, but it fits so well: “*Love God and do what you like.*” But as we do that, we know that being a Christ Follower means not only loving God but also loving our neighbor as ourselves. So, as the body of Christ . . .

We need to think of everything

- What I mean is, we need to see past our own agenda. We are the Church – God’s called out ones. We are plural. While we need to make our own way and work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12) and not allow our walk with Christ to be dictated by the convictions of others – we still have a responsibility to one another. Barclay points out that “*The picture of the Church as a building runs through the New Testament. The members are stones within the building. Anything which loosens the fabric of the church is against God; anything that makes that fabric stronger and more secure is of God.*” So, as F. B. Meyer simply puts it, “*We must be careful of one another's faith.*”
- So Paul tells in verse 17 that in order to keep accounts in good order we need three things. . .

Righteousness, Peace, and Joy

- And that is not on our own – it’s only in the Holy Spirit.
- Love for our neighbor means we will never cause food or drink or anything else to destroy one for whom Christ died (v. 15). That is the picture of righteousness. It’s just right! And it is what promotes peace and harmony and joy. This only happens by the Spirit. Ralph Martin writes, “*The Lordship of Christ is supreme and all-inclusive of life and death and judgment. When Christians remember that each shall give account of himself to God, other matters will assume the right perspective.*” In other words, when we are no longer wrapped up in our own stuff we realize that not everyone sees things as we do.
- Righteousness also means that we agree on the essentials. And as long as we know that we will have our accounts in order as we all bow before the throne and confess that the God is King.

Conclusion: So, let me ask again, are your accounts in good order? As yourself that. Ask the Holy Spirit that. Don’t ask if your neighbor’s accounts are in order, they are the ones that should be doing that.

Pursue righteousness, peace and joy, in love. There is a promised outcome if you do – it’s in those final two verses, *Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.* Romans 14:18-19. What can be better than being acceptable to God and approved by our brothers and sisters? Having our own accounts in order means we are building one another up. Amen.