

Judging Others

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[0 : 00] Well, this morning we're continuing our ongoing study in Paul, Paul said it to the Romans, and we're going to turn back to the passage that you've read for us in chapter 14.

We're going to look at the whole section, but we can perhaps just read again verse 13, which in many ways points us towards the great themes being set before us here.

Therefore, let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or a hindrance in the way of a brother.

As many of you will know, we've been working through this letter over the past few months, and working through a letter in the New Testament or a Gospel or any book of the Bible is a wonderful thing to do because it means that you cover all the ground that's been set before us in that book. That's one of the great advantages of going through a book chapter by chapter. And one of the other advantages of doing it is that it means you sometimes come to passages that raise issues and questions that we perhaps would normally not maybe talk about or think about that often.

[1 : 12] And a very good example of that is here in Romans chapter 14, because this passage in many ways is all about what we should do when Christians disagree.

What should we do when Christians disagree? The great theme of this letter of Romans is the Gospel.

Paul's giving us just this wonderful explanation about how the good news of Jesus Christ works. As we've been saying, the letter divides into two big sections. You've got chapters one to 11, which are all about knowing the Gospel.

They're full of amazing theological teaching in these first 11 chapters. And from chapter 12 to the end of chapter 16, the letter is all about living the Gospel.

The chapters are full of brilliant practical instruction. And the whole of the letter combined of these two parts is a great reminder that in the Christian life, the theology we know must always shape the day-to-day life that we live.

[2 : 16] So from chapter 12 onwards, Paul becomes very practical. And in terms of our day-to-day living as followers of Jesus Christ, there are certain things that are clear and that are non-negotiable for us.

So for example, in chapter 12, Paul tells us that we are to give our whole lives as a living sacrifice to God. Being a Christian isn't just something for a Sunday. It's for every single part of our lives.

We're told to do various things. We're told to pray. We're told to be hospitable. We're told to resist the temptation to take revenge against those who hurt us.

Chapter 13 gives us further non-negotiable instructions. We are to be responsible citizens. We are to love one another. We are to walk in a way that we should.

Alongside these obligations for what we should do, there's various things that we should not do. So chapter 13, verse 9 summarizes some of the 10 commandments that we looked at in the New City Catechism this morning.

[3 : 17] Do not commit adultery. Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not covet. Later in the chapter, he gets a little bit more specific. He says we must avoid orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality and sensuality, quarrelling and jealousy.

All of these things and many others are non-negotiables for the Christian. These are the major things that we must either do or not do.

Now for all of us there are times when we fail and we slip into so many of these things. But none of those, that feeling doesn't make any of these things right when we do slip our response that we want to repent because we never depart from the conviction that these are things that are of major importance.

And all of these instructions, these major instructions are emphasizing the fact that as Christians we are now different. We are living a new life as new people as part of a new humanity being restored through the coming of Jesus Christ and the inauguration of His kingdom.

And so there's major things that we do. There's major things that we don't do. And I think it's probably fair to say that the majority of Christians are in agreement about these things.

[4 : 39] I know there's always exceptions but we would all agree I think that the Ten Commandments are of major importance in terms of how we live our lives.

But then we come to chapter 14. And chapter 14 is dealing with the fact that alongside these major issues there are also a lot of minor things.

And when it comes to these minor things, Christians are most definitely not in agreement.

And that was true for the Christians in the early church. Paul gives us two examples. Firstly, he spoke about diet. So some Christians were comfortable eating anything. Others were not comfortable eating meat.

And it's very likely that a key factor in that was that the meat you bought at the local market in cities like Rome or Corinth came from animals that had been sacrificed to the Greco-Roman gods.

[5 : 41] And so people worried about that association and they're thinking, well, this meat's come from an animal that's been offered to an idol.

Should I eat it? Should I not? Not sure. There's the question of diet. Finally Paul talks about observing particular religious days and there are perhaps maybe reasons why they felt like that in Rome.

It could have been because it seems to be the case that there was a transition in the New Testament from the Jewish Sabbath on the Saturday to the Christian Sabbath on a Sunday. Sunday was the day that Jesus rose from the dead. It's the first day of the week and that was the day in which Christians met. And for some of these Christians, they may have found it very hard to just treat Saturday like a normal day.

They'd grown up and Saturday had been different and now we're worshiping on Sunday and maybe they found that difficult. It may also have been connected to the various high days of the Jewish religious calendar.

[6 : 39] So they were various feasts, festivals, high days in the Jewish calendar and people may have felt, well, I still want to acknowledge these. And interesting example is Pentecost.

So Pentecost was a Jewish festival 50 days after the Passover but it had great significance for the Christian church as well as Acts chapter 2 will tell you. And so maybe some people thought, well, Pentecost, that's a special day.

We should observe that day every year. So some Christians were happy to eat anything. Others thought that certain foods were wrong. Some Christians were happy to eat all days except Sunday as the same.

Others weren't so sure and wanted to acknowledge these high days. And of course, it's exactly the same today, only maybe it's even a thousand times more complicated because although most Christians are agreed on the majors, there's huge disagreements on the more minor issues.

And in some ways, in fact, the major issues can give rise to minor questions or minor issues on which we don't agree.

[7 : 47] So for example, in chapter 13, Paul says towards the end of the chapter that Christians should avoid drunkenness, they should avoid sexual immorality and they should avoid quarrelling.

So these things are all prohibited for the Christian. But you have to ask, well, what about the minor issues related to these things? So we agreed drunkenness not appropriate for the Christian, but is it okay to drink alcohol at all?

And some Christians say yes, other Christians say no, absolutely not. So for sexual immorality, for the Christian sexes to be kept within the bounds of marriage.

But is it okay to kiss your girlfriend? And some say yes, absolutely. Others no. Remember watching a program on TV in America, these young couples would wait for their wedding day for their first kiss.

Different views. Everything is wrong, absolutely wrong. So is it okay to write a blog about a Christian you disagree with?

[9 : 00] These are the kind of questions that arise. There's huge differences of opinion among Christians about many, many issues. And even within this congregation here, I am sure we all have

lots of different opinions.

And our question today is what do we do when Christians disagree? What do we do when these minor issues lead us to fall out?

Well Romans 14 is a chapter that tells us the answer to these questions. And it gives us some very interesting and some very important practical advice. And we're going to come to the practical steps that Romans 14 sets out shortly.

But before we do that, I want to highlight that underlying the practical steps that Paul gives us here, there are two very important theological truths that must shape our perspective in terms of this whole issue.

And so before we come to the practical instructions that Paul gives, I want us just to highlight two areas where we're being challenged in this chapter. We're being challenged I think in terms of how we view God.

[10:05] And we're being challenged in terms of how we view others. So in terms of how we view God, Romans 14 emphasizes a fundamental theological truth.

God is judge. We read in that in the middle of the chapter, none of us lives to himself, none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord.

So then whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lords. For to this end Christ died and lived again that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. Why do you pass judgment on your brother or why, or you, why do you despise your brother?

For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, as I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me and every tongue shall confess to God. So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

And within this whole concept of the fact that God is judge, I think there's two absolutely fundamental but easily forgotten truths of reality.

[11:15] First, God is judge. Now that may sound so obvious, but it's something that we must highlight because I think today it's a theological topic that we maybe don't want to talk or think about too much.

When we talk about God's judgment, we tend to think of a kind of bygone day of quite intimidating or even harsh sounding preaching.

But yet it is absolutely vital that we recognize this truth. God is judge. And that makes perfect sense.

If God is all powerful, if he's all wise, all knowing, if God is our Creator, our ruler, our master, our king. If God is the supreme being of all reality, then he most definitely is also the one who has the position, the power, and the prerogative to judge.

In fact, if you think about it, it's surely absurd to believe in God and not recognize that he is judge.

[12:28] And the implication of that is immensely serious for everyone here because we are accountable to him. If he is judge, then every single one of us will have to give an account of ourselves to him.

Now this is why the Gospel message is amazing because the good news is that if you are trusting in Jesus Christ, then you have nothing, nothing to be afraid of in terms of God's judgment.

Because the penalty for all the mistakes that you and I have made has been paid in full by Jesus.

And with our trust in Jesus, our judgment will not mean condemnation.

It will be the final seal of our eternal salvation in him. The Christian has to give an account of himself.

But the amazing thing is that he or she won't be doing that on their own. In Jesus Christ, you have a perfect advocate by your side.

[13:39] But for the person who's not yet a Christian or who's maybe not willing to think about it becoming one.

If you don't become one, if this is true, if verse 12 is true, then you'll be standing before God on your own.

What does that make you think? Does it even worry you at all? I don't know. But a lot of people, it doesn't seem to bother them.

When they hear the whole question of judgment before God, they respond by thinking, well, it's a lot of rubbish. It's not going to happen.

It's a kind of easy answer to just dismiss it really, isn't it? And think, well, I don't think that's true. But in that whole question about judgment and whether it's real or not, I heard I've really an interesting quote.

[14 : 44] And you maybe have heard it yourselves. Or everyone here who's a fan of the Alec McDonald band will know this quote. Karl Marx, as I'm sure you all know, famously said that religion is the opium of the people.

And he didn't mean that in a positive way. He meant it in a critical way. He was arguing that religion gives people false illusions of happiness. And that's masking the realities of all the problems in society that need to be addressed through a shift in class structure and all that Marxism involves. His big problem with religion was that it was just kind of numbing people to the realities of what was going on around them. It was like a drug that just made them happy and detached them from reality.

So it's very famous, Karl Marx. Religion is the opium of the people. Lots of people have agreed with him. But there's a quote from a Polish poet called Czesław Miłosz.

I don't know if that's the right pronunciation. That challenges what Marx says. And his quote, I'll just put it up for you here. He says, a true opium of the people is a belief in nothingness after death.

[15 : 59] The huge solace of thinking that for our betrayals, greed, cowardice, murder, we are not going to be judged.

He's saying that the real opiate, the real mind numbing drug is to believe that you're not accountable to God at all. And if when someone like me talks about judgment, if your response is to think, well, I'm not that's just fantasy, then I think you really need to think about that quote.

The astonishing thing is that all of us worry a lot about how other people are going to judge us. So we worry about how we look, how successful we're going to be, how we perform at work, how well off we are, how other people are going to judge us.

All of these things bother us, I'm ashamed to say it bothers me what people think of me. But do we ever stop and ask ourselves about how God is going to judge us?

It's something we've all got to think about. But as you think about it, please also remember that the whole point of the Gospel message is that through Jesus Christ, we can all have hope on the day of judgment.

[17 : 23] In fact, the Bible tells us that if we trust in Jesus, we can have confidence for the day of judgment. That's how perfect Jesus' work is.

If you trust in Him, it's very simple, you just trust in Him. You're totally, utterly and completely safe. But Romans 14 is reminding us something that we must never forget. God really is judge. But that means something else that's very important.

You are not judge. If God is judge, I'm not and neither are you. And you say that's so obvious. Of course, we're not the judge.

And I'm quite sure if I look back over my life, I can think, I can safely say I have never, ever, ever, ever stood up and said, I am judge.

[18 : 19] And yet I've judged people thousands of times. And so although we say in theory, God is judge, I'm not, yet we constantly judge others.

We criticize others. We fall out with others. And every time we do that, we're forgetting that God is judge and we are not. The theological reality that God is judge means that we should always be ready to leave things to Him.

Always ready to leave judgment to Him. That's what Romans 12, 13, 14 emphasizes before us. And it's so much better to leave it to God. He is the one who knows the whole story.

How many times have you passed judgment over a person or a situation and then realized, I didn't know the whole story. I've done that before. God knows the whole story.

God is the one who is always absolutely fair. God is the one who has all the wisdom needed. God is the one who cannot ever get it wrong. That's why judgment is God's work.

[19 : 21] And our default position should be to leave judgment to Him. In the same way that we are answerable to God, so to our others. It's before God alone that they stand and fall.

And so we leave judgment to Him. We want to recognize that God is judge and we are not. So we're being challenged in terms of how we view God in this chapter, which is a good and a healthy thing.

But we're also being challenged about how we view others in Romans chapter 14. So here's how we test for you. So here's a long list of opinions held by Christians that most of us in here, well, a good chunk of us in here probably don't agree with.

So we have Christians who argue that you should only think psalms. Christians who argue you should not participate in sport on a Sunday. Christians who say that you should pray in a private tongue, a kind of unintelligible language.

Christians who say you should not drink alcohol. Christians who say you should wear clerical clothing, like a collar or something like that. Not you all, if you want, can.

[20 : 36] Christians who say celebrate certain days. So some would say let's celebrate Easter, Christmas. Some will say we should have special communion seasons, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, with preparatory services before a communion service on a Sunday.

Some Christians will say only use one Bible version. Often that will be the King James version, not necessarily, but Christians who will hold to that view. That's the only one we should use. Some Christians have very strong views about homeschooling, and that we should prioritise that, not use state schools.

Some Christians can be very loyal to a church building, so they have a building that they've poured their time and energy and money into, and they're very loyal to that. Some Christians have the view that when you sing, you should raise your hands to sing.

Some of the view that when we have communion, we should only use one cup. There's a lot of different views about the role of women. Some people would come in here and say that the women should be doing far more. Some people would come in here and say that the women should be doing far less.

Some people would argue that we should have communion every week. Lots and lots and lots of different views. As you read through Romans 14, we've been challenged in terms of how we view others and how we view all of these people.

[21 : 48] I should have also said that we could have added all the numerous different denominations across the Scottish church scene to that list. So here's your test. When you look at that list and when you think of people with all of these views, what should be the first word that comes to your mind when you think of these people?

They're your family. And then again, Paul uses the word brother in chapter 14.

And when he's talking about the people who disagree with you, he's talking about your brother and sister in Jesus.

He's making it absolutely clear that when we disagree as Christians, the person you're disagreeing with is your family, your brother or your sister.

Now within that family, Paul highlights that some are stronger and some are weaker. So you've got the one who is weak mentioned in 14.1. You've got those who are strong mentioned in 14.15.

[23 : 05] What does that mean? Well I once heard another free church minister, Joe Bernard, who's now in America speaking about this issue. And he said something that I thought was very helpful.

He said it would be good for us to maybe think of this in terms of sensitive and confident. So the weak Christian is the one who's sensitive.

The strong is the one who's confident. And I think that does capture very well what's been said here. Some Christians are very sensitive about certain minor issues.

Christians are not shaken in their confidence when it comes to these things. Now here's a really interesting little point to note. So I want you to recognize what Paul is saying here.

The sensitive one, the weak one, is the one who has very strong views about a certain issue. So Paul is saying to have really strong views about a minor issue is a weakness.

[24 : 03] Interesting, interesting. But he's emphasizing that above all else, whether strong or weak, we are brothers and sisters in one family.

He also emphasizes another very important point about how we view others in verse 15 of chapter 14. When it comes to the Christian who disagrees with us, what are they?

What are these people? Verse 15 tells us they are the one for whom Christ died. And that immediately is pressing home to us the immense value of the person that we don't agree with.

So the Christian who thinks that we should have communion every week, the Christian who thinks that all the women in here should be wearing head coverings, the Christian who thinks that we

should be dancing while we sing and worship, the Christian who thinks that we should be using a different Bible version.

These are all people who in God's eyes are worth the blood of Jesus Christ. They're incredibly precious.

[25 : 20] And I need to pray that when I meet people I disagree with, that God would press home to my heart how precious that person is. It's a great reminder that behind an opinion that we really don't like lies a person who God really loves.

So our perspective has been challenged and it's good to think about that. We must always remember that God is judge and we are not. We must always remember that as Christians, even when we disagree, we're still a family and our brothers and sisters are so precious to God. So these are the foundations that Paul sets before us. For the last five minutes or so I want to just look at the practical lessons that Paul gives to us on the basis of these foundational principles. And he basically gives us a list of dos and don'ts. There's certain things we should do, there's certain things that we must not do. So we'll start with the don'ts. In verses one to three he says in verse one, don't quarrel over opinions.

So there's practical lesson number one. It's so easy to start an argument over minor issues. It's so easy that when we encounter people who are of different opinions to us over certain things our instinct can be to start a quarrel or to start a kind of confrontation.

[26 : 46] Paul simply says don't do that. He also says in verse three, even more significantly, he says do not despise that person.

And that word despise is I think really important because it basically means to think of something or someone as of no account or of no worth. And it's so easy to do that.

We can think that other people's opinions are not worth bothering about. They're just stupid opinions. And we think that the person who expresses that continues is not worth their concern because they're too old fashioned or they're too modern or they're too out of touch or they're too concerned to be in touch.

And we can dismiss people. We can think that they're not really worth it because their view is different to ours.

And of course that's the exact opposite of what Paul has just taught us. He's taught us about the astonishing worth and value of our brothers and sisters.

[27 : 45] That's why he says don't despise others. So that's practical lesson number two. And then the third one, he says don't pass judgment, don't judge. And that's self-explanatory from what we've been seeing.

God is judged. That means that really does mean that you're not judged. And that really does mean that you should not judge. Then in verses 13 to 16 he gives us more practical instructions.

Verse 13 says don't put a stumbling block in front of others. Now that's an important thing to think about it because when we meet somebody who we disagree with there can be a very strong temptation for us to want to see them stumble and fall.

And so we may be absolutely certain in our minds that this person's view on this certain issue is wrong and inappropriate. And we can have a desire to show them that they're wrong.

We can have a desire to kind of pull the rug out from underneath them and watch them fall so that we will be proved right. Paul says don't do that.

[28 : 47] And it's, this is where we are really challenged. So nearly 20 years ago a percentage of the free church left informed what's now the free church continuing and it was a hard and a difficult time.

And we have to ask ourselves the question do we want to see the free church continuing stumble or thrive?

Paul says don't put a stumbling block. It's just one for us all to think about in lots of contexts.

That's just an example. Verse 15, there's a really interesting phrase in verse 15 just at the end there, third line from the bottom, do not destroy the one for whom Christ has died.

That's teaching us a vital lesson because Christians can destroy each other over minor issues.

[29 : 54] Christians can destroy each other over minor issues. We often talk about the church being persecuted, don't we? And we pray for people around the world who face persecution from external forces.

So you can go to countries in Central Asia or in Africa where the government or where locals will persecute the church from without.

And it's a desperately difficult situation for people to face and we should never ever, ever stop praying for them. And we might face the same thing ourselves. We are very blessed that in Scotland over many generations we have not faced external persecution but boy we've been good at persecuting ourselves.

We're really good at persecution from within. And that's why when we face somebody with a different opinion to ours always think to yourself I need to protect this person, not destroy them, protect this person whom I disagree with.

Then in verse 16 Paul says, don't let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. Now that's an interesting verse because I think it could be interpreted in more than one way.

[31 : 08] When I first read that verse I thought to myself well I think that means stand up for what you think is right. So if you think that something is right don't let people speak badly of it.

If you think that something is good don't let people speak badly of what you think is good. But the more I think about it the more I think I'm wrong. I'm not convinced that is the right way to understand that verse because I think it kind of comes out of that it sort of shifts the whole context of the chapter.

Now I'm thinking that the way to understand that verse is this. Paul is saying that you could hold to something that's perfectly good. So for example having a nice glass of red wine with your dinner you might think, you might hold to that, that's been perfectly good.

But if that then becomes a stumbling block to your brother or sister for whom drinking alcohol seems an insurmountable possibility for a Christian, if that difference of opinion becomes a fallout then what you regarded as good is now going to be spoken of as evil because it's caused this damage.

And so if we push what we think is good too hard then it can lead to evil, it can lead to hurt, it can lead to others looking on and thinking why did these people fall out and they'll speak badly of it.

[32 : 31] Paul says don't do that. And then there's another interesting command in 151. He says do not please yourself.

And our natural instinct is often to think that we are right and it's often to think that what pleases us is what should happen and it can be a very pleasant feeling to prove yourself right.

I can only speak for men but it's definitely something men enjoy I think being proved right. Paul says don't do it.

Do not please yourself. So easy in a disagreement to think well the number one objective is that I get what I want at the end of this. Paul's saying no he's saying the absolute opposite.

So when Christians disagree these are the things that we should not do. And then last of all he tells us things that we should do. So we'll go through these very quickly. 141, 157 you see a repeated word it's kind of like a bracket the beginning at the end of this section it's the word welcome.

[33 : 37] We're to welcome those who think differently on minor issues that's conveying the idea of acceptance of bringing people alongside. In other words it means not keeping your distance from the people you disagree with.

It means not ostracizing them and yet that's so often what happens. And yet it's so interesting verse 7 of chapter 15 gives us a comparison between how we welcome others and how Christ has welcomed us.

Let's think for a moment how many holes could Jesus find in your theological opinions?

And yet does he keep his distance from you? Of course he doesn't. He welcomes you. Does he brag about you?

Does he look down on you? No. He's our example in it all. So we are to welcome one another.

[34 : 43] Verse 21 of chapter 14 highlights probably what's the main sort of themes running through the whole chapter that we should be ready to accommodate to the sensitivities of others in order to preserve peace and joy and fellowship.

Paul says the same thing in 1 Corinthians chapter 8. He says if food makes my brother stumble I will never eat meat lest I make my brother stumble. It's a great emphasis that the default position is that we should put the sensitivities of others before our own.

And this is really one of the key practical instructions of Romans 14. So for example supposing Derek and I had a difference of opinion about an issue.

Say for example the frequency of communion. So say I said we should have communion twice a year and Derek said no we should have communion every week and we started this discussion about whether which one was right.

What kind of response is Romans 14 calling us to? Well it's saying that my approach is to say we'll go with Derek's view.

[35 : 54] And Derek's approach should be to say we'll go with Thomas's view. And interestingly the one who concedes his position is the one who's stronger in faith.

And it's important to recognize this because it's the opposite that we often see. So Derek and I say no my way, my way. And then we go further back.

No. Then we have two St. Columbus's. All because of what? Nothing.

We must never ever let minor issues become battlegrounds. Major issues yes. And please, please recognize that distinction.

Major issues we are uncompromising on. We have to be. The authority of Scripture, the deity of Jesus Christ, salvation by faith alone, they're major issues we stand up for them resolutely.

[36 : 56] But not minor ones. Not minor ones. Then 14.5 says that we must be convinced in our own minds.

Sorry there's a typo there. There should be a D at the end of minds. Each one should be convinced in his own mind. Now that's a really important point.

It's saying two things in fact. It's saying first of all that in all of this Paul is saying you do not need to change your opinion. So Paul said I'm not going to eat meat if it offends my brother.

But he is still convinced in his own mind that eating meat is perfectly okay. And he was more than ready to change his actions without changing his mind.

He was ready to change his actions without changing his mind. So Romans 14 is not saying you're always going to be wrong. Always concede your position. Always change your mind.

[37 : 58] Always just be shaped by whatever body else thinks. It's not saying that at all. But it's saying even if you know you're right. Still be considerate to the sensitivities of your brother or your sister.

Paul is saying that be convinced in your own mind. You don't need to change your opinion. But secondly behind that lies a really important implication. Paul is saying if you're going to hold a strong opinion on something make sure you've thought it through.

Make sure you are actually convinced about it in your own mind. Make sure you know why you hold that view because often Christians can hold very, very strong views about a minor issue and they have absolutely no idea why they hold that view.

And that's a really important thing to think about that. I remember being challenged by that wonderfully. It was helpful in a way.

Remember somebody asking, there was a lecturer at ETS saying to us, how many singing should you have on a Sunday morning? We all said, four.

[39 : 11] And he said, why? And we were speechless. Now four songs is great.

It's brilliant. But we had no idea why we did it. We just did it. And he asked us numerous other questions about our habits. Why? Why? Why?

And most of the time we couldn't answer it. Paul is reminding us, think things through. It's important to think things through. We have to be careful of football theology.

Sometimes in football we just love stuff because we love it. So we love a player because he's joined Aberdeen. We hate a player because he's joined any other team. We don't think things through, we just do it because that's what we are.

It's really important to think things through. Be ready to listen, ready to learn. Be convinced in your own mind. Last couple of things. 14, 19, 15, 2 uses the same phrase or same language, the idea of building each other up.

[40 : 15] Isn't that interesting? A disagreement is an opportunity if it's handled correctly to build each other up.

And that should always be our goal, to encourage one another, to support one another. In an environment of righteousness, peace and joy, which is what the kingdom of God is all about, Paul's just told us, we can help each other learn.

We can build each other up. We can recognize each other's sensitivities. And we may even be able to resolve many of our differences. And then lastly, the instructions that we get in 14, 6, and then

next in, bring up the next slide in a moment, 22 and 23, tell us that our priority and focus should always be on God.

So here Paul says, if you're going to eat, you do it in the honour of the Lord. If you're not going to eat, you're doing it in the honour of the Lord. Same he talks about towards the end of the chapter, he's saying, keep the priority between yourself and God.

And so our motivation is important. So if we abstain from alcohol, if we want women to wear hats, if we use a certain Bible, if we dance as we worship, if we do all that because we want to honour God, then good.

[41 : 32] But if we're doubtful about something, as it says at the end, if you think, well, I don't think this is right, but I'll do it anyway because I don't really mind what God thinks. That's not good. In fact, it's a sin.

And so we want to remember the importance of our heart in all of this as well. But I want to emphasise that never forget in all of this that God is patient and gracious and kind and we should just simply be exactly the same ourselves.

So there's lots of things that we must do and lots of things that we must not do when Christians disagree. Interestingly, these are non-negotiables.

So how we respond to minor issues is a major issue. Does that make sense? What I'm saying is the instructions of Romans 14 are incredibly important.

And that makes perfect sense because if you just think about it, how many of the church's problems would be solved or avoided if we listened more carefully to this chapter?

[42 : 39] So Romans as a whole is an amazing book. And we want to identify ourselves with that book so much, don't we? We all want to be Romans chapter three Christians.

We hold to justification and to atonement and to all of these great truths. We all want to be Romans chapter three Christians. We all want to be Romans chapter eight Christians, all that talk of adoption and hope and security and inseparability from God's love.

We all want to be Romans eight Christians. We all want to be Romans 12 Christians, a living sacrifice. You read that chapter and you think, I want to be a Romans 12 Christians. We're Romans three Christians.

We're Romans eight Christians. We're Romans 12 Christians. Are you a Romans 14 Christian?

Let's pray.

God our Father, we thank you for the teaching of your word and we acknowledge that at so many times we can get our priorities mixed up and so often we can elevate minor issues to a place that's not warranted.

[43 : 49] So often we can be concerned about our own sensitivities and what we want at the expense of the spiritual, good and health of others. Help us Lord to remember that you are judge.

Help us to remember that our brothers and sisters are so precious. Help us to live out the teaching of Romans 14.

Amen.