

Rom 14:1-12

How to Live Together and Not Kill Each Other

November 5, 2023

Main Point: As we seek to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision to gratify the flesh” (Rom 13:14), Paul writes now about turning away from judging our fellow believers over disputable matters. Paul gives us 3 tools to use against this ever-present tendency to judge our brothers and sisters, to despise them, condemn them, and pass judgment upon them.

Intro: Ch 14 and first half of 15 are all about not judging fellow believers. Part 1 of 3. Stay tuned.

3 weeks, 3 passages on the strong and the weak, the weak and the strong.

Christian liberty: Freedom of the conscience before the Lord. So, WCF Ch 20.2: “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men...”

A motto of our age is “don’t judge me!” “Only God can judge me!” To be clear: On matters of morality – yes, we must judge as to whether this is right or wrong, as defined by God’s Word, and say so out of love for people. This is harmful to you, body and soul. And I am willing to accept the consequences of loving you enough to say this to you.

Read 14:1-12

Opening Intro Planet Fitness – Judgment Free Zone

The first time I went to a Planet Fitness

Ever since my high school years, I’d been to a few gyms.

This one was different.

Sign on the outside of the gym: The Judgement Free Zone®

And \$10/month, with a \$49 annual fee. Really? That inexpensive? Weights and machines?

What do they mean by this?

Planet Fitness became known as the “Judgement Free Zone®” – a welcoming and non-intimidating environment where people could feel comfortable regardless of their fitness level.

The Church should be more like Planet Fitness.

*Application of 12:1-3

Dietary laws/customs & observance of days

Paul gives us 3 tools to use against this ever-present tendency to judge our brothers and sisters, to despise them, condemn them, and pass judgment upon them.
The warning, the joy, and the sobering reality.

1 The Warning: Judging One Another is Super Easy (vs. 1-6)

Vs. 1-4

At a common meal, common in the early NT church.

The propensity that both parties have to judge one another, to 'pass judgment.' To condemn, to write off, to disdain, to look down upon, to think 'how could they do that?'

This assumes that judging happens and was happening. So heed the warning - It's a rebuke against peer pressure to do or believe something that is against the conscience.

Paul has in mind the Last Day, the Judgement Day. (v. 4 – will be upheld, 3 more future references to the future judgement to come)

See WCF 20.3 "...the purpose of Christian liberty, namely, that being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life."

Because judging one another is super easy, we also have to speak to the opposite temptation:

Danger to think this is just 'live and let live,' 'you do you,' no judgment at all about anything. No. This is dealing with disputable matters, matters of conscience. It is not loving people to say 'oh that's no big deal' when they are doing something that is clearly against God's Word and harmful to themselves and others.

ILLUS of doctors and medical students dealing with the pressures of transgender conformity and gender affirmation that performs surgical procedures to physically alter their anatomy. Love is costly. Last word from one of presenters to CMMA: "If you are not prepared to suffer for your patients, then do something else, get in another line of work."

But on matters of opinion, of individual conscience before the Lord, 'you do you.'

Paul's examples of food and days of the week

Why would they not eat meat? b/c they were afraid it had been used in religious services for idol worship or b/c they believed it was ceremonially unclean and therefore to be stayed away from...

Same with honoring different days well, differently. Likely related to Sabbath observance and Jewish feast days.

In our day, this could be innumerable issues. But not just taste, like musical tastes or preferences. These are matters that matter to your conscience before the Lord. As in, this is an issue that you are standing in front of God explaining to Him why you partake or don't partake in this certain behavior. A call to pay attention to, to heed your own conscience...

... drinking alcohol or Sabbath observance or how to celebrate holidays
schooling

Or who you vote for

An issue that came up in our church: Harry Potter – School of Wizardry. Wizards and witches. Am I introducing my children to paganism if they read this? Could it be a vehicle to see and to learn about the complexities of good vs. evil and how good triumphs?

Why Judging others is Super Easy: Temptation for the strong to ride right over the weak and boast in their liberty regardless of whether it destroys the conscience of the weak. And for the weak to create laws out of their own scruples and bring the destruction of legalism into the Church.

Vs. 5-6 –

Individual rights within the whole community

Matters of personal conscience

I stand or fall before the Lord and Him alone

We all must give an account of why we chose what we chose

Taking us back to 12:1-3. Renewing our minds. “in honor of the Lord”, “gives thanks to God” 3 times! Plus 5b. “fully convinced in his own mind” Our fellow believers have the Holy Spirit just as we do. I don’t agree with their position although I am obligated to seek to understand it. This is trans to 2 – “For...”

The next tool:

2The Joy: A Captivated Conscience (vs. 7-9)

This is Paul’s poetic, lofty way of saying ‘breathe, and chill out, and live!’ Such freedom and such joy.

The double prescription of meds to cure us from judging one another: The warning and the joy.

Paul is giving us the why. The deep and wide foundation of how the strong can welcome the weak and the weak can welcome the strong.

The captivated conscience.

Read v. 7 and 8

Living and Dying? What is this, Paul? Why so stark and strong language? I mean, this is just about all of us getting along, right? Why isn’t this easier? Because I need you to be wrong.

So we see again! How much we need Jesus! If I am robed in the righteousness of Christ, if I am whole and complete in Christ, if I have everything, then I don’t need you to be wrong or me to be right. I can defer. I can die to my own opinion being right.

*Not die to my own opinion, my own conscience, my own hashing it out with the Lord!
This assumes a very strong personal relationship with God in prayer and conversation

and intimacy with God! Throughout – especially “in honor of the Lord” and “gives thanks to God” – My conscience is captive bc it has been captivated!

Assumes a strong personal relationship with God.

The joy of individuality within community while forbidding individual supremacy.

*As your conscience is captivated by the joy of belonging to Christ and being under His loving, gentle, lordship, you are more and more freed from the need for me to be wrong.

This is nothing more and everything included in love for one another.

Welcome him. Welcome her.

What is this welcoming? What does this look like? Be eager to listen and to hear.

“To receive kindly or hospitably, admit to one’s society and friendship, treat with kindness.” (The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, 1990, Pershbach, 354)

Non-intimidating

Non-bragging

Not, you know, drawing attention to myself by how much weight I’m lifting, flexing my strength in front of you weaklings and feeling so much better than the weak!

7-9 is a check on our age. 7-9 is very counter-cultural, almost blasphemous (Fran Sciacca). I am not my own, but have been bought with a price. And there is inexhaustible JOY in this!

‘to the Lord’ – Paul checking our motives – We live ‘to the Lord.’ We die ‘to the Lord.’ I am not my own. I do not live according to society’s changing mores or which way the winds of opinion are blowing.

How attractive! How different! How weird! Salt and Light. Salt is salt and light is light, unless it’s not and then, it’s nothing! It’s waste or it’s darkness.

v. 9 – this is why Christ died and lived again – to make us His own, to own us. Paul pressing us deeper into the opposite of individualism! How the Church needs this! So as to prevent the Church from being destroyed from the inside – by us judging one another.

Trans to 3 – why does Paul go back to the warning again? The temptation to dismiss this. The temptation to deceive ourselves. To say, “I don’t judge my fellow Christians.”

3The Sobering Reality (vs. 10-12)

What’s underneath all this, undergirding this? Rom 12:1-3 and an assumed ongoing, in-depth, joy-filled relational intimacy with your Father. He’s available and He’s for you. He’s on your side. He loves you. He brings to you all kinds of difficult people. And He brings you through all kinds of difficult conversations and circumstances for your good. And He allows you, invites you to sharpen one another and have disagreements and discussions and conflict so that you are changed, sanctified, always going deeper into faith and repentance and eager, so eager to welcome one another (Rom 15:5-6). You are

brothers and sisters of one another! You are closer than biological family. Appeal to your conscience here... what is it worth to you to be right and for them to be wrong? What length are you willing to go to?

*Quote from J. Bunyan, *The Acceptable Sacrifice*: On Ps 51:17, “A broken and contrite heart, o, God, You will not despise.” “A tender heart will deny itself, and that in lawful things, and will forbear even that which may be done, lest some Jew, or Gentile, or the church of God, or any member of it, should be offended, or made weak thereby; whereas the Christian that is not tender, that has lost his tenderness, is so far off of denying himself in lawful things that he will even adventure to meddle in things utterly forbidden, whoever is offended, grieved, or made weak thereby. *{For an instance of this, we need go no further than to the man in the text, who, while he was tender, trembled at little things; but when his heart was hardened, he could take Bathsheba to satisfy his lust, and kill her husband to cover his wickedness.}*” (88-89).

So, the Sobering Reality:

You judge – see 12:3 and Gal 5:13

Sober judgement of ourselves (Rom 12:3)

Yes, you are free – but beware of your fleshly instincts – you still have indwelling sin that has to be warred against! (Gal 5:13) “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

God Alone is the Judge

You will be judged – Paul rooting all of this in the future judgement to come.

Paul raises the stakes even more. Consider what’s at stake when you are judging a fellow Christian for their opinion on disputable, non-essential matters.

When we pass judgement on others, we are taking the place of God in their life.

Judging is usually about my own insecurity – when I have judged others, condemned them, written them off as stupid or crazy. The roots of that are usually my own desire to be right and for them to be wrong. (*Switchfoot – I need you to be wrong*)

Slowly walk through 10, 11, 12 and then:

Which leads me to desperately cling to v. 9 – “Christ died and lived again that He might be Lord both of the dead and the living.” This is my only hope. This is my sobering reality. This is yours, isn’t it? Why is it sobering? It’s smelling-salts reality – it’s waking up reality. It’s acknowledging and then clearing away through repentance all of my fleshly frustrations, anger, despising attitude towards those who have different opinions than me! It’s freedom from “I have to be right” and “you have to be wrong” for me to feel ok with myself. It’s freedom to be strong and not brought down to the weak position. It’s freedom to be weak and to acknowledge I need to grow.

Conc: So let's make the church more and more like Planet Fitness. A place of welcoming, non-intimidation, growing more and more fit. In fact, they may not realize how theologically astute their name is. As v. 11 alludes to, God is one day going to make this whole planet, Planet Fitness. May His Church and His people demonstrate a taste of what that kind of fitness looks like as we genuinely welcome one another within our vast diversity of opinions on disputable matters. Let us strive to help one another be "comfortable regardless of their faith (fitness) level" This is a very strong value for our church, but we have to fight to keep it that way.

So how do we live together and not kill each other? Receive the warning, be captivated by the joy of belonging to the Lord Jesus, and soberly judge yourselves so that you flee from judging one another on disputable matters.

Bene: Rom 15:5-6

Discussion Questions for Community Groups:

1. Why do you think a great tag-line for a workout gym is "The Judgement Free Zone ®"? What is Planet Fitness tapping into with that tagline?
2. Christians passing judgement on one another was obviously an issue for the Roman church. How have you seen this damage relationships within the church or in your own life?
3. How does love for one another help us to love the strong and love the weak?
4. Can you think of an issue you would be willing to share that is an opinion of yours on a disputable matter and how you arrived at that, as a help to the rest of us as we seek to "honor the Lord" and "give thanks to the Lord"?
5. How could we help each other grow in a captivated conscience before the Lord (vs. 7-9)?
6. What is one tangible action you can take to seek to grow in welcoming a fellow believer, especially one with whom you disagree over an issue that to them or to you is just plain wrong before the Lord?