"Do not Hinder One Another"[1]

Romans 14:13-23

[Begin with prayer. Pray for Bob & Sandi Piatt and for Covenant Presbyterian with Ken Klett.]

Explain Q&A Sunday evenings (as well as jumping around this morning to try to explain context).

Recently, I read a memoir entitled, *Educated.* It's written by an adult woman who grew up in a very strict, fundamentalist and also turbulent home in Idaho. She was "homeschooled," but she barely learned anything educationally in the home. In the midst of this, and many other very harsh circumstances, she did not learn much about the outside world. Yet, she had a desire for knowledge. In high school, she taught herself enough to be able to take the ACT's and get into Bringham Young University. And, if I remember correctly, it was within the first week of school that her teacher brought up the Holocaust. She had maybe vaguely heard of something that happened to Jews in Germany, but not to this level. So, she raised her hand and asked, "What is the Holocaust?" Her teacher thought she was denying the Holocaust existed and essentially reprimanded her. From that point, the author said that she never asked another question in class. She would study on her own.

Now, the teacher didn't know that she didn't know, but the teacher had an affect on her – a negative one. And, I bring this up because of the chapters we're studying now in Romans. Over the last few weeks, we've been in passages urging the Roman church to love one another, and even to love one another in the midst of differing viewpoints. At the beginning of Romans 14, Paul then reveals the differing viewpoints in the church come from two basic types of Christians. There are those who are strong in the faith and those who are weak in the faith. The point Paul is making is that the weak in the faith are those who simply do not yet grasp the greater ramifications of the gospel. While they mentally know that no type of food will make them right with God – only Jesus, through his sacrifice, can make us right – they still think these rules of drink, food and special days still apply. Yet, those who are strong have learned that Jesus' sacrifice has done away with old testament, temple-type regulations. And, sadly, the strong are acting like the teacher in the story I just told. The strong assume knowledge or information that isn't there. Instead of being patient and teaching, they argue and try to get the weak to just do what they do! Today, this sermon addresses this tendency in those of us who have grown in the faith and yet may not be patient towards other believers. If we live this way, we are a detriment to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

But there's one other warning I want to give to other who may be "weaker." As we dive into the text that we just read (Romans 14:13-23), the temptation for some of you could be to fall into the trap that Paul warns against: to not judge one another. In verse 10, Paul says, "Why do you pass judgment on

[1] This manuscript is still in the rough draft phrase. I recommend you utilize these notes in conjunction to the sermon to gain greater insight and clarity.

your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. . .."[2]

In other words, don't get judgmental towards each other – and especially during a sermon when the big idea of the passage is to not sinfully judge one another. I know that sounds funny, but the temptation could be great. We all do it at times, don't we? We listen to a sermon and think to ourselves, "Oh, I sure hope so-and-so heard that point!" Or, you could be thinking, "Ugh, so-and-so isn't here to hear that!" Those of you who may be weaker in the faith may get a haughty spirit this morning in hearing points directed to the strong and think to yourself, "Yeah, do you hear that! So there!"

I know the temptation within my own heart, so please pray that instead of a haughty spirit, you'd have a humble spirit – to learn and apply for yourself and to also be genuinely concerned that others around you would grow – that the strong and the weak would grow even stronger in resting in Christ's strength.

With this said, I'm not going to re-read the passage that David, Ben and I read. Instead, I'm going to give you the main idea of these verses. I believe what Paul is wanting us to learn here is to **Seek to never hinder a Christian in their pursuit of Jesus.** Now, I know that these words need to be defined. And I get this idea first from verses 13-14 and 20-21. Let's start with 13: Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.[3] The "therefore" comes because Paul just said that God is the judge of all of his children. And, since he is going to ensure all of his children "stand" in the judgment, and that all of his children will bow before him; then we shouldn't pronounce a sinful condemning judgment over our brothers and sisters in Christ. But then Paul goes on in verse 13 to say what we should do. The wording is interesting because it's a positive with a negative in it: decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

Oh, how many times I've heard misapplications to this verse and these words. A man could have a foot fetish and then say that the woman wearing sandals is a stumbling block to him. Someone may not be wearing a dress or a suit to church, and someone will say, "They're going to be a stumbling block to others because it'll cause them to dress like them." In the King James and New King James, we also have a word "offense" that comes in, which is misapplied in similar ways. I remember hearing a story once of a preacher probably a century or two ago who was greeting people at the end of the church service, and a woman came up to him and reprimanded him for his tie. She stated how it offended him. Then the preacher responded with something like, "Ma'am, if this tie offends you so, let me give you some scissors. I only ask that you let me cut your tongue for it offends me."

My point in bringing this out is that we can't use the terms "stumbling block" and "offend" in subjective ways. Things that I'm personally offended by. These words have greater meaning that need to be understood in their context. If these words simply mean, "What angers you, bothers you or upsets you," then these verses can be used by people to destroy churches by having people take sinful control – and I imagine that has happened many times in churches.

So, what does it mean to never hinder another believer? When we look at the text, we actually see a few words that are similar to each other. Verse 13 has "**stumbling block"** and **"hindrance."** Verse 15 has **"grieved"** and **"destroy."** Verse 20 mentions to not "destroy" (which is actually different Greek word

[2] *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 14:10.
[3] *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 14:13.

than in v. 15), and then there's the word **"stumble."** Finally, verse 23 has the word **"condemned,"** which I think sheds light on these words, too. If we simply take these ideas together, Paul is talking about never doing something that would cause someone to get off course in their pursuit of Christ and fall away forever. A stumbling block, hindrance or offense is not simply something that someone doesn't like. It's something that takes the person's faith away from Jesus and ultimately will lead to their condemnation at the judgment. I say this because the word for "destroy" in verse 15 is *always* used by Paul to refer to the final judgment and condemnation.

So, by your desire to exercise your freedom and push it on a weaker person in the church, you could destroy their faith and they won't make it into Heaven. Wait. What?! Is that what Paul is saying? Admittedly, I want to share with you the tension I have with these words – and I think Paul wants us to feel this. If you're an attentive reader to Paul in chapter 14, you could say, "Didn't Paul just say in verses 10-12 that God is going to ensure that every believer is going to stand in the judgment and bow before the Lord? If that's the case, how could I destroy them and keep that from happening?"

This is the beautiful logic of the Scripture. Paul gets very serious here. And we shouldn't minimize the warnings here. Let me explain. Some say, "Well, if God has saved a person, then they're going to Heaven, and I can just do what I want." But Scriptures teach us that God works through his children to grow his children, as part of their sanctification! Maybe you've heard David Pollard before say, "I'm going to make it to Heaven's shores because of you, this church!" And you could say, "No! Because of Jesus!" He would be the first to affirm this. But, using an illustration he loves; imagine we're on a boat on our way to Heaven. This boat gets to Heaven. The Spirit gives us wind and the strength to honor God on the boat. And then, we hear a warning, "Don't throw anyone overboard or they will be in danger of not making it!" We need one another, to help each other and keep each other from jumping ship – and we shouldn't be the ones who throw anyone overboard!

This is why Christians 4-500 years ago didn't simply say, "Once saved, always saved." They said, "perseverance of the saints." While God ordains for all of his children to make it to and through the judgment. He has ordained means for them to get there!

So, the strong in the faith in the church at Rome could say, "What's the big deal? It's just food! We're free!" And, in one sense, Paul agrees with them. He even says this in verse 14. Which, by the way, shows Paul teaching the truth while also ensuring the stronger are affirmed that they do believe the truth. However, Paul says that the food, days and drink issues can be a big deal if you sear the conscience of a weaker member of the church. When you do this, you're trying to throw them overboard. Over food, you could detract them in the faith and lead them to drowning. In verses 20-21, he essentially restates this point. Look at those verses with me: **[20] Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. [21] It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.**[4]

One more qualification here because I think we need to understand the broader context of chapter 14. Remember that these words "stumble" and "destroy" are referring to final destruction. So, Paul is not saying that if someone disagrees with you about something you think is fine then you shouldn't do the thing they don't like. We all need to be mature enough to recognize we have different viewpoints and practices. So, you might do things I wouldn't do, and I could do things you wouldn't do. Paul isn't saying to stop all disagreeable things. What he is saying is, "Don't let your selfishness cause other believers to

[4] *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 14:20–21.

stumble and fall away from the faith." Meaning, don't do things that could lead people to a habit of looking away from Jesus.

Now, how were the strong in the Roman church beginning to act like this? In verse 1, Paul implies that the strong were simply trying to use their strength to get the weak to act more freely. Yet, in doing this, Paul shows that the strong are actually taking the weak's eyes off of Jesus, and simply on to the "strong's" way of doing things. In some way, the strong had a sort of "peer pressure." They just wanted the weak to give in. They weren't concerned about the weak growing in Christlikeness. If they continued to do this, the weak could fall away.

So here, we have warnings to not cause a brother to fall away. And, in case you want to think this only applies with food, drink and holidays; Paul says in verse 21 that he would refrain from all sorts of things if it causes someone to fall away from the faith. So, don't, for the sake of *your* self-focused desire for freedom, destroy another person's faith in Jesus and cause them to stumble and fall away from the faith. Again, these verses cause me to say that the big idea is to **Seek to never hinder another believer from their pursuit of Jesus.** With this, Paul moves on to give a few (or more) reasons **why**.

1. **We are to live in love (vv. 15-16).**

Let's read verses 15-16 again: **15** For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. **16** So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil.[5]

The "For" is probably referring back to verse 13. Judge to never hinder another believer. Why? Because if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Here, Paul is giving a specific scenario. The word "grieve," again, isn't simply someone saying, "I'm so sad you did that. *tsk tsk*." One commentator named Douglas Moo writes this: **The eating of the "strong," coupled with their attitude of superiority and scorn toward those who think differently, can pressure the "weak" into eating even when they do not yet have the faith to believe that it is right for them to do so. And by doing what does not come "out of faith," the "weak" sin (v. 23) and suffer the pain of that knowledge** (Moo, p. 854). This is the grief being spoken of here.

Keep in mind, an application here is *not* "If a Christian is a vegan, and you are on the Adkins diet," you shouldn't associate with each other. Some people can be so intense in their viewpoints of food, they can feel grief over what others eat. But this grieve is stronger. Context dictates this grief comes because they don't know how Jesus applies to this. In addition, verse 14 uses the term "unclean" or "common" which means the arguments were over the implications of the Old Testament. Were there unclean foods? Were there days God required to be celebrated as more holy now? What about wine that could have potentially been offered to idols?

If a weak person sees another Christian drinking a drink that they know could have been offered to idols, they could be very concerned because it was used in idol worship! Is that even allowed? Yet, the strong would take no time to explain. Instead, they'd simply argue with the weak and say, "It's okay, and they should do it, too." How does this encourage them in their faith in Jesus? It doesn't. And, it tears away unity around Christ. Instead of pursuing Jesus together, they were pursuing standards together. As a result, they aren't walking in love because love focuses on God's glory first and then our neighbors good.

[5] *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 14:15–16.

Neither are taking place in this scenario. So, what could be an application in our day? I'm hesitant to give these because I want to be careful, but I think these could be examples. If the concern for wine was that it could be offered to idols, then I imagine a modern-day equivalent could be people who say you cannot buy General Mills or shop at Target. After all, both companies gives towards awful things. Would we exercise church discipline on someone who buys diapers at Target? No. Can there be disagreement on this issue? Yes. But we shouldn't condemn or look down on one another for the varying viewpoint. That said, if you knew someone who was a new believer, and they were genuinely concerned about this, you shouldn't simply say, "C'mon. You're free in Christ! Shop at Target with me next time. You know you want to!" What could happen is that the person will go against their conscience by shopping at Target. You haven't pointed them to Christ. And, if they go against their conscience here, they might go against it in another situation that is more significant.

Instead of arguing for your freedom, sacrifice. Don't destroy the one for whom Christ died. Meaning, don't tear them down in the faith. They're supposed to be built up. So, "strong" Christian, love the believers by paying the insignificant price of limiting your freedoms so that the "weak" can grow in pursuing Christ! What scenarios do you simply say, "They need to deal with it" as opposed to "How can I point them to Jesus and be patient?"

Some of you could say, "Well, if I always refrain, then I may never be able to do that thing!" There you go again only thinking of yourself! But actually, this may not be the case. Paul isn't against talking with one another and presenting cases that point to Jesus. In verse 14, he explains the right viewpoint. What Paul is against is a type of superiority that simply emphasizes you in what you're doing, thus getting their eyes off of Jesus. When we do this, Paul says in verse 16 that the good thing we do will be spoken of as evil. God tells us elsewhere that no foods are forbidden if received with thanksgiving! These are good gifts of God! But it can be spoken of with evil if you are haughty and self-focused. The weak believer will not even want to become strong if you treat them with contempt.

It's like the story I told in the beginning. Who would want to listen to a teacher who doesn't teach? Who would ask questions of a teacher who mocks? We, as followers of Jesus are called to be disciple-making disciples. Meaning, we are called to always lead each other to love and follow Jesus. If we simply look down on others and say, "Just agree with me," they'll never see the beauty of God's plan. But if we patiently come alongside of them. If we say, "This is why I believe what I believe and how this applies to Jesus," then even if we disagree with each other, we will love one another and we won't divert each other from Jesus. We keep our good from being evil spoken of due to our attitude and demeanor towards one another. So, why should we not put a stumbling block? Because it's not loving. It doesn't point to Jesus and his good plan, which should be spoken of positively! Another reason is:

2. **We are to live out the Kingdom's Values (vv. 17-19).**

Read verses 17-19 with me: **17** For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. **18** Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. **19** So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. [6]

[6] *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 14:16–19.

Again, we have the word "for," which brings us another reason. Why shouldn't we judge one another sinfully? Because the kingdom of God isn't about eating and drinking. It's about righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Have you ever been in an argument with someone and then you start arguing over things that aren't even the point? The issue could be that a roommate didn't take out the trash like they agreed, but the underlying issue is really that you don't feel respected. You argue over the trash, though. But, guess what? You still feel like things aren't resolved. So, you argue again. The other person is confused and they want out because they think you're just a nag.

Guess what? This is how it is sometimes within local churches. We make rules that people have to abide by. You need to make sure you dress like this, sing like that, act like this, don't do this thing over that. All of these things merely focus on the behavior. But what about a relationship with Jesus? In verse 18, Paul says "whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men." Paul is mostly concerned about our relationship with the Lord that fuels our behaviors – not merely behaviors.

So, how's your relationship with the Lord? Have you recognized that all your behaviors, left to yourself, are sinful in the sight of God and cannot make you right with him? Have you turned to Jesus, who lived the perfect life you could never live and took the judgment your sins deserved? Have you experienced freedom in Jesus? Are you living in that freedom by focusing your gaze on him? Maybe some of you have taken your gaze off of Jesus. You've fallen back into old patterns. You've focused on what you do or don't do. Relationship with God has become a list of chores. As a result, you judge others according to those standards.

But Jesus has given us salvation so that we could live righteously, so that we could have joy with God and others and also so that we can grow in our peace with God and peace with one another! Do you see the Kingdom of God is relational? It's growing in the restored relationship with the Lord and with those who trust and follow Jesus!

Therefore, Paul says in verse 19, "let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding."[7] The word for "peace" doesn't simply mean calm. It refers to an assurance of safety. We should pursue those things that encourage one another in the peace we have with God and even the peace we have with one another. The argumentative, judgmental, condescending spirit that was seeming to take root in Rome wasn't from God. It wasn't building each other up in the faith. It was tearing one another down. The Holy Spirit has come to build up a people in the image of Christ! So, we are to be dependent on the Spirit and live out these values in the strength the Spirit supplies.

In a similar way, with one another here at Ventura, we should always seek to show to one another the peace we have and can grow in in Christ, and we should also show that type of welcoming peace with one another. Because Jesus experienced judgment for sins on the cross, those who turn to him from their sins now have peace with God. And, all who have peace with God have peace with one another! Now, we are to live in this Kingdom peace!

To quote from Douglas Moo again, he writes that the strong here were somewhat similar to the Pharisees. He says, **". . .where the Pharisees insisted on strict adherence to the ritual law at the expense of 'justice, mercy, and faith' (Matt 23:23), the 'strong' are insisting on exercising their**

[7] *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 14:19.

freedom from the ritual law at the expense of 'righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit'" (Moo, p. 856).

Oh, how we can pendulum swing. In an effort to not be like the legalistic Pharisees, we can become them. Let's beware of this danger! *Pursue* what makes for peace. Notice, this is a word that calls for you to take action. Paul doesn't say, "Pursue it if others do." No. You pursue it as a disciple-making disciple of Jesus. So, we should seek to never hinder someone from their pursuit of Christ because we are to love, we are to live out the kingdom values, and finally:

3. **We are to keep our faith focused on God (vv. 22-23).**

Verses 22-23 say, "The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."[8]

What is he saying when he says, "Keep your faith between yourself and God?" In our culture, that could mean, "Just be quiet. Don't tell me what you believe." Clearly, Paul isn't saying be silent because he's talking about it here, and he also just stated that the stance of the strong is actually correct. But I do think that Paul is essentially restating the idea of being fully convinced in your own mind. But he's bringing up the aspect of faith. The word faith is found in verse 22 and then verse 23 ends with the idea of faith. So, faith is extremely important.

What is faith? Faith is belief and reliance on Jesus. You trust him and thus are increasingly convinced of what he says. When Paul writes in verse 22 to have our faith between ourselves and God, I think contextually what he's saying is, "Believe something because the Lord says it, not simply because of someone else." The strong shouldn't say that someone should believe them because they're strong. You shouldn't believe me simply because I'm the pastor. A good pastor, a good disciple of Jesus, always wants people to be pointed back to the Word, which ultimately points to our Lord. Keep our eyes fixed on Jesus!

After all, "Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves." This means that if you live and act in dependence on the Lord, then your conscience doesn't condemn you. You're grieved when you just do things because other people pressure you. But if you do it out of freedom in the Lord, then you're blessed!

But, I need to press this statement a little further. The idea of "blessed" is a reference to eternal blessedness. I don't think Paul is saying that if you do one act in dependence on God you're blessed. While that is true, Paul is saying, that if the trajectory of your life is one of living by faith, then you are blessed. Think of Jesus' beatitudes. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. Are these statements simply talking about a one time ting? If you're pure for one second, you'll see God? No, the word "blessed" is an eternal blessedness. And purity of heart is a gift of God that flourishes in the blessed.

So here. Paul is talking in larger terms! If you live by faith, you're a blessed person! You're enjoying the pleasure of God and not feeling his judgment. But if you doubt, you're condemned if you eat because it's not in faith. In other words, if you're not convinced this is God's ways, then you are rejecting God. And,

[8] *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 14:22–23.

by the way, I think Paul is speaking in ultimate terms here, too. This isn't simply saying at one point in time you go against your conscience. The term "condemned" is talking about a final condemnation. If you live this way, putting your faith and reliance on people more than God, then you're condemned even in the action of eating.

And, Paul gives the reason why. Whatever is not of faith is sin. In our culture, there's a lot said about "faith." And, people simply say, "Have faith." But we all have faith. The question is, "What is our faith in?" Is our faith in reason, science, philosophy, our bank account, people's approval? Or, is our faith in Jesus. The important issue isn't so much the faith, but in the object of the faith! If you do not live in trust and reliance and pursuit of Jesus, you're sinning.

Now, **if you're a Christian, you're going to hear these words and want to grow in experiencing the righteousness, joy and peace of God. You don't want to live in yourself. You don't want to sinfully judge and condemn one another. In no way would you want to throw a brother or sister off the ship! We want to make it to shore together! Make it your aim to never hinder another believer in their pursuit of Jesus. Live in love, live out the kingdom values, and keep your faith focused on the Lord.**

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