

# Do Not Cause Your Brother to Stumble

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[ 0 : 00 ] And I would like, if you brought a copy of the Scriptures with you, I would like you to open up to Romans chapter 14.

Again, we're going to finish this chapter this morning that we've been in for the last few weeks. We're going to read the same passage that we read last week, which is really the second half of the chapter, beginning in verse 13 all the way down through the end in verse 23 this morning.

If you didn't bring your copy of the Scriptures, then you just need to grab one of the black pew Bibles scattered around in the chairs, turn to page 949, and you'll find Romans 14 right there. Easy to find, easy to follow along.

Now I'd like you guys, though, to stand to your feet as we read the Word of God together this morning. The Apostle Paul writes, verse 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. 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. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love.

[ 1 : 20 ] By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

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. 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. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.

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. Father, we give you thanks for this word. We give you thanks that you have taught us through these last few chapters of Romans and you continue to teach us how to live in ways that display not only the love of Christ for us, but our love for one another within the body of Christ.

[ 2 : 36 ] Continue to teach us those things this morning. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Most of you have probably not heard, but a few of you may have heard of an author by the name of Rosaria Butterfield.

She wrote a book called *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*, which is perhaps the most appropriate book title I've ever found in a book, because if you read through this book, you will find, as she describes her life before coming to Christ, that she was indeed an unlikely convert.

Here we are in the middle of sort of the Bible belt a bit in the South, and many of you grew up in church, or at least you've been exposed to church, and there's a certain sort of Christian subculture. Though it's shrinking and it's changing, and we know it's not as vibrant as it once was, there's a certain Christian subculture still that exists in Texas and other parts of the South, whereas Rosaria Butterfield was in the midst of a lifestyle and a culture that could not be any more opposite than what we think of when we think of Bible belt evangelical Christian subculture.

And she relates not only the story of her conversion in this book, but also she gives a lot of the thoughts that she has on the Christian life and on what the Bible has to say in light of the kind of conversion that she experienced, and in light of her experiences having been where she once was to where she is now as a faithful follower of Jesus.

[ 4 : 07 ] But I wanted to share from you this morning at the outset, I wanted to share something with you from this book that she shares about some of the events that led up to her conversion to Christianity, that led up to her receiving Christ as indeed her Lord and Savior.

Now, she was an English professor working in a liberal arts school and teaching in a very liberal faculty, and she was doing some research though on the Bible and on what Bible-believing Christians believed, and she felt that as a part of that research, she ought to at least engage with some people who believe in this book.

She, of course, did not. She had long since rejected it. Her entire lifestyle and worldview required that she reject the Bible. Yet she felt that if she was going to do honest research, she needed to speak with someone who actually did believe the Bible.

So she set up an interview with a Presbyterian, with a Reformed pastor, and after speaking with him, he actually invited her into his home to come and have dinner with his wife and his kids.

And she accepted his invitation. What I want to point out to you though is something that she says as she reflects back on that dinner that she had at his house. She says, I remember in great detail that first meeting with Ken and his wife, Floyd.

[ 5 : 25 ] I remember being conscious of my butch haircut and the gay and pro-choice bumper stickers on my car. And then she says, I remember how relieved I was when I learned that Floyd had made a vegetarian stir fry for dinner.

She says, I try to maintain a vegetarian diet for health as well as for moral reasons. She goes on, I remember awkwardly greeting my host at the door and pulling out of my bag two gifts, a bottle of good red wine and a box of strong tea.

It was a hot July day and I was glad that they didn't use air conditioning. I was concerned about the environment in general and the ozone layer in particular and assumed that they were too.

She says, I share with you these details because they reflect my thinking at the time. I wanted to get to know these people but not at the expense of compromising my moral standards.

So here was a woman who had a worldview very much different from the worldview of the people she was engaging. And yet as these followers of Christ invited her into their home, one of the things that they were aware of, they were aware of her morality.

[ 6 : 32 ] They were aware of her worldview. Obviously there were aspects of that that both knew the other that they could not come to agreement on. That there could be no compromise.

But there were these areas in which they knew and recognized, or at least she presumes that they knew and recognized, that they could compromise in. That they could go out of their way not to offend her and not to force her into a situation where she was having to do things that she was uncomfortable doing.

And so they were self-conscious enough to fix the vegetarian dinner. They were self-conscious enough to, even in July, to not have the air conditioning running because they had someone coming in for whom that was a big issue and that was a big deal for her.

Now these things may seem silly to us. We might even understand why these things would matter to her at all. And that's not the point. In fact, the point is that because they mattered to her and because this family wanted to demonstrate the love of Christ for her and not create barriers where there need not be any barriers, they were willing to go out of their way to do things or to refrain from doing things that she herself would find offensive.

And there's a connection between that story and the passage that we've been looking at here in chapter 14 for the last several weeks. Now, the application that Paul was giving and the context in which Paul is discussing these things is not a context in which he's dealing with our outreach to non-Christians.

[ 8 : 00 ] That's not the issue. He's dealing, in fact, with relationships within the body of Christ. But the same basic principle can be applied. Paul is urging us, when we recognize and we are aware that there are other members of the body of Christ, other believers who have convictions that differ from ours, we need to be sensitive to that.

We need to be aware of that. And as we close out this chapter this morning, I want to think about, from the text, two ways in which we can be aware and be sensitive of these things.

And then I want to ask the positive question, what should we do in light of that? We're going to have some instructions here about what not to do, but what should we do in light of that? When we have brothers and sisters who have genuine convictions that we just don't share.

The examples that Paul gives here in Romans 14 are eating meat and drinking wine. The Jewish believers in Rome didn't want to do that. And yet the Gentile believers felt free. The Jewish believers felt the need to honor and recognize certain Jewish days, like the Sabbath and other festivals.

The Gentiles did not. And Paul is instructing these Gentile Christians on how to interact with them and how to demonstrate love toward them. And so as we dive back in here this morning, I want us to notice just how seriously Paul takes these issues that we might say, oh, that's no big deal.

[ 9 : 25 ] Let's not worry about that. Let's set that aside. I want you to see how seriously he takes it. I want you to look at how he describes the effects that our behavior can have upon others if we are not careful and loving in thinking through the ways that we interact with them, the things that we do around them.

Take a look there in verse 13. You can see he begins using this language of stumbling. 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.

He's going to use that language of stumbling two more times in this passage. But then he goes on and he says in verse 15 that if your brother is grieved by what you eat, so you can cause them to stumble, you can grieve them by the things that you do if you're not careful and not thinking through how you can avoid hurting them or offending them.

And then the language grows more strong. Move down to verse 20. Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Now we have the language of destruction.

This is getting more serious now as we move through. These are no longer minor issues. Sure, at the surface level, whether or not you eat meat and drink wine are not a big deal. At the surface level, whether or not you recognize these Jewish days are not a big deal.

[ 10 : 42 ] But now, the effects of how you engage with others with differing convictions on minor issues, the effects of those things can be massive. He says do not destroy the work of God.

And then again, we should not make another stumble there in verse 20. And finally in verse 21, the language of stumbling again. So you can cause them to stumble, you can grieve them, you can bring destruction into their lives.

But the strongest statement is reserved for verse 23. But whoever has doubts, that is, whoever, in this case, eats meat when they believe they shouldn't eat it, or drinks wine when they believe they shouldn't drink wine, whoever has doubts and yet goes ahead and violates their own conscience, Paul says, whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats because the eating is not from faith.

That's strong language. Paul says not only can they be caused to stumble, not only can they be grieved, not only can there be destruction brought into their lives, but there can be condemnation brought into their lives.

Now, we spent a little bit of time talking about this a couple of weeks ago because this kind of language can honestly throw us for a loop, right? Because Paul has repeatedly referred to both groups, the strong Christians and the weak Christians, both groups in here, the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians, as brothers in Christ.

[ 12 : 09 ] He's nowhere indicated that they're lost, and yet we hear this language of destroying the work of God, or earlier, destroying one for whom Christ dies, or now actual condemnation being brought upon them.

And that can really throw us. It can throw us because we are aware of, and we are certain of the doctrine of eternal security, or the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

So that we read verses like Romans 8.1, that there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ, and we stand firmly on that, and we say, there's no condemnation. It's done.

It's settled because of the work of Jesus on the cross, on our behalf. It's settled and done. There is no more condemnation. So where is the condemnation coming from here? How is this even possible?

Or we reflect upon the end of Romans 8, where is that beautiful golden chain of redemption, where things move from predestination, into calling, into justification, and all the way to glorification, showing us that there is no break in the chain, that all those whom God has chosen in eternity past, and called to faith in Himself, will indeed be justified, and ultimately will be glorified, will be ultimately saved.

[ 13 : 21 ] And we know that, and we uphold that great doctrine, and yet we need to remember that there are statements in between there is now no condemnation and the golden chain of salvation in

Romans chapter 8 that cause us to pause and think more carefully about our doctrine of perseverance.

For instance, Paul tells us in Romans chapter 8 that all those who live according to the flesh will die. And that's aimed at believers. And that's condemnation.

That's eternal death. But he says, if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. So in some sense, whether or not we actually continue in the faith and persevere has a bearing on our final salvation.

It does. God will ultimately save all those who trust in him. He will. God will ultimately save all those whom he has sent his son to die for.

All those whom he has chosen in eternity past. He will do that. But that does not mean, nor does that imply, that we should have an attitude towards eternal security that says, well, once you're in, you're in.

[ 14 : 35 ] And it doesn't really matter what you do after that point. No. The Scriptures routinely, over and over, tell us, you must endure to the end. Now, God is the ultimate cause of our enduring to the end.

He's the one behind it. But that does not mean that we're not responsible for what we do. It doesn't mean that we're not responsible for actually engaging in acts that will lead to our perseverance and to our being made more holy by God Himself.

In some sense, there's some mystery here. And we have to as followers of Christ and people who are going to build our lives on this book, we have to be okay with the fact that God has not chosen in this time to solve all of these mysteries and to tie together all of the loose ends and make it easy for us to figure everything out.

I mean, that's part and parcel of what it means to be a Christian. If you have any, even elementary, understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, then you understand and know that God does not intend for us to fully comprehend everything that He's revealed about Himself.

And that's true not only in terms of God's nature, but it's also in terms of the way that God works within His people. We don't understand it in every degree. We just don't. There's a parallel here.

There's a parallel between how God works to cause us to persevere and yet our perseverance and our effort is necessary.

[ 15 : 58 ] There's a parallel between that and the way in which God initially saves His people. We read, for instance, in Romans chapter 9 about the sovereignty of God in salvation. If you haven't spent some time ever in Romans 9, then I encourage you to go back and read it this week.

You can go back and listen to the sermons that I preached on it. But it's a beautiful picture of the sovereignty of God in salvation. And yet, when Paul arrives at Romans chapter 10, he's perfectly happy to say that if the gospel is not preached, then no one will be saved.

If God is the ultimate determiner and if He has chosen people from eternity past, how can Paul turn around one chapter later and say, but if we don't preach the gospel, nobody's going to get saved.

Because he's happy to have those two things stand in tension together. And he does not feel the need between Romans 9 and Romans 10 to explain it all. And the same thing applies to our understanding of eternal security or to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

God does not feel the need to explain every detail to us. What He tells us is He's ultimately responsible. He's going to glorify all those that He's chosen and called and justified.

[ 17 : 07 ] And yet, people of God have a part to play in the sanctification and the perseverance of their brothers and sisters around them.

We have a role to play. We have a part to play. And our neglecting of that role or abusing of that role can result in condemnation.

There's great mystery there. We would want to sometimes, and it's helpful sometimes to take a step back and say that what Paul is arguing here is that if a person ultimately, because of something that they do or something that we influence them to do, if they ultimately fail to continue trusting and treasuring Jesus, then that proves that they never really trusted and treasured Jesus.

And that's true and we should uphold that. It doesn't solve the mystery in its entirety. But the weight of this chapter cannot be felt if you don't understand the threat.

If you don't understand that your engagement in helping your brothers and sisters to grow in their faith and to persevere in their faith is a necessary part of their journey with Christ, if you don't know that and understand that, then you're going to miss the weight of this chapter.

[ 18 : 24 ] And I want you, as we finish this chapter this morning, I want you to feel the weight of it so that you'll be engaged. Engaged in the lives of other believers in a way that is helpful and moves them toward maturity in Christ.

So how do we do that according to this text? What is our role? Well, I want to say it in two negative ways this morning before we jump into the middle of the passage and say it in a positive way.

Alright? So negatively, the first thing that we have to recognize is that as Christians we cannot always insist that our rights be recognized and deferred to by everyone else.

There are going to be things that we have a right to do. Paul says in this chapter that it's okay, it's good to eat meat. It's okay to drink wine. It's not a big deal, Paul says.

Yes, but don't do it if it's going to cause your brother to stumble. In other words, yeah, you have a right to do that. Yeah, you're free to do that. But if it's going to cause your brother or your sister in Christ to stumble by causing them to violate their own conscience, then don't do it.

[ 19 : 31 ] Helping other people to grow in their faith means that sometimes, in fact, many times, we have to be willing to set aside our own rights and not insist upon others recognizing and deferring to what we ought to rightfully be able to do.

Now, that's not a very 21st century American way of saying things and I understand that. All the time, we want to insist upon our rights and we want everyone else to acknowledge our rights and move out of our way so that we can pursue that which is our God-given or at least constitutionally given right.

And Paul is saying here, we do have God-given rights and freedoms that come through the gospel and yet we're going to have to lay those aside sometimes for the health and service of others.

This is something that Paul models for us throughout his ministry. Hold your place in Romans 14. I want you to turn over to 1 Corinthians 9. 1 Corinthians is just the next book right after Romans so just turn over a few pages to 1 Corinthians 9 where Paul's going to model this for us.

He's just finished in chapter 8 about talking about a very similar issue to the one that he's dealing with in Romans chapter 14. Can the Corinthian believers, can they eat meat that's been offered to idols?

[ 20 : 48 ] He's just been talking about that. He's just been dealing with that and he's just confessed that he's never going to eat meat if it causes his brother to stumble at the end of 1 Corinthians 8. So it's a very similar context but then he's going to move into some other ways in which he's been willing to give up his rights for the good of others.

Verse 3 of chapter 9. This is my defense to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?

Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? So not only has Paul been willing when necessary to refrain from eating certain meats and drinking certain drinks, but Paul has gone far beyond that in his willingness to give up his rights.

Paul has sacrificed his own right to marry another believer. And he acknowledges here the other apostles, they marry Peter, that's Cephas, he's married.

Some of the brothers of the Lord who are leaders in the church, they're married. Is it just Barnabas and I who have to give up that right? He's acknowledging, I've given up that right. I mean, imagine, imagine the sacrifice necessary.

[ 22 : 03 ] If you've been married for a while, then you've probably forgotten the sense of longing that you once had as a single person. But there can be a great sense and desire and longing in a person who's not married for marriage.

It's powerful and it is strong. And Paul says, we have the right to. We laid it aside. More than that, Paul acknowledges that as an apostle and as one who teaches the Word of God, he had a right to be paid for what he did.

He goes on to defend that in the next paragraph from the Old Testament that those who preach the Word of God have a right to be paid. And Paul says, but we didn't do that. We worked other jobs. Paul was a tent maker in all the different cities that he went to. Why? So that he didn't have to insist on his right and put any kind of burden on any group of new believers in any church that he went and started.

He said, I didn't do that. I did not cling to those rights. Take a look down in verse 12. We'll jump in the middle of verse 12. Nevertheless, he says, we've not made use of this right, but we endure

anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.

[ 23 : 13 ] Or verse 15, but I have made no use of any of these rights. Paul was willing to lay aside his rights for the sake of the gospel and for the sake of the good and the health of his brothers and sisters in Christ.

And in Romans chapter 14, he calls us to do the same. To never do anything, even if we have a right to do it, never do anything that would cause a brother to stumble.

Just don't do it. Our default way of dealing with these things is to deal with it as Americans.

But I have a right to do that. I shouldn't have to give that up just because they've got a problem with it. I've got a right to do it. And Paul says, so what? I didn't get married.

I work another job even though I'm traveling all over the empire and laboring to preach the gospel and they're beating me and putting me in prison for it. When I get out of prison, you know what I do? I go make tents. Stay up all night working.

[ 24 : 16 ] Sore fingers and hands. So what? If you have a right to it, if it will cause your brother to stumble, if it will impede the gospel in any way, whether that's the gospel going to the lost or the gospel bearing the fruit in the lives of fellow believers in the church, you don't insist on your rights.

Not when there's something greater to be pursued. And the something greater to be pursued is genuine, authentic love. Notice, you remember what Paul says in the middle of this section?

He says in verse 15, if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you're no longer walking in love. Walking in love means being willing to give up your rights for the sake of others.

But it also means not insisting at all times that you are right. Not insisting that others acknowledge that you're correct and that you're right about things.

It's a giving up of rights, but it's also a not expecting everyone else or a forcing of everyone else to acknowledge when you're correct, when you're right about something.

[ 25 : 23 ] See, that's another temptation that's entirely separate. We might be willing to say, hey, you know what? If that bothers you, I won't do it. But you know what? I just want you to recognize that I'm right about this, alright?

I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to impose that on you. But come on, the least you could do is say you're right. Because I am right. We do that all the time. Paul has something to say about that. Look down towards the end of our chapter here in verse 14. Verse 22. It sounds a little bit puzzling at first. We'll try to untwist it and make some sense out of it.

The faith that you have keep between yourself and God. Now that seems like a weird thing to say. I mean, it's supposed to be preaching the gospel, it's supposed to be teaching the truth. What does he mean here?

The faith that you have keep between yourself and God. Here's a bit of an explanation. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.

[ 26 : 22 ] In other words, what he's saying here is so you have greater faith than someone else. That is, we've seen this in the context of Romans 14. So you're right.

So you've got your doctrine right. That's good. Pursue that at all times. Get your doctrine right. Understand the word of God correctly. You've got that right. Some others don't.

And sometimes, for the sake of those others, you're going to have to keep it between yourself and God. You're going to have to not at every moment insist on making everybody get things right just the way you have.

In fact, he says that there's a blessing that comes to those who don't have any reason to feel judgment on themselves for what they approve. In other words, if in your pursuit of getting others who disagree with you to acknowledge that you're right, you, in the midst of that, cause them to violate their conscience.

That is, you cause them to stumble because now they're confused and they don't know what to do. And even though their conscience is still settled that they ought not to do this, they're confused and then they violate their conscience.

[ 27 : 36 ] if you cause that by your insistence that they acknowledge your rightness in the matter, then you have a reason to judge yourself.

You have a reason to feel as if you've done wrong. And Paul says, but if you don't do that, there's a blessing that comes to the man or the person who doesn't have a reason to feel judgment upon them in the things that they approve.

So, I mean, there is some personal payoff and benefit to this. There is joy, there is happiness, there is blessedness that comes when you don't do those things. But the danger is that when we insist that people acknowledge that we're right all the time to the point of making them violate their own conscience, we lead them on a path that leads to their destruction.

Because we weaken their trust and their treasuring in Jesus Christ Himself. So that's a negative way to say it. Don't insist on your own rights.

Don't insist that everybody acknowledge that you are right even if you are right. Don't do that all the time. That's a negative way to say it. But I want us to end this morning, I want us to end our journey through chapter 14 by saying it positively because Paul says it positively here right in the middle of this section.

[ 28 : 56 ] I want you to glance down here at verse 16. Verse 16 is kind of another way of saying what he said in verse 22. Do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil.

That's another way of stating verse 22. And then he says for or because the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking. Don't insist that people acknowledge that you're right because that's not what the kingdom is about.

The kingdom is not about these little issues of eating and drinking and days. It's just not about that sort of thing. That's not what the kingdom of God is concerned with. No. The kingdom of God is a matter of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

So rather than saying don't do this let me say do this. Pursue righteousness and peace and joy in the lives of others through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pursue it. Help them in their pursuit of righteousness and peace and joy. Do all that you can to help them to achieve practical righteousness to experience peace within the body and to be captivated by joy in Christ.

[ 30 : 10 ] Do everything you can help others to pursue those things. Or he says it in another way in the very next verse. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men so then let us pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding.

What is positively what is the goal of the relationships that we have with other Christians? What's the goal? The goal is their mutual upbuilding.

The goal is to help them to grow in their faith. That is the goal is to help your brother your sister to trust and treasure Jesus more tomorrow than they do today.

And you're not going to accomplish that if you push them into violating their conscience you're going to weak their trusting and treasuring of Jesus. But Paul says in everything that you're doing you're trying to build them up you're trying to strengthen them you're trying to make them more holy.

That's what I want you to pursue and that applies in all sorts of relationships that we have with other Christians. Think of the relationship between a believing husband and a believing wife.

[ 31 : 23 ] What does Paul say is the role of a husband in marriage? He is to be like Christ. That is he is to be willing to lay down his life and to sacrifice himself.

That's a kind of laying aside your rights. That's a deep level of self sacrifice that Christ gives and that we're to pattern ourselves after. But he says that the reason that Jesus did that was so that he might present the church to himself without spot or wrinkle or any such thing and the goal of a husband in his relationship with his wife if they are both believers is for his wife to become more holy.

That's what he's pursuing. That's what he's aiming towards. That's what he wants. He wants his wife to be more holy. It's one application of this broader principle of what we're supposed to want to accomplish within the body.

I want every other Christian that I'm surrounded by because of what I do to be led toward holiness. I want them to be led to a greater embracing of the mindset of the kingdom, righteousness and peace and joy through the Holy Spirit.

And whatever kinds of relationships you have with other believers, if you're raising children who have come to trust in Christ, your goal in everything that you do in raising them is that they become more holy.

[ 32 : 49 ] Does it matter if they make good grades? Yeah, it matters. Does it matter if they behave the way they ought to behave in certain certain? Yeah, it matters. But the goal is not those things.

The goal is holiness in the lives of your children. Whatever relationships you have with others around you, in whatever ways you engage with others in the body of Christ, remember that the goal

is for mutual upbuilding in the pursuit of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Christ laid down His life for these things. Christ gave up everything to make His bride pure and holy. And we ought to be willing to set aside our rights, to give up the acknowledgement of being right and to pursue the good of others.

We ought to be willing to do that. Examine every relationship that you have. Examine all the relationships you have within the church. Do you have friction between yourself and someone else? [ 34 : 07 ] Are you angry at somebody? Are there problems going on? God and ask yourself the question, could this have been resolved or avoided if I were just after their holiness and not what's mine?

Let's pray.