

Romans Chapter 14 - John Karmelich

Title "The danger of organizing our firing squads in circles!"

Most of us who've been Christians for a while, know believers we like to keep our distance from. Yes, we believe they're saved, but we can't stand this or that aspect about them! They probably feel the same way about us. In the last chapter Paul focused on the Christian relationship with government leaders. It was a matter of saying if we don't like them, they're in charge and we must accept it. As the U.S. Army teaches, "When you salute, you respect their uniform". The reason Paul spent the last chapter (I realize no chapter breaks exist in the original text) on the topic of unity is we should care about church growth as that in effect is Jesus' "marching orders" to us. Meanwhile here in Chapter 14, if a believer thinks it's wrong for another believer to do "this or that" (not sin, just things that affect our freedom as a believer) to do in our life. Paul is teaching to treat them kindly! The idea is not to fix them or flaunt our freedom in Christ, but in effect help them as believers by respecting their views!

If there is a key word for this chapter, it is "unity". I remember a sermon by a fairly famous, "hippie of a preacher" (short hair now) who had an older brother with a military background. They lived different lives, and both believed strongly that Jesus is God. His point was they don't have to be in the same spot to be brothers. They know they're united as a family despite their differences, and they respect the lives that each has lived.

That leads me to the title of this sermon: When Christians criticize each other over different views over how Christians should act, we are "organizing our firing squads in circles!" We become a bad witness for Christ because we're more concerned that Christians are supposed to do or not do "this or that" as a believer. Realize I'm not talking about sin issues. Matthew 19, 15-18 lays out how we are to confront a Christian on sin issues. For example, issues like should Christians be allowed to drink alcohol or if we can sing certain style of songs in church! Christians have total freedom to live however we want. That is not a license to sin! I'm only talking about debatable issues. The chapter is full of examples and Paul states a few biblical principles we need to keep in mind when talking to other believers! OK then, time to start on the text itself to explain this better!

To me, the final five chapters of Romans are a lot easier to teach than the rest of the book. This section is very practical and straight forward. As to the topic of the moment, I suspect most of us have a person or group we struggle with, because we don't think Christians should do, "this or that" as believers. The chapter implies both sides must accept the other. Just because we can struggle with a type of behavior, doesn't mean the Christian near us has to act the same way! At the same time, I and Paul argue that we shouldn't flaunt our freedom around someone struggling with a specific issue! Of course I don't believe our church must change our musical style to please everyone! Just saying when we're around someone who believes Christians shouldn't do "this or that" doesn't mean we should, "stick it in their face"!

The issue is about helping Christians grow in their faith. I've learned the hard way it's not my job to fix other believers. If someone asks my opinion that's one thing. To state a famous joke, "They're entitled to my opinion and since theirs is wrong, I'll fix that!" Remember we're not talking about sin. It's issues Christians debate about such as how to dress in church, type of music or even if smoking or drinking is acceptable! Christians are free to do what they want, but the important issue is being a good witness to fellow believers and non-believers while we're in the neighborhood.

Paul uses the example of those who eat meat versus vegetarians. Remember Romans was written to all believers in Rome. At that time, temples to false gods were everywhere! The "best meat" came from a temple sacrifice. Paul argued that since those gods were false, it should be a non-issue. Church people could say that was offered to a fake god and refuse to touch it. So, the issue isn't so much what we can or can't do, but not offending other Christians when we're gathered together!

He makes a similar point about when to go to church. Some say only Sunday is important! Some say it should be every day! Paul's point is we should each decide for ourselves where God is leading us as it's a matter of personal preference. I'm a big believer that if God is leading me to do this or not do that, I'll follow my conscious unless it's something obviously sinful! When we gather as believers, it should be a priority to "lift each other up" and if that means saying no to something we enjoy, we "let it go" when we are gathered with other believers!

In Verse 10 Paul reminds us that everyone will be accountable to God. I have to admit, I try to picture that! Is it a very long line? Since God is God, I assume time isn't an issue. Also keep in mind He'll not going to list every sin we've ever committed and embarrass us! Rewards are given in heaven, but they are based on what we did with our faith in God, by using the gifts God's given us to make a difference! I realize some people have death-bed conversions and some are too ill to make a difference! My point's that it is a matter of wanting to use our lives for His glory, if for no other reason, eternal rewards exist! I am sure those eternal rewards are far greater than any reward we might get in this lifetime!

That leads Paul back to the issue of lifting up other believers, especially those who do rub us the wrong way to put it simply! His conclusion gets back to his key point that we are to use our lives as a witness for Him and that especially includes how we act around other believers. Let me try it another way, if it was a case of trying to talk to a non-believer about an issue and a believer was there who has views not like ours, priority is peace with the other believer! Let's be honest if the nonbeliever sees us quarrelling over some non-essential issue, they'll think why should I get involved with those people!

I was thinking about my past Christian history on this: I remember leaving a church because my views on a particular issue were different than the pastor. Do I think he was saved? Of course! Would I think any less of him if I saw him again? Of course not. However, the issue was significant enough to make the decision that it was better to "hang my shingle" elsewhere since I was a teacher there and if I stayed it'd cause division in that church! The point is peace among believers is priority one and if an issue can not be resolved, praise God there's other churches "down the street". If we live in a location where that isn't an option, then one may have to "tow the company line" despite a difference over an issue! Again, we're talking about debatable issues, and not one where the Bible is absolutely clear about something!

OK said my peace and hopefully covered the chapter. So, the next time someone tells us Christians are not supposed to do "this or that" tell them to read Romans 14 and then "play nice" with them!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on one of the links below. It is still a joy to study and teach this and again I'm grateful for you reading this. The rest of this email is links to questions you may have. If you're new here, you are always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again for reading this!

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