



## Pilgrim Home Baptist Church

NT 260 2022 • STUMBLING BLOCKS • ROMANS 14:13-23 • 6/26/2022

### MAIN POINT

The love of Christ compels us to make personal sacrifices for the faith of our fellow Christians.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Growing up what, if any, rules did your family have for what you could or could not do on Sunday? What were your family's church-related traditions?**

**What church-related traditions do you still practice today?**

Traditions are common and often healthy in religious life. However, traditions can at times blur the line between preference and conviction. When we find our preference at odds with someone's conviction, our tone should be deferential. Today we will look at an example from Paul's writing to the Romans centering on food offered to idols. His teaching encourages us to make personal sacrifices for the sake of our fellow Christians.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 14:13-16.

**What issue was Paul confronting in this passage? Why would eating food sacrificed to idols be difficult for some people?**

**What are some behaviors that your coworkers, friends, or family members often have questions or hesitations about?**

**How might these behaviors compromise your witness to a non-Christian? How might they compromise the health or unity of the body of Christ?**

Paul identified a specific issue the early church faced in his letter to the Christians in Rome. The issue was food offered to idols. Purchasing leftover meat from the temple sacrifices was a common practice. This practice, however, raised a moral question for some Christians: Were they participating in idolatry by eating the meat?

**According to Romans 14:15, what did Paul point out as the main problem with being a stumbling block to others?**

**How might we tear down other believers when we do what we want without love's limitation? How would your decision-making be impacted if you let love rule?**

When it comes to deciding what behaviors are appropriate for Christians, what's the first thing we should consider? Think about Jesus' example. Did He most often operate out of His own interests or out of love? As Christ-followers, we're called to love God and others. This is what Paul was calling the Christians in Rome to do—look at relationships, not just rules, and make the personal sacrifices necessary to best love others.

**How are the issues surrounding things like what we eat, drink, or watch on TV—"gray areas"—different than issues surrounding moral absolutes?**

**What approach do you tend to take toward things that may fall into a gray area? Are you more strict or more lenient?**

This passage not only helps us understand our strengths and weaknesses, it also instructs us on how to do life with people who are weak in areas where we happen to be strong. We're responsible for how our actions impact others. Some people complain that this isn't fair, and maybe you agree. Why should we abstain from something we don't feel convicted about just because someone else is convicted about it? The reason, as Paul already emphasized, is love. When we truly love others, their relationship with God matters more to us than our personal interests.

| HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 14:17-23.

**What qualities should characterize God's people, according to this passage? Read Romans 15:13 for additional insight.**

**How do we demonstrate with our actions that we consider the spiritual health of the body of Christ more important than exercising our rights?**

When we operate in love, we're willing to do what it takes to look out for our brothers and sisters. We strive to know each other well enough to know where we are weak and strong so that our actions don't become stumbling blocks for one another. This is why community is so important. Know your friends well enough to know what causes them to sin and stay away from that stuff. When we put our rights first, we not only hurt our brothers and sisters, we also hurt our personal spiritual growth and the ministry of the body as a whole.

**Read 1 Corinthians 1:23. How is Jesus' work on the cross the universal stumbling block? When did you encounter the stumbling block of the cross? What was that experience like for you?**

**Why is it important that we keep the path to the cross obstacle free? What happens when we don't?**

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**When has your freedom in Christ been a stumbling block to someone else? What happened? On the other hand, what causes you to stumble that may not be an issue for someone else? Have you ever had to confront another Christian about that issue?**

**Do you know where your friends are strong and weak? If you don't know, what does this reveal about the areas in which your relationships need to grow? What steps can you take to grow in these areas this week?**

**How can you guard against becoming a stumbling block to others?**

**Read John 13:34-35. How do these verses relate to what we discussed today?**

## PRAYER

Pray for love to become the defining characteristic of our group and our church. When other people talk about us, let it be because we display God's love. Pray that your group members will allow love to direct their actions and choose what's best as they make personal sacrifices in order to strengthen the body of Christ.

## COMMENTARY

| ROMANS 14:13-23

Verse 13. Paul called on mature Christians to lead the way in building unity in the church by refraining from petty criticism of weaker church members. Paul challenged the mature to decide never to put a stumbling block or pitfall in the way of weaker Christians. The apostle had in mind avoiding any actions that might lead other Christians into sin. Paul urged his readers to always take the path of Christian love over the way of self-interest.

Verse 14. Paul felt at this point that he needed to let his readers know his personal view about clean and unclean foods. He wanted them to know that he wasn't urging mature Christians in Rome to follow a principle that he himself didn't follow. He had been persuaded by the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself. Paul wanted his readers to know where he stood on the question. Yet for Paul, the greater issue was helping those Christians who sincerely believed the clean and unclean regulations were still valid for believers. In other words, the greater issue for the mature believer was caring as much for another believer's conscience to be clear as for one's own.

Verse 15. Paul clearly emphasized the importance of striving for peaceful relationships among believers. Mature Christians put the law of love above the law of liberty in situations where their exercise of freedom might hurt or destroy a weaker Christian. Paul reminded his readers that Christ died for weaker Christians too. In light of Christ's redeeming sacrifice, how could mature Christians risk destroying the spiritual growth of another believer over something as inconsequential as what you eat. The apostle emphatically urged his readers not to do that. Paul hoped that all believers would be active peacemakers. When we refrain from criticizing other Christians, we are striving for peace with them.

Verse 16. Paul taught that church members needed to take seriously the impact their conduct could have on their reputations as well as on the church's reputation in the community (see 1 Cor. 5:1-3). Paul urged mature Christians to guard their reputations by giving due consideration to how others were impacted by their conduct. Enjoying some good aspect of Christian freedom in a public setting might be desirable, but if our actions cause weaker Christians (or perhaps unbelievers as well) to criticize our lifestyle, we need to be concerned.

Verse 17. Thus Paul went on to challenge mature believers to transcend their legitimate Christian privileges, such as the freedom of eating certain foods, in favor of pursuing eternal values. Eating and drinking are necessary human activities, but what we eat and drink should never take priority over the pursuit of the Christian qualities of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit.

Verse 18. It was not enough, Paul taught, for Christians to be self-assured that their eating habits were acceptable. He wanted mature Christians to be guided by greater spiritual discernment. By carefully guarding their conduct, willingly foregoing activities that would draw criticism from

weaker Christians, the mature would in fact be serving Christ, would be acceptable to God, and would build their good reputation in the community. God is delighted when He sees His children put priority on His kingdom and its concerns.

Verse 19. Continuing to build his case for believers' choosing the path of spiritual maturity, Paul urged his readers to pursue two important lifestyle qualities. One way to intentionally live out salvation in Christ is to pursue what promotes peace. Paul was exhorting mature Christians to diligently strive for attitudes and actions that would result in church unity (see Eph. 4:3). By striving for unity, mature Christians would help their weaker brothers and sisters in Christ grow in the faith too. Likewise, a second way to intentionally live out salvation in Christ is to pursue what builds up other Christians.

Verses 20-21. Paul's warning was that choices concerning food should never be a justification for damaging the church's life and fellowship. Paul was clear that Christlike love, not Christian freedom, was to guide believers in their relationships with fellow church members. Paul commended the choice to refrain from doing anything that caused another Christian to stumble as a noble thing.

Verse 22-23. Paul called upon stronger Christians to show spiritual discernment about when and when not to display publicly their convictions about these issues. In good conscience they could simply keep quiet about or refrain from doing those things when their actions would cause weaker believers to stumble in their faith. Paul then warned weaker believers, urging them to be sure about their attitudes and actions regarding debatable issues. They too needed to live with a clear conscience and not conduct themselves based on doubts. Paul warned these believers that everything that is not from a conviction is sin.