



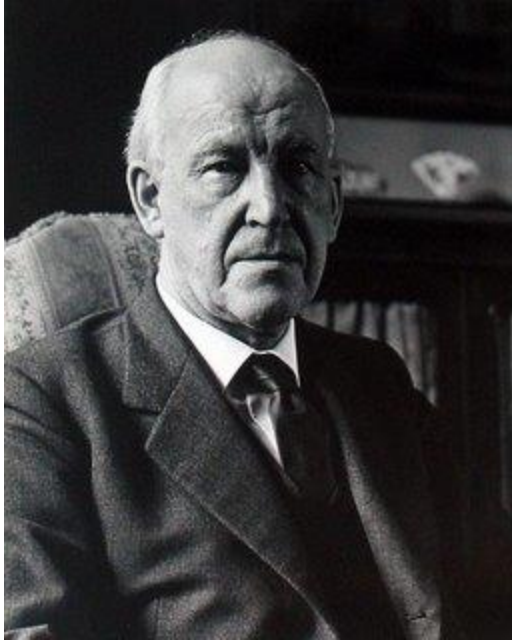
Romans 14:13-23

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. 14 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.

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. 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.

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. 22 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. 23 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.

John Piper preached 225 sermons from the book of Romans. That's four and a half years of Sunday morning sermons. The great Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached 366 sermons from Romans. By comparison, this is my 65th message in Romans. It's unlikely that I will be able to squeeze 301 sermons out of the last two chapters, nor would you want me to! But after 366 sermons Jones stopped preaching at verse 17 of chapter 14. And when I say stopped I mean he stopped. He never did finish preaching through the book. Here is his explanation in his own words.



“I was at Romans 14:17. I had dealt with ‘righteousness’, with ‘peace’ on March 1st, and there I was stopped. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones I was not allowed to deal with ‘joy in the Holy Ghost’. I have the feeling that this was not accidental. God intervened and I could suggest a reason why. I was able to deal with righteousness and peace (I had fleeting experiences of it), but the third thing is the profoundest of all. Why was I not allowed to deal with it? Because I knew something, but not enough about it. ‘I want you to speak with greater authority on this,’ God said . . .

Here is what I would put before you. For six months, until September, I did not preach at all. For four months I have had the most valuable experience of being a listener. My general impression is that most of our services are terribly depressing! I am amazed people still go to church; most who go are female and

over the age of forty. The note missing is ‘joy in the Holy Ghost’. There is nothing in these services to make a stranger feel that he is missing something by not being there.”¹

One of the great preachers of all time stopped preaching because he knew so very little about the joy of the Holy Spirit. Or I should say he experienced very little of it. I’ve listened to one of his sermons and by today’s standards, I found it a little boring. But they were powerful. J.I. Packer was 22 years old when he first heard Jones preach. Packer said that the sermon came “with the force of electric shock, bringing to at least one of his listeners more of a sense of God than any other man.”

[Here’s a 30 second snippet](#) of this very passage.

So Jones was not boring nor was he without the power of the Holy Spirit. One day an occultist was converted after listening to Jones preach.

“The moment I entered your chapel and sat down on a seat amongst the people, I was conscious of a supernatural power. I was conscious of the same sort of supernatural power I was accustomed to in our spiritist meetings, but there was one big difference; I had the feeling that the power in your chapel was a clean power.”²

Despite the crowds that gathered to hear him preach and their testimonies of the power of the Spirit accompanying his words, he still was not satisfied with his experience of joy in the Holy Spirit.

I believe that the key verse in this passage is the very one that Lloyd-Jones struggled with—verse 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.* First, I want to explain this verse and then show you how the rest of the passage hangs on it.

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking. In the first two message from chapter 14, we learned that the believers in the church of Rome were fighting over non-essential issues, things like eating meat and drinking wine. They were acting like little children, calling each other names. They cast judgment and despised one another. By the way, I was corrected when I got home on Sunday. My kids did not say “meanie soo-soo” to each other when they were mad. They said “meanie, pooie soo-soo.” I just wanted to clear that up. ;-)

They fought over debatable issues that were issues of Christian liberty. It was acceptable if you ate and drank or if you did not. But what was not acceptable was the judging and despising. That is a summary of the first twelve verses. But from verse 13 to the end, there is a similar yet different emphasis. The ones being addressed here are the “strong” in faith. They are the ones who had Christian liberty on these issues. They ate and drank with a clear conscience.

So when Paul said that the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, he did not mean that we should not concern ourselves with these matters. He did not mean to say, “Well, you know, these are non-essential matters. Let’s not fight about these things. Let’s move on to winning people to Christ and not worry about these insignificant matters.” This verse kind of sounds like that, but that is not at all what he meant. In fact, what he meant was that even though fundamentally they were non-essential matters, in the kingdom of God, they were hugely important.

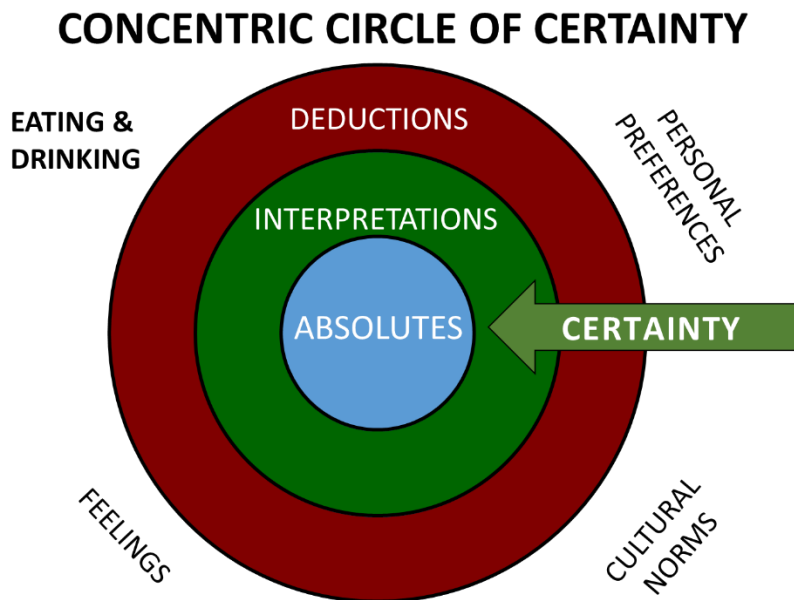
Here’s what was happening. The weak were not eating and drinking and the strong were eating and drinking. Again, both sides were free to do so, but Paul was saying to the strong: lay down your rights! Look at verse 13. *Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer.* That was written to both sides. Stop passing judgment. Stop acting like children.

But that was followed up by this: *but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.* That is directed right at the “strong” side, the ones who take part in their full Christian liberty can often be a stumbling block for some believers. Now is it OK to have Christian liberty? In verse 14, Paul gave the strongest possible argument that it is right. *I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself.* Paul knew that nothing was unclean. He was absolutely convinced of it. Moreover, he was “persuaded in the Lord Jesus.” Paul was probably referring to something like this that Jesus said. “It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person” (Matthew 15:11).

Another way of saying this is that all things created by God are gifts from God given for our good. By that I don’t mean things created by man. Pornography and racism are evil but anything that God created is good. By itself, it’s not only not unclean, it is a good gift. However, Paul went on to say *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.*

So if your weaker brother is offended, then you’re at fault. Paul is clear--*you are no longer walking in love.* Do you see what Paul has done here? He has taken a non-essential issue and

moved it into the essential category. It's inevitable in this passage that I would have to pull out my Concentric Circle of Certainty, so here goes.



On this diagram, according to Paul, where does an issue like eating and drinking belong? It belongs in the realm of personal preferences, right? Paul has been clear about that. *I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself.* It belongs in the outer edges. But if by claiming your right to do something that is in the outer circle and offending a fellow believer, this issue has just been pulled into the dead center. It's no longer a debatable issue about personal preferences. Now it

is an absolute truth, because we are talking about love. The stakes have been raised. Can you see that?

But some will say, “Well that doesn't seem quite fair, does it? If someone has a problem with me doing something that the Bible does not forbid, than it's their problem. Why is it my problem? Why should I always be watching out for the weaker Christian? It's not my fault they are weak. Why should they be allowed to hold me back?”

I can see why these thought would occur to you. It does kind of feel like that makes us part of the weakest link. And actually, in the best sense, it does. Think of it this way. What if we had a requirement to join the church—and I don't just mean membership, but actually join the family of believers, to be a part of our body—and that requirement was that you had to swim a mile out to where the church met together. It's a bit unrealistic, I know, but bear with me. Would we only want good swimmers to be in our church? What about those who could not swim? What about little children? We would make sure that our weakest and most vulnerable members were taken care of, right? This is what it means to be a church. We take care of each other. The strong take care of the weak. That's what families do. That's what churches do.

To do otherwise is the absence of love. If you insist on expressing your Christian liberty at the expense of another believer, then you are not walking in love. But it's much worse than that. *By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.* Paul may have been thinking of Jesus' teaching in the gospels.

"If anyone causes one of these little ones--those who believe in me--to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).

Paul uses the word stumble and so does Jesus. And both passages talk of weaker believers. Jesus calls them 'little ones.' We usually think of children but it could be anyone who is immature in the faith. Can a believer be destroyed? Can a true Christian lose his or her salvation? No, they cannot, so Paul did not mean ultimate destruction but being led into sin. Paul does not mention being drowned in the sea but his language is very strong. Do not destroy *the one for whom Christ died*. Christ died for the person sitting next to you. You know that believer who rubs you the wrong way? Maybe they caused you harm. Christ died for them. They are your brother and your sister.

If that were not enough, Paul ups the ante even more. *Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God*. By harming other believers we are also harming the work of God. It only takes a few people in a church to bring it down. We can bring great harm to other believers by causing them to stumble and we can bring harm to the work of God, including, but not limited to the local church.

Some of you may have a hard time wrapping your heads around a strong believer causing a weak believer to stumble. What does that even look like? After all, we have two thousand years of church history separating us and the church in Rome. Let's say that someone feels it is within their Christian liberty to drink alcohol in moderation. But another believer feels strongly that it is not right. If the weaker brother offended by the actions of the stronger brother, is that what we are talking about here?

Well first of all, it's more than just being offended. The issue is drawing the weaker believer into sin. Verse 23- *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*. This is a picture of the weak brother eating food that he had previously considered as forbidden. He did not stumble by watching someone else eat certain food or drink wine. He stumbled because then he himself ate the forbidden food. He did not eat in faith. He doubted when he ate. He did not eat in faith and therefore it was sin to him. The result is that the liberty of the stronger brother caused the weaker brother to follow his behavior. It was no sin for the first but it was sin for the second. Therefore, the stronger brother was guilty of a greater sin by causing the weaker brother to go against his own conscience.

This could happen in a variety of ways. Maybe you encouraged a friend to watch a certain movie with you which harmed the friend's conscience. There are countless ways this could happen but here is the larger principle I think. You are taking a small thing and making it big. You are taking a non-issue and making a big deal out of it. You are demanding your rights instead of laying them aside. This is why some of you are embroiled in conflict and strife with someone. You've taken something that was debatable, something small, something that should never have come between you and you made it big. You took something that should be in the outer circle-a matter of personal opinion-and you have dragged it into the center circle. You are no longer walking in love.

It's here where we start to understand verse 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.* In other words, why are we bogged down by the minutia? Why do we turn Christian mole hills into mountains? This is not the kingdom of God. God did not inaugurate his kingdom so that we could fight about petty things. The kingdom is not about your little fights.

But the kingdom is about righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 5:12 brings these three together in our salvation. *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.* We are justified—that's righteousness, we have peace with God and then we rejoice-righteousness, peace and joy.

These three are most definitely happening in the vertical plane. What I mean is that these three are between us and God. They are in the vertical dimension. God makes us righteous, God gives us peace between us and him. This is an individual experience between us and the Lord. But these same three are also corporate in nature. Righteousness relates to ethical behavior, righteous living among believers. Peace is peace among believers. Joy in the Holy Spirit is joy among believers. That's what we get to do this afternoon at the baptism service. We get to hear the testimonies of six people who are getting baptized. It is one of my favorite things all year. It's awesome! If you have never been to a baptism service, you are really missing out.

But much of the time we have an absence of righteousness, peace and joy among believers because small stuff has become big stuff. We move peripheral issues into the center of the diagram. We take non-essential issues and turn them into absolutes because we are no longer walking in love.

This brings us full circle back to Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Despite what he thought were his personal shortcomings, he taught about the Holy Spirit a lot. He taught often about revival. Here is his definition of revival. "A revival is a miracle . . . something that can only be explained as the direct . . . intervention of God . . . Men can produce evangelistic campaigns, but they cannot and never have produced a revival."³

And another . . .

"The difference between the baptism of the Holy Spirit and a revival is simply one of the number of people affected. I would define a revival as a large number, a group of people, being baptized by the Holy Spirit at the same time; or the Holy Spirit falling upon, coming upon a number of people assembled together. It can happen in a district, it can happen in a country."⁴

Lloyd-Jones accurately describes personal revival as a direct intervention of God. It's the Holy Spirit falling on believers. But what he does not mention here is how personal revival almost always starts. Revival almost always starts with confession of sin and it is almost always confession of sin against another believer.

In March of 1995 a powerful revival fell upon the campus of Wheaton College. Listen to a firsthand account of how it started.

“A few did, as I remember, and then a fifth-year senior, a well-known and well-liked guy on campus, went to the microphone and confessed bitterness and things of that sort. It was powerful. This was followed by a student confession of sexual sin. Then one of the leaders asked if anyone else who struggled with that wanted to come up to the front for prayer. All of a sudden, dozens and dozens of students got up and went forward, and the atmosphere of the place suddenly transformed. The Spirit of conviction and cleansing had fallen upon us.”⁵

I would like us to have a minute or two of quiet confession. I have no expectation of a revival starting, but certainly the Holy Spirit can fall upon on as individuals. He speaks and we listen.

Rich Maurer

August 2, 2015

¹ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/adrianwarnock/2008/05/martyn-lloyd-jones-monday-shortage-of/>

² <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/a-passion-for-christ-exalting-power>

³ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1987), pp. 111–112.

⁴ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Joy Unspeakable*, (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1984), p. 51.

⁵ <http://www.wheaton.edu/Media-Center/Wheaton-Magazine/Spring-2015/Feature-Articles/Wheaton-College-The-Essence-of-Revival>