

October 31, 2021 - Bill Howell

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Preacher: Bill Howell

[0 : 00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church, knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. So turn to Romans 14, second half of the chapter, verses 13 to 23.

And this is a portion that lets us know food wars are not for Christians. I'm going to read the passage. Therefore, let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this, not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.

I know I'm convinced of the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but to him who thinks anything is unclean, to him it is unclean. For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love.

Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. Therefore, do not let what is good, what is for you a good thing, be spoken of as evil.

For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.

[1 : 20] So then, we pursue or let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food.

All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.

The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself and what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith.

And whatever is not from faith is sin. Father, help us to take in and remember what you would have us act upon, each of us individually.

From your word we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. So, we're told in verse 13 not to judge one another. And yet, we're told in another passage to judge our fellow believers.

[2 : 26] So, what's the difference? Well, in this passage, it's referring to motives. Don't judge your brother's motives.

Don't judge your brother's preferences if they're different from yours. This passage is related to things that are not right or wrong, biblically speaking.

Now, I'm just going to read a few verses in 1 Corinthians 5, where we are to judge our brother. We are to be our brother's keepers. We're not to be like the world that just says, follow your heart.

Anything goes. It's different for each one of us. As believers, we say, be careful. Be careful about following your heart. Your heart can be deceitful and desperately wicked.

Follow the word of God. Get your instructions from the word of God. And so, in 1 Corinthians 5, it's a chapter where a professing Christian is having sexual relations with his father's wife, his stepmother.

[3 : 33] And Paul says, what are you doing? Did the believers there think they were being gracious and not judging? Paul says, judge him. And he says, you know, I have told you to not associate with immoral people.

In verse 9 of 1 Corinthians 5. But he said, I didn't mean the unbelievers. In verse 10. He says in verse 11, but actually I wrote you not to associate with any so-called brother.

A professing Christian. If he's an immoral person. If somebody's living in a sexual, having sexual relations outside of marriage. Paul says, don't associate with him.

It's not right. Tell your brother. That's not right. Tell your sister the same thing. If he's covetous. And you see this, the person is just living for, he wants this.

Somebody else has it. He wants this. A person. A thing. Something. And you know where this can lead. It can lead to stealing. It can lead to lying. It can lead to murder.

[4 : 36] Or an idolater. God doesn't have room to share his glory with another God. It's not adding Jesus as one of your gods. It's having him as the one supreme.

And God the Father. Along with God the Spirit. The triune God. Or a reviler. A railer. Somebody who just cuts down and cuts down and cuts down everybody he talks about.

You know, we've got a lot of that in the world today, don't we? People that just want to cut down, cut down, cut down. They don't want to build up. They want to cut down. And if a brother or sister is doing that who belongs to the Lord Jesus, you tell them, no, this is, no brother.

I'm not going to listen to that anymore. Build up. Don't tear down. Or a drunkard. Someone who drinks more than they should and it leads to perpetual drunkenness.

Or a swindler. Someone who's taking advantage of others. Cheating others. It's like in the Lord, talk about the Pharisees in Matthew 23.

[5 : 42] You devour widows' houses. Yeah, I'll help you, old lady. And you take what belongs to them. And so Paul says, you know, those who are outside, in verse 13, God judges the unbelievers.

But he says, you remove the wicked man from among yourselves. So I just want to mention that because, again, in the world which we're living, the favorite verse of many in the world is, don't judge me.

And it's true. We don't want to judge unbelievers. Leave them to God. Pray for them. If they want to ask you about, is this right or wrong according to the Bible, let them know what the Bible says.

But for your fellow brothers and sisters, you are their keepers. And we need to watch out and look for each other in a loving family way to when there's specific sins that are being openly practiced.

We can't let that go unnoticed. Back in Romans 14, we have seen in the previous verse, verse 12, each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

[6 : 52] So, you know, he wants me to focus on myself. He wants me to focus on loving my fellow believer rather than critiquing my brother.

I need to be sure my life is well-ordered before my Savior and not zero in on the life of someone else. You know, one area that I've wrestled with in judging others is the area of church.

You know, I'm a go-to-church guy. I'm a go-to-all-the-meetings-in-the-church guy. What's the problem with the other believers who don't come to all the meetings of the church?

Well, is it just because I'm a spiritual giant and there's spiritual pipsqueaks? Is that the way it is? Well, not necessarily. I grew up in a church where little pins would be given to those who had a good record on church attendance.

Well, is the most spiritual person the one who goes to church the most? Again, not necessarily. You know, Sally, my sister, she grew up as a go-to-church person.

[8 : 05] And so if my daughters go to one meeting and then they leave for work, she says, that's not right. They need to be here for both meetings. That's not right. And yet, you know, my daughters are going to help in the assisted living home, the nursing home.

And, you know, the Lord said it's okay to do good on the Sabbath. He would probably say it's okay to help people in the nursing home on the Lord's Day as well, if that's part of your work.

There are a lot of reasons that I don't know and motives that I don't know about others. Some people can't physically, they can't be at more than one meeting. They just can't handle it. Other people might leave camp on Sunday morning, but the reason they leave and don't go to church is because they want to get to their home church for their evening service.

So there's a lot of things I don't know. And I need to let the Lord, I let the Lord now. They're the Lord's servants. Now, if you're a Christian, the Lord says, do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together.

He says, you need to be with each other. But he doesn't say how often we should meet. We read in the New Testament, the pattern was, seemed to be on the first day of the week.

[9 : 18] Resurrection day, celebrate the Lord. But again, he doesn't say that as a commandment. It's like, how much do you want to get together with my people?

How much do you want to get together with me? I'll leave that to your discretion. You know, when he talked to Peter, Peter, do you love me?

Well, yeah, Lord, I'm fond of you. You know, you know me, Lord. Kind of weak, but you know something's there for you. And what did the Lord say?

Feed my sheep. Care for my sheep. Well, you know, a good place to find the sheep of the Lord is on Sunday mornings. They're often together on Sunday mornings. That's a good place to meet with them and show your love for them.

When the Lord, we talk about remembering the Lord and his death and the breaking of the bread and the taking of the cup, representing his broken body and his shed blood. He says, as often as you do this.

[10 : 17] He doesn't tell us, he doesn't command us, you do this every week or it's a sin. But he gives us a choice. As often as you desire to remember me, I'd like to be remembered in this way.

And so, I'm appreciating, you know, it can, it used to mess up my Sundays if I would, you know, where's so-and-so? Yeah, so-and-so's probably skipping out with no good reason.

No, I can't be like that. I can't go there. That ruins my Sundays. Instead, I've come to appreciate, thank the Lord for those who are there. You know, some may be, they aren't there because they're not skipping out, but they're kids sick.

They're home with their sick kid or they're sick themselves. And you know what it's like these days. Just let people decide if they're sick or healthy and come if you're able. So, you know, the Lord, we tend to think that if people aren't seeing things our way, they're just, they need to mature and grow up and be as spiritual as I am.

That's not necessarily the case. And so we need to be careful in that regard. In verse 14, the Lord talks about nothing being unclean.

[11 : 36] The Lord Jesus was the one who said this. But if your conscience says something's unclean, it's unclean. The weak brother is described as the one who's concerned about eating right.

The not-so-weak brother knows that food's not morally wrong or right for the New Testament believer. Now, the not-so-weak brother gets irritated at the weak brother because the weak brother thinks that he's the more spiritual one because he's got a long list of do's and don'ts.

But he wants the others practice to show they're as serious about Christian living as he is. Warren Wiersbe says, He goes on to say later, If Christians would go to the Lord in prayer instead of going to their brother with criticism, there would be stronger fellowship in our churches.

And when I see something, when you see something that's a little different about the way another believer views things, that's where I should go. If it's not directly, you know, an open sin according to the word of God.

Pray. Pray about it. Don't go criticizing. I think of Peter. You know, after Peter became a New Testament believer, in one sense he was an Old Testament believer, and then he became a New Testament believer when the church was born, he thought he should still follow the Old Testament dietary laws.

[13 : 34] Until the Lord showed him otherwise. Remember the Lord gave Peter the opportunity to present the gospel to the Gentiles, starting in Acts 10 with Cornelius, the Roman centurion, who prayed to God and who gave financial support for the synagogue.

And an angel told him, send messengers to Peter, and Peter will come and share what you need to hear. And so when the Gentile messengers came to Peter, Peter was, he was seeing a vision before they got there.

He was getting hungry, and the Lord showed him a blanket full of food coming down from heaven. And the Lord said, arise, Peter, kill and eat.

And Peter said, oh no. And we always imagine there must have been a pig included in that blanket. And Peter said, no, I've never eaten anything unclean. And the Lord said, what I've made clean, don't call unclean.

And this happened three times. And each time Peter said, no, Lord, I'm not going to eat it. I don't eat unclean things. I eat kosher. And after that, you know, Peter's wondering, what is this?

[14 : 49] And the messengers arrive, and the Holy Spirit says, go down and meet them. They're here for you. And Peter gets back and shares the gospel with Cornelius, and he says, the Lord's taught me that I shouldn't call any man unclean.

The Gentiles are no longer unclean. But there was a sub-issue. Food is not unclean for Peter either. There's no longer right and wrong food for him to eat.

And this was connected to Peter's background. And a lot of our preferences can be related to our backgrounds, what we grew up with, what we're familiar with, what we've always done and thought.

And we can struggle with some of these things. And Peter struggled with this. It's estimated that he shared the gospel with Cornelius maybe about five years after the Lord Jesus died, buried, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven.

And then it's estimated maybe 10 to 15 years later, this issue came up with Paul's letter to the Galatians.

[15 : 57] And James sent some men to check on things, and they were very Jewish men. And instead of Peter eating with the Gentiles like he had been, the Gentile believers, he separated and began eating kosher, no doubt, with the Jews from James group.

And Paul said, I had to call Peter out on this. This is not right. And so, just to mention that, you know, Peter fell into some things that he had to work through because of what he was familiar with most of his life.

And yet the Lord had brought changes related to food issues. In verse 15, we read, If for food your brother is hurt, you're no longer walking according to love.

You know, I appreciate the passages that talk about running the race, finishing strong, completing the race, but at my stage of life, I'm more of a walker. And so I appreciate even more the passages that talk about walking.

And there's a lot of them. And there's a lot of times this phrase is repeated, isn't it? Walk in love. And that's how we need to live our Christian life. Love comes as a priority.

[17 : 22] And then it's followed up, Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. Wow, that's a strong word. Destroy. Apollyon. It's the word from which we get Apollyon.

Apollyon, the destroyer, the one who led the army when the pit was opened in Revelation. Apollyon led the army. This demon infested army from the pit.

We don't want to be those who destroy our brother just by holding on to what we want to eat. You know, when we think about what the Lord said about food, I'm just going to read a few verses in Mark chapter 7.

And you're familiar with this, but I think many times these are good reminders for us. Verse 14, He called the crowd to him. Again, he began saying to them, Listen to me, all of you, and understand, there's nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him, but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man.

If anyone has ears, let him hear. When he left the crowd and heard of the house, his disciples questioned him about the parable. He said to them, Are you so lacking in understanding also?

[18 : 45] He obviously expected them to understand what he was saying. But they had this background. Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him?

Because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated. Thus he declared all foods clean. And he was saying, That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man.

For when out of the heart of man proceed evil thoughts, fornication, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness.

All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man. So it's not what you put in. Now I have no doubt the Lord ate kosher as a Jewish man under the laws.

He willingly placed himself. And yet he's also telling us here that it's not food. It's not food that defiles you. It's not certain foods that are healthy.

[19 : 49] Well, I shouldn't say some foods are healthier for certain people than other foods. And yet, you know, it's almost like, well, the Old Testament dietary laws. Was it because if you ate that way you'd be healthier?

I think we want to be careful about that. I know a lot of people want to say things against pork. Well, you know, here the Lord says all foods are clean.

Why did God give the dietary laws in the Old Testament? Well, maybe he wanted to see if they were going to obey him or not and be separate as he asked them to.

Maybe it had something to do with health. I can't say for sure. But here he's telling us food doesn't defile you or make you more spiritual one way or another.

And so, as you know from the letter to the Corinthians, in the early church, the believers were, there's a question about food offered to idols, right?

[20 : 52] Should you eat it or not? And the believers, some of the believers who came from an idolatrous background, as most of them would in Corinth, most of the Gentiles would, they were not going to, many of them felt by their conscience that they should not eat this meat because they knew what it used to symbolize, feeding the idol and worshiping the idol, providing for the idol.

Other believers, you know, they recognize, hey, these choice steaks, they're good pieces of meat, they're at a great price. Christians always like a good deal. And it's just meat.

There's no spiritual stigma to it. Paul said, it's just meat. But if others were sensitive, we should not be celebrating, you should not be celebrating your Christian liberty because it might be spiritually damaging to your brothers with a conscience in this area.

If you ate it in their presence, they might think you were sinning, even if you had a clear conscience. So we're told never to push our Christian liberty. It's there, but not push it.

Don't push it upon others if you know others might be hurt. But maybe even if they have an overly sensitive conscience, it might cause them to think, well, look, look, here's Bill.

[22 : 24] He's chucking down this meat. He loves meat. And it was sacrificed to an idol. And maybe it just doesn't matter what we do.

Maybe we can do whatever we want. And it might make the person not want to follow their conscience or the guidance of the Holy Spirit and think, oh, it doesn't matter how a Christian lives anymore. We're going to heaven in the end.

That's all that matters. Well, no, it does matter. The Lord has a testimony for us. He desires this in the dark world in which we're in. And sometimes we can have accidents in promoting certain things that others might be offended at.

A lady lived next to us at camp, and she was a lady you don't eat out on Sunday. You don't mow your lawn on Sunday. And so one Easter day, we walked over to her house, and if I thought about it ahead of time, I wouldn't have, but I brought her a chocolate Easter egg.

Wrong choice. You don't eat chocolate Easter eggs. You celebrate the Lord's resurrection. I mean, who are you trying to honor, the Easter bunny or the Easter bunny, Easter chicken, whoever, anyway.

[23 : 42] Sometimes, you know, oh, yeah, if I'd thought about that, no, we wouldn't have brought her the chocolate Easter egg. You know, if it's a Reese's Easter egg, we would have brought her a regular Reese's.

That would have been okay, but not a Reese's Easter egg. Maybe some of you know believers who like to follow the Old Testament dietary laws.

Well, if they do, you know, don't invite them over for a bacon breakfast or a ham dinner. You know better than that. We had a boy at camp who was from a Seventh-day Adventist background, and once we were having pizza at camp, he came to me afterwards, towards the end of the meal, Uncle Bill, I got this piece of pizza that was smothered with mozzarella cheese, and he didn't know there was pepperoni pieces under the mozzarella cheese.

My counselor said, you're not going to waste that. You eat that. And so, anyway, if he'd come to me before he ate it, I think he went ahead and ate it, and then he came to me, so maybe, I don't know.

But, you know, it's, we're not going to stop serving pepperoni pizza at camp. And the reason is because it could, I mean, we also, we're not going to force people to eat pepperoni pizza either.

[25 : 00] We have all sorts of cooks make all sorts of pizza, and you can have your plain cheese pizza or other varieties. But we're not going to support any idea that there's spiritual merit in eating certain foods and in not eating other foods.

Because that's not right. And, you know, when Paul talks to Timothy about doctrines of demons, the religious kind of demons, of course, you know, he says one of the things that they promote in 1 Timothy 4, verse 3, they promote the forbidding of marriage.

Well, you know who's had a lot of failure by pressing their men, male priests, not to get married. That's against the Bible. The Bible doesn't say that.

Most of us have the gift of marriage. We're going to get married. Some of us have the gift of being single. We're going to stay single, but most of us are going to get married. And that includes the spiritual leaders in the church.

In fact, it's recommended for the spiritual leaders in the church so they know how to get along with a little family. They can get along better with a big family of God, a church family being a little bigger than their own usually.

[26 : 16] And these men advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.

For everything created by God is good. And it's talking about food. And nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude. For it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.

In pointing out these things to the brethren, you'll be a good servant of Christ Jesus. So, back in Romans 14, verse 16. Therefore, do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil.

You know, I enjoy the freedom from the Lord to eat whatever I want. But I shouldn't be a food policeman for you. Eat and let eat.

Verse 17. For the kingdom of God is not vaccine or no vaccine.

[27 : 22] It's not mask and no mask. It's not my favorite Christian music and your favorite Christian music. We could expand the list, of course.

It's not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Do you have food wars in your own home?

Well, do what's right. Do what makes for peace. What contributes to joy in your own home when you eat. That's kind of a basic place to start, isn't it?

Men, don't force your wives to change the menu because you feel like eating something else, even though she's already started preparing something she had in mind.

Women, don't nag your husband about eating more kale because it would be healthy for him, even if he really does need to lose some weight. Men, if you wanted your meat to be medium rare, and your wife knows it, but you get a piece that's dry and really well done, let it go.

[28 : 32] Don't sulk. Don't sulk. Thank her for putting together your supper and pray that she gets it right next time. I mean, if you complain, you're going to be the one cooking the next meal.

Women, if you're excited about some new diet, be careful about pressing your husband to join you in becoming a semi-vegetarian.

Don't have to do that. You know, there are certain foods that people like, but somebody else's body reacts differently, and everybody in their own home has to work that out with their own family and be sensitive in this regard.

But practicing the kingdom of God in our own homes is a good place for a family testimony to your spouse, to your children, to your grandchildren, to whoever you have over for a meal.

Verses 18 and 19. For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then, we pursue, this is the New American Standard Bible, the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

[29 : 42] You know, food shouldn't be that important to us, should us. But when I look in the mirror, I find food must be pretty important to me. I really like food. You know, when Solomon talks in Ecclesiastes about things under the sun, not the spiritual realities that are far greater, he talks about enjoying your work and having a good meal.

And it doesn't mean we can't enjoy a good meal, but it shouldn't be the emphasis, should it? As believers, we want to pursue what makes for peace, and we say with the psalmist how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.

Psalm 133, verse 1. We shouldn't make a big deal out of our favorite foods. We'd say that being in right relationship with the Lord and with our fellow believers provides much more satisfaction than a good meal, much more lasting satisfaction than a good meal or even a good job.

Did you wrestle with what to do during COVID about putting out snacks? You know, we all kind of, we all wrestle with this. Well, should we, should we abstain?

Should we put stuff out? And, you know, I mean, what do you do with your hands if you don't have coffee in one hand and a donut in the other hand? And you can't hug anybody or touch it.

[31 : 04] I mean, so everybody had to figure out, I think we separated, put the drinks over here and the eats over here, and whoever wanted to eat and drink could do so, and if you didn't want to, you didn't have to, but we wanted to keep it as normal as possible.

And, you know, the Lord gives us these tests to see how we're going to respond to these little things, relatively little things. Right response, don't condemn those who eat snacks, and don't condemn those who abstain from snacks.

Now, if we're edifying one another, because that's what this verse says, we should build up one another. So it's not just refraining from eating certain foods, but thinking about how we can use food as a blessing for others.

You know, when you get around people, you know what they like. You know their favorite pie. You know their favorite cookies. You know, make it for them, even if it's not their birthday, just to be a blessing to them.

We had a longer-than-usual gardening season. We enjoyed picking the sweet corn and had more tomatoes than we ever had and sharing it with our neighbors. When our children were little, some of the saints on Sundays would invite us out to eat.

[32 : 12] That was a real treat. You know, you've got a bunch of little kids, and, you know, it's a great way to encourage somebody with little kids. Invite them out to eat.

And we'd go to a buffet, and the kids would eat Jell-O and peaches, and we'd just let them eat what they wanted to eat. And when we got back home, we kind of adjusted their diet, kept what we thought would be good.

But, you know, usually take them out to eat. Kids' prices are usually less than adult prices. You don't have to worry about them breaking anything in your home. You don't have to do the dishes afterwards. One way you can edify others.

Verses 20 and 21. Don't tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things are clean.

But they're evil for the man who eats and gives offense. So now the evil man is the one who's pushing his Christian liberty. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything by which your brother stumbles.

[33 : 17] What about the missionary who goes out and, wow, you go out to certain places, and the locals want to, you know, they want to have you over and have you enjoy their great food.

And you think, I don't know if I can keep this down or not. But if I don't, they're going to, well, who are you? Well, the big white man comes in, and he thinks he's superior to us because he's not eating our food.

And, well, I guess you pray, Lord, help me not to gag and help me to help my stomach. I want to honor you. The strangest thing I ever heard was from Carl Dorner in Taiwan.

A man was eating monkey brains. And in Taiwan, monkey brains were a real treat. And I think he acted like he just dug right in and ate him with the rest of them.

But they would get a live monkey. They'd push together two tables. The monkey's head would be in the middle. The monkey's still alive.

[34 : 21] They would take off the scout, the top of the, I'm losing my words now. Anyway, they would open it up, and with the live monkey still wriggling below and the juices squirting up, they would just dig in and eat the brains until they were all gone.

So, anyway, there are some challenges that have to do with eating. We've gone too far. So, everybody ready for lunch now? Well, the final couple verses.

Verses 22 and 23. The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy as he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because eating is not from faith.

Whatever is not from faith is sin. You have faith, you know. You can eat whatever you want, but be more concerned about building up your brother than eating whatever you want, if it's going to be offensive to him.

You know, Charles Spurgeon, he got out of sorts with another brother because he said, that other brother is unspiritual because he's going to the theater.

[35 : 37] Well, you know, there are a lot of things we could talk about. For us, more than eating, more than food, probably the area of drinking is an area where we want to be careful, and some of us might disagree about that regard.

But then Charles Spurgeon was a great smoker of cigars. And today we would say, oh, that's a no-no. That's not very healthy. In fact, I heard he eventually kind of gave it up because somebody was advertising, this is the cigar that Charles Spurgeon smokes.

He thought, I don't think I want that on my resume. But there's a lot of little things. J. Vernon McGee was saying that, you know, they were smokers down south, and then they moved to church out on the west coast, and there was mixed bathing on the beaches.

Guys and girls there at the same time. Whoa! You know, there's a lot of different things you can come up with that are not clearly right and wrong, according to the Bible, but more a preference and so forth.

So may the Lord help us not to pressure others. Hey, come on. Don't be a spiritual baby. Eat this. Do this. I'm doing it. It's okay with me. Don't pressure others if they have a conscience against it.

[36 : 52] I don't want to be responsible for my brother sinning, nor do you. You know, that's the devil's business, to tear down somebody and wreck their faith. It's not the business of the brother in Christ the Lord wants us to build up.

Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for a lot of practical instructions. Father, help each of us to know how to apply this portion of your word, that you might be honored, and that we might be in happy fellowship together.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.