

Stop Passing Judgment!

Romans 14:1

Series: "Characterized by Grace"

This will mark the beginning of FOUR SERMONS from Romans 14

1. Stop Passing Judgment. 14:1
2. Growing New Believers in an Environment of Grace. 14:2-4
3. Judgmentalism - the Danger and the Cure. 14:3-10 (especially 3, 8b, 10b)
4. How to Handle Disputable Matters with Grace. 14:13-23

The Importance of this series. *At FBC there are **many things we do well.** Missions. Friendliness. Evangelism. Discipleship. Teaching. Children's ministry. Worship.* but there is **something that we do not do well.** *Things like Acceptance. Forbearance. Forgiveness. Understanding. **These are the attitudes of grace.***

I could **tell many stories** of people turned away because of criticism, insult, or a general sense that they could not meet the expectations of others.

BUT, to avoid the embarrassment of actual FBC examples, listen to **"Brenda's Story,"** written by Ray Pritchard. (How to Kill a New Christian February 2007)
She always believed in God. Even during her worst days, she never lost her faith. Sometimes God felt far away, but she never doubted him, not even for a moment. Deep inside she always felt that someday she and God would get together.

Her life began to change when she met a new person who transferred into her department at work. That new friend was "different" somehow. She was unique, calm under pressure, gracious to those who too her for granted, strong in her convictions yet always with a smile on her face. Brenda had never met anyone quite like her. When she finally asked her what made her so different, her friend said, "I gave my heart to Jesus Christ and he changed my life."

Brenda had never heard anything like that—ever. She knew about church and about religion. After all, she had attended parochial school as a child. She even went to church once or twice a year. But Jesus! He was just a name to her—a great religious leader—but nothing more. The thought intrigued her that Jesus could change her life.

Over a period of many weeks, Brenda brought the subject up whenever she felt it was safe. Her friend always answered her questions carefully and one day gave her a Bible to read. She told her to start in the gospel of John. Brenda did, and couldn't believe how exciting it was. For the first time in her life, the Bible made sense to her. On and on she read, finishing John and Acts and most of the New Testament.

Early one morning it hit her. It was true! Jesus was God's Son. He really did die on the cross and rise from the dead. He's alive today. Brenda bowed her head and prayed a very simple prayer: "Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God. Thanks for dying on the cross for me. Come into my life and make me a new person."

She didn't hear any angels sing. Nothing happened outwardly, but Brenda knew she would never be the same again. She couldn't wait to tell her friends at work. She was so eager, so excited, so glad to be a Christian.

Her friend shared her joy. Each day they spent their lunch hour reading the Bible and praying together. Not many weeks later her friend came in and said, "I'm being transferred to a another city." Brenda couldn't believe it. But her friend gave her the name of a church nearby and said, "Go there. It's a good church. I'm sure they will welcome you."

So she went, timidly, because she didn't know anyone there. The first Sunday she sat in the back row, listening quietly, watching intently, trying to understand, trying to fit in. She enjoyed the sermon, what she understood of it. The music lifted her spirit and she loved the time of silent prayer.

Week after week she went to the new church. Slowly she met a few people who seemed to be glad to see her. But it wasn't easy. Brenda was new to the church and wasn't schooled in the ways of evangelical Christianity. She still had some of her old habits. Before she came to Christ, she had not lived a perfect life—far from it. Some things she used to do made her ashamed now. In the old days, she had lived a wild life. When she heard others tell of growing up in the church, she felt guilty about her many sins, her many boy friends, all those late nights that stayed in the memory and made her feel rotten.

And she dressed too boldly for some of the older women. When she met the pastor at the door, she mistakenly called him "Father"—just like she had been taught by the nuns. One Sunday she clapped after a particularly beautiful choir number—only to have four or five people turn and frown at her. Soon the whispers began, "Where did she come from?" "She's not from around here." and "Someone should take her aside and explain how to walk and talk like a Christian."

Actually, that was an excellent suggestion, but no one did. They talked about her, but no one talked to her. When she asked if she could teach Sunday School, the response was so negative that she knew she must have done something wrong. When the leader of the Women's Ministry asked for volunteers to help plan the Fall Retreat, she raised her hand, but no one called on her.

After several months, a kindly couple pulled her aside and suggested to Brenda that she might be happier in another church. She took the hint and left. She hasn't been back to church since.

Her story is fictional, yet every detail is true. Brenda's story has been repeated many times in many churches. What happened to her happens to new Christians all the time as they try to find their way in our churches.

Let's examine the **THREE KEY PARTS** to **ROMANS 14:1**

The first part of Romans 14:1 asks,

I. **Who is the one "weak in the faith?"** *The NIV reads "Accept him whose faith is weak..."*

A. **Let's look at the word "Accept."**

1. Kittle defines this as "To take to oneself" (TDNTT)
2. The word is used when describing "inviting or accepting someone into your home." (Acts 18:26) *"He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.*
3. In the Lexicon, it says the word means "receive or accept in one's society, into one's home or circle of acquaintances" (BAGD)
4. We learn from looking at this word further, that our acceptance of others is **BASED** on **GOD'S** acceptance of us! (Romans **14:3**) *"The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for **God has accepted him.**"* (Romans **15:7**) *"**Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.**"*

B. **The second key word in Romans 14:1 is the phrase "Weak in Faith."**

1. This is **the believer who restricts something** that is **not strictly forbidden** in Scripture.
2. *Luther says of this phrase "When the Apostle here speaks of the weak, he has in mind those who were of the opinion that they were obligated to certain laws, to which in reality they were not obligated" (Luther, "Romans," 194)*
3. There are **TWO Possibilities as to who these weak believers were**
 - a. **Judiazers** who required obedience to the **LAW** in order to be saved. *But the context here is not legalism, as in Galatians 5:1-3 and Philippians 3:2. "Dogs.. Mutilators of the flesh..."*
 - b. **Gentile Christians struggling with practices associated with their former way of life. 1 Corinthians 10:25-30**
4. The **DESCRIPTION** of these weak believers is given in **Romans 14. It says that they...**
 - a. Eats only vegetables (14:2, 3)
 - b. Considers certain days more holy than others (14:5, 6)
 - c. The brother who regards something as unclean (14:14)
 - d. The brother who is distressed (14:15)
 - e. The brother who stumbles (14:20)

- f. The man who doubts (14:23)
- 5. **Here's a key Principle - in the situation of a weaker brother, *the one who promotes greater restrictions in the Christian life is regarded as WEAK.***
- 6. Modern day examples:
 - a. A New believer who throws away all of his MUSIC
 - b. A New believer who cannot go to a certain part of town because that is where he used to party and buy his drugs.
- 7. BE CAREFUL before saying **“that offends me...”** When you say that, you are admitting that you are the weaker brother! Normally, one says this to emphasize their greater position of spirituality so as to condemn the behavior of other believers. But when you say that something offends you, you are claiming the position of a weaker brother. We use this phrase from the KJV interpretation of two passages. In both passages, the weaker brother is the one who has the potential to be offended, or to sin by judging the innocent behavior of his stronger brother!
 - a. (Romans 14:21 KJV) *"It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak."*
 - b. (1 Corinthians 8:13 KJV) *"Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."*

C. The third phrase in Romans 14:1 is “Without passing judgment”

- 1. **The Greek word is *διάκρισις* from *κρίσις* JUDGMENT**
- 2. There are many aspects to this word. Here, **it is not to establish ourselves as judge over another's spirituality.**
- 3. Again, Kittle gives us tremendous insight as how this broad word is specifically used here. He writes, *“In the light of God's judgment, we should not judge one another (Mt. 7:1-2; James. 4:11; Rom. 14:4, 10; 1 Cor. 4:5). This does not mean flabby indifference to moral wrong but recognition of solidarity in guilt. (Kittle, TDNTT)*

II. Having evaluated Romans 14:1, we must then ask, in our contemporary world, What is sinful judgment?

A. There are Things that Christians must judge

- 1. False teaching. 1 Tim 1:3; Tit 1:9-11; 2 John 7-10
- 2. The truth of the gospel . John 7:24
- 3. Sinful behavior inside the church. 1 Corinthians 5:12
- 4. Believers in legal conflict. 1 Corinthians 6:5
- 5. The words of preachers. 1 Corinthians 10:15; Acts 17:11

B. But there are also things we CANNOT Judge

1. Legalism is the application of the Law to ones' salvation. I don't think that this is our primary problem today.
 - a. Applies the Law to someone's JUSTIFICATION
 - b. Rules in order to be **saved**
2. Judgmentalism, on the other hand, applies rules to the doctrine of Sanctification. This is a much more common problem in many Bible believing churches
 - a. Applies the Law to someone's SANCTIFICATION
 - b. Rules in order to be **spiritual**
 - c. In Romans 14, the weak were not being judgmental. Paul commends them for following their consciences.

C. Here are some hints in Recognizing Judgmentalism

1. Selective expectations for new believers. (Laws that have to be followed. Teaching by words and example the THINGS to DO in the Christian life, above DRAWING CLOSER to CHRIST.) **The Christian life is more about BEING and less about DOING.**
2. Unforgiving to believers who fall into sin.
3. Performance standards by which we judge someone's sincerity
4. Taking pride in ourselves (church attendance, personal disciplines, fasting, giving, witnessing).
5. Spiritualizing our opinions. (Making authoritative statements beyond the authority of Scripture)

III. What are "disputable matters?"

- A. Things that are clear. Where the Bible clearly speaks
- B. Reasons Christians disagree
 1. Weaker brother
 2. Questions about worldliness
 3. Questions about testimony
 4. Questions about separation
 5. Application of biblical principles

BECAUSE FBC is an evangelistic church, we should expect that many will get saved.

WILL THEY FEEL ACCEPTED?

Would "Brenda" feel accepted?

Would she be lovingly encouraged?

- with their piercings?
- with their divorced spouses?
- with their new age ideas?
- with their ideas about evangelism and worship?

We cannot expect INSTANT SPIRITUAL MATURITY.

We cannot expect FAULTLESS BELIEVERS.

- all of us will sin
- all of use will offend

The Bible guides us into knowing ...

- how to FORGIVE.
- how to resolve conflicts
- how to help new Christian mature in their faith

Let's do that without judging one another's spirituality.

Leave that for God.