

Justice, Peace, and Joy in the Holy Spirit

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Romans 14:14-23

¹⁴ I know and I'm persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, except that to one who considers something unclean, to that person it's unclean. ¹⁵ For if because of food your brother or sister is brought to grief, you are no longer **walking by the standard of love** (*agapé*). Do not by your food **destroy that one for whom Christ died**. ¹⁶ So don't cause something that is good in your lives to be reviled.

¹⁷ For **the kingdom of God** is not **eating** and **drinking** but is **righteousness** and **peace** and **joy** in the **Holy Spirit**. ¹⁸ The one who is a **servant of the Messiah** in this matter is **pleasing** to God and **recognized and approved** in relation to people.

¹⁹ So then let us **pursue** what makes for **peace** and for the **building up** that affects each other. ²⁰ Do not, on account of food, **ruin the work of God**. Everything is indeed **clean**, but **it's bad** for the person who eats as a result of a stumbling block. ²¹ **It's good** not to eat meat or drink wine or **do anything** that causes your brother or sister to stumble.

²² The **confident faith** that you have, **hold onto it in yourself before God**. Blessed are those who don't **pass judgment** on themselves for the way they use what they recognize and approve. ²³ But those who are disputing inwardly have **condemned** themselves if they eat, because they haven't acted from a confident faith. For whatever does not proceed **from faith** is sin.

Romans 12:1-2

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, through God's mercies to you, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, which is your worship that fits with God's message (*logos*). ² Don't let yourselves be shaped by this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, in order that you may recognize and approve what is God's intention – which is for what is good and pleasing and mature.

Romans 4:20-21

²⁰ Toward God's promise Abraham did not dispute in himself in unbelief, but he was empowered by his confident faith, since he gave glory to God, ²¹ and since he was fully convinced that what God had promised he was also able to do.

Romans 5:1-5, 8, 17

¹ Therefore, since we have been declared right from faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Messiah, ² through whom also we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we celebrate the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only that, but we celebrate in our suffering/tribulation, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces tested character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because the love for God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. ...

⁸ But God demonstrates his own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

¹⁷ ...Those who receive this abundance of grace and the gift of being declared right (righteousness) will reign in life through the one Jesus Messiah.

1 Corinthians 8:8-13

⁸ Food won't bring us close to God. We're no worse off if we don't eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹ But watch out that this authority that you have doesn't somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

¹⁰ For if someone sees you who possess knowledge at banquet in an idol's temple, if they are weak, won't their conscious be built up to eat things sacrifices to idols? ¹¹ And so the one who is weak is

destroyed by your very knowledge, the brother or sister for whom Christ died.¹² But by sinning in this way against these brothers or sisters and striking a blow at their conscience when it is weak, you are sinning against Christ.¹³ Therefore, if food is a trap that makes my brother or sister fall, I'll certainly never eat meat, in order that I not cause them to fall.

The Importance of What's Not Important

Paul wants us to see that the profound event that God has brought about in Jesus (Gospel) comes to embodied fulfillment in transformation of life through a renewed mind – a way of seeing ourselves, others, and God through the lens of Jesus – his life, cross, & resurrection. This section is marked by confident assertions: “nothing is unclean,” “the kingdom of God is...,” “everything is clean,” “faith.” But something happens. The idea of clean/unclean, holy/common used to be objective, as in so much of the Torah: God is separate from the world. Paul's statements are heretical to Paul's own past. But Jesus happened! Now God has placed at the center of his holiness and love a cross, a scandal, horror, God dying for us. God is different from the world – his self-giving, serving love is weakness and foolishness to our world, but embodies his power to overcome death's grip on us and give us real life now. Christian life is taking that in. We are “in Christ,” presenting our bodies, transformed, renewed mind, learning in ourselves day by day to recognize God's will and affirm it – good, mature.

Maturity – Simple, But Not Too Simple

Jesus is simple but he takes us deep. He wants us more grown-up than we can now imagine. The Gospel leads to a confident faith of freedom: the whole world is God's and we're God's beloved children. Nothing can separate us from God's love. But Love means community, and community means difference, diversity. Difference is the practice ground of Love. There are truths: “*Nothing is unclean...*” “*My brother believes this is unclean.*” “*My brother is struggling in faith and can be undermined in his relation to Christ by my action.*” “*I have a right/authority to do this.*” “*Christ died both for me and this brother.*” Going through the process of bringing such ideas together is the school of renewing the mind. Can I recognize and approve God's choice of self-giving love, affirming but releasing my right, being in Christ as he empties himself to die for me, experiencing the goodness, excellence, maturity? God wants the one weak in faith to grow, but weak faith is vulnerable to destruction. A strong, confident faith is the aim, but its central pillar is Jesus on the cross, and that is Love. Serving the Messiah by living out faithful righteousness/justice, building peace, bringing joy in the shared Holy Spirit, learning to judge things through love for others is the path to maturity – pleasing to God and recognizing and affirming God's will in relation to people. Confident faith never means going against conscience. The point is to bring our consciences, our way of evaluating things, to the full meaning of Jesus. Both the “weak” and the “strong” are on the same journey. The one with inward doubts must not go against conscience and destroy its usefulness. The one with “confident faith” must shape and train the mind and conscience to see the priority that God gives to love for others, building them up, fostering the Gospel in them. And to delight in that priority. Love is more fundamental than right.

God's Reign in Our Real Life

For Paul it is in the wide range of such real-life relationships, each different, that we grow up, we learn to live God's kingdom now. What began in Abraham's faith is fulfilled in this Grace. We are disciples, learning Jesus, God. This deep grace/love of God is the kingdom of true life.