

Romans 14:13-16 (NIV)

¹³ Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. ¹⁴ I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. ¹⁵ If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil.

This chapter could be broken into 2 parts: **1-12**, law of liberty
From **13-23**, the law of love

In this section we'll look at:

Refrain from Judgment (v. 13)

Remove Stumbling Blocks (v. 13)

Radiate Love (v. 15-16)

I. Refrain from judgment (v. 13)

1. Paul begins with a clear command: "Let us stop passing judgment on one another" (Romans 14:13).
2. Anytime scripture is saying something to me, I need to reflect & pay attention.
3. I'd like to think that I don't have this in my life, but if God's Word highlights something, it's probably the hand of the great physician using His scalpel
4. This simple instruction of refraining from judgment is **foundational**
5. The word "**judgment**" here refers to forming critical opinions or assumptions condemning someone based on personal choices that are not necessarily wrong but different from our own
6. [Paul isn't talking about moral or doctrinal issues](#), which need to be addressed
7. He's talking about secondary matters, things that don't affect salvation.
8. For the early Christians, these differences revolved around diet & days
9. For us today, it may be any number of issues: from worship styles to how we interpret certain scriptures

10. Passing judgment isn't **just** forming an opinion; it's deciding someone's spiritual standing based on external behavior
11. We often mistakenly judge someone's faith based on whether they share our personal preferences
12. Paul cautions us against this harmful attitude
13. **Jesus gave a similar warning in Matthew 7:1-2**, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."
14. This makes it clear: when we criticize others, the same standard will be applied to us
15. In **Matthew 7:3-5**, Jesus continues: "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?"
16. This is a powerful reminder that we are in no place to condemn others
17. We don't like being condemned, so why do that to someone else?
18. The reality is, in many cases, we don't know the whole story
19. A person might be going through personal struggles that we don't know about
20. **I.E.** Imagine seeing someone acting rudely in public—cutting in line or snapping at a cashier
21. It's easy to label them as unkind or rude
22. But what if they just received devastating news?
23. Knowing more about them changes our perspective
24. Also, in the context of our families and/or church, we are all at different stages in our spiritual journey
25. **I.E.** Think of spiritual growth like a garden
26. Some plants bloom early, while others take time to grow

27. Just because one flower blooms before another doesn't make it more valuable
28. Similarly, we are all growing at different rates
29. We may have different convictions at this stage of our journey
30. Think of a family that has lots of kids of all ages
31. Each is only able to handle things at their level
32. Just as we encourage little ones to grow, we should encourage our spiritual family to grow
33. This is so important b/c we may often forget, so Paul writes 1.5 chapters to remind us to be merciful & gracious, not judging others
34. Jesus demonstrated this many times throughout His ministry
35. **I.E.** the story of the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-11
 - a. The Pharisees brought the woman before Jesus, ready to stone her according to the law
36. They were ready to condemn & kill her, but Jesus had to set the record straight
 - a. He had to remind them of who they were
37. They were like spectators in a courtroom that felt they had authority to speak up & hand out a sentence
38. Only the judge who has perfect knowledge has that authority
39. Jesus responded with "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her (John 8:7).
40. This story shows us the heart of Jesus—He came to save, not to condemn (John 3:17)
41. Not passing judgment is to follow Jesus' example of extending grace to those who need it
42. I believe a powerful way to learn this lesson is by asking a trusted person if you **lean toward criticism & judgement**

- a. Ask them to hold you accountable
- 43. Give them permission to **Remind** you to focus on your own walk with God
- 44. **We want to walk in the light & be people who build others**
- 45. Ephesians 4:29 says, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."
 - a. This should be our guiding principle

II. Remove stumbling blocks

1. Paul goes on to say, "Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister."
2. A stumbling block is anything that causes a believer to struggle in their walk with Christ, experience doubt, or even fall into sin.
3. It's more than just offending someone. It's about leading another believer into confusion, doubt, or sin by our actions.
4. This is a call to carefully consider how our actions affect other believers, especially those who may be newer or weaker in their faith.
5. As Christians, we must **not only** avoid putting stumbling blocks in front of others but also be **committed** to removing them
6. Which means paying attention to & prioritizing the spiritual well-being of others over our personal freedoms
7. For example, let's say you're having dinner with a new believer who has struggled with alcoholism in the past
8. Based on their history, they now believe that drinking is wrong
9. Now, the Bible doesn't forbid drinking alcohol, only drunkenness (Ephesians 5:18)
10. However, it does warn about using alcohol as a means of escape or self-medication (Proverbs 20:1)
11. So, your friend sees you order a glass of wine or a beer, and they may feel pressured to join you.

12. Even though they don't feel right about drinking, they order a drink to fit in
13. In this case, your freedom is violating your friend's conscience
14. What if that experience leads them back into a destructive habit?
15. You didn't mean to cause harm, but by exercising your freedom without considering their struggle, you've placed a stumbling block in their path
16. Which means we need to be willing to give up our rights for the sake of protecting the spiritual health of others
17. Paul is clear in Romans 14:14 when he says, "I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean."
18. What Paul is saying is that, while in Christ, many things are not inherently wrong, we need to be sensitive to others who might not share the same understanding or freedom
19. As Christians, we are no longer bound by legalistic rules or rituals.
20. However, that **freedom comes with responsibility**
21. Just because we are free to do something doesn't mean we should
22. To avoid stumbling blocks, we sometimes need to lay down our rights for the sake of others.
23. We can all forget at times
24. The apostle Peter is a great example of this
25. In Acts 10, God revealed to Peter that the old system is now obsolete & the idea of clean & unclean is no more.
26. Immediately after, Cornelius, the gentile gets saved
27. Peter should have really got this lesson, but forgot & caused believers to stumble
28. Peter was later confronted by Paul in Galatians 2:11-13, ¹¹ When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood

condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. ¹³ The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. ¹⁴ When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

29. Paul confronted Peter because his actions were a stumbling block for both Jewish and Gentile believers.
30. Jesus warned about the seriousness of causing others to stumble. In Matthew 18:6, He says, "*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.*"
31. Jesus uses strong language to emphasize how seriously God takes the spiritual well-being of His children.
32. Whether it's a new believer or someone weak in the faith, we must be careful not to lead them astray.

III. Radiate love

1. In verse 15, Paul continues, "If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love."
2. The principle here is even though we may have the freedom to act in certain ways, if our actions cause someone else spiritual or emotional distress, we are not walking in love.
3. Because the well-being of others should come first.
4. Love always seeks to protect others
5. In 1 Corinthians 8:9-13, Paul gives a similar teaching to the Corinthian church. He tells them that although eating food sacrificed to idols may be permissible (since idols are nothing), they should not use their freedom if it causes another believer to stumble.

6. Paul writes, "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols?" (1 Corinthians 8:9-10).
7. Paul concludes with a strong statement: "Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall" (1 Corinthians 8:13).
8. Love would give up its rights entirely than risk leading someone into sin
9. Paul adds: "Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died" (v. 15). This is a profound statement.
10. Jesus gave His life for each person in the church.
11. So, we need to be cautious about possibly hurting someone whom Christ loved so much He died for them
12. **I.E.** Imagine you were entrusted with a one-of-a-kind masterpiece painting worth a lot of money
13. You would handle it with the utmost care because of its value.
14. In the same way, every believer is priceless to God.
15. Jesus paid the ultimate price for their salvation, and we must be careful not to harm them by our actions
16. That is playing defense
17. But Jesus also shows us how to love, proactively in **John 13**
18. After supper Jesus begins to wash the disciples' feet
19. In that time, washing feet was considered the job of the lowest servant, but Jesus, the Son of God, humbled Himself to do this for His disciples.
20. He didn't think about His rights or status; instead, He acted out of love
21. This act of love was more than just a demonstration of humility—it was a lesson

22. Jesus showed that love means serving others, even when it's inconvenient or uncomfortable.
23. Paul did that in the Philippian jail
24. Prioritizing love over our rights means putting the needs of others before our own preferences.
25. If Jesus could lay aside His position to wash feet, we can certainly lay aside our personal freedoms to care for the spiritual well-being of others
26. We need to be actively looking for ways to help others
27. When we act out of love, we build others up, promote unity, and reflect the heart of Christ, who laid down His life for us
28. Just as Jesus loved and served, we too are called to love others, even if it means sacrificing our own liberties for their sake
29. Finally, in verse 16, Paul gives a practical guideline: "Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil."
30. Paul is speaking about the cost of love
31. Real love always requires sacrifice; and that is the heart of Jesus
32. 1 Cor 13 on love defines what real love is
33. **1 Corinthians 13:4-8**
4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails...
34. This describes Jesus who told us to abide in Him