

2024 BIBLE STUDY SERIES
THEME: “GET YOUR HOPES UP!”

December 18, 2024

AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LIVING
“Christians in the Social Media Driven Age”
Romans 14:13-23

Topics

- Reflection Questions
- Important Emphasis
- Key Terms
- Scripture Reference
- Outline
- Introduction
- Background And Context
- Exploring The Text
- Check For Understanding

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

A. What Social Media platforms are you familiar with?

B. Of the Social Media platforms that you listed in question A, which ones are you active on—either reading or posting to at least once per week?

C. Have you ever received a negative response to something that you posted on Social Media? If yes, briefly explain how you responded in return.

IMPORTANT EMPHASIS

What is Social Media?

- Social media is digital technology that allows the sharing of ideas and information, including text and visuals, through virtual networks and communities.
- Social media typically features user-generated content that lends itself to engagement via likes, shares, comments, and discussion.
- More than 5 billion people around the world use social media.
- Social media is credited with helping people build community and faulted for facilitating disinformation and hate speech.
- Social media is also an increasingly important part of many companies' marketing campaigns.
- The largest social media platforms worldwide are Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and WeChat.

Can Social Media shape our thoughts, behaviors, and values?

What are Algorithms?

ALGORITHMS are everywhere. They play the stock market, decide whether you can have a mortgage and may one day drive your car for you. They search the internet when commanded, stick carefully chosen advertisements into the sites you visit and decide what prices to show you in online shops. Algorithms impact our online exposure and experiences.

How are they developed? Who develops them?

Algorithms are step-by-step procedures for solving problems. They can be written in programming languages like C++, Javascript, and Python, or in plain English. Algorithms are used in many applications, including:

- Video games
- Social media
- GPS tracking
- Voice and face recognition
- E-commerce recommendations
- Traffic signals
- Dating app pairing
- Financial transactions

Are you smart about your Social Media Interactions? (Proverbs 4:23)

Setting Boundaries

What is appropriate—on or off line!

Clicks and Likes can be addictive.

Influencers???

Undercover behavior online.

Uninhibited behavior online.

Righteous response to adverse encounters.

Refrain from exchanging evil for evil (**1 Peter 3:9; Romans 12:17-21**)

Social Media and Ministry (1 Corinthians 9:22)

Social media can be a powerful tool for ministries to connect with people, share their message, and build a community:

- Communication

Social media can help ministries communicate with their congregation and spread religious beliefs.

- Community building

Social media can help ministries create a supportive community by sharing stories, providing updates, and responding to comments.

- Outreach

Social media can help ministries reach people beyond their congregation, including potential new members.

- Research

Social media can help ministries learn about their congregation's rhythms and identify things that might be amiss.

- Feedback

Social media can help ministries get feedback on sermons.

KEY TERMS

Acceptable
Algorithms
Approve
Christ
Conscience
Condemn
Division
Doubts
Edify
Evil
Faith
False Witness

God
Good
Grieved
Happy
Holy Spirit
Image of God
Joy
Judge
Kingdom of God
Law of love
Offend
Offense

Peace
Pure
Righteousness
Scruples
Sin
Social Media
Strong
Stumbling block
Stumble
Unclean
Walking in love
Weak

Scripture Reference (Romans 14:13-23 NKJV)

¹³ Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in *our* brother's way.

¹⁴ I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that *there is* nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean.

¹⁵ Yet if your brother is grieved because of *your* food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.

¹⁶ Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil;

¹⁷ for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸ For he who serves Christ in these things *is* acceptable to God and approved by men.

¹⁹ Therefore let us pursue the things *which make* for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

²⁰ Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed *are* pure, but *it is* evil for the man who eats with offense.

²¹ *It is* good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor *do anything* by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.

²² Do you have faith? Have *it* to yourself before God. Happy *is* he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

²³ But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *he does* not *eat* from faith; for whatever *is* not from faith is sin.

Outline

- I. Cease Criticism** (Romans 14:13-14)
 - A. Reject Untenable Reproach
 - B. Remove Useless Roadblocks
- II. Consider Consciences** (Romans 14:15-16)
 - A. Mind Your Motives
 - B. Respect Others' Restrictions
- III. Cultivate Community** (Romans 14:17-19)
 - A. Prioritize Perfect Peace
 - B. Foster Fruitful Fellowship
- IV. Counteract Conflict** (Romans 14:20-21)
 - A. Prevent Petty Problems
 - B. Guard Against Grievances
- V. Commit to Convictions** (Romans 14:22-23)
 - A. Hold on to Hope
 - B. Hold Fast to Faith

INTRODUCTION

In this series on Authentic Christian Living, we have explored the meaning of a true or Authentic Christian from a biblical perspective (Romans 12:1-2); how to have an Effective Devotional Life (Psalm 119:11); how to establish or enhance our prayer life (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18); what an Authentic Christian's Home Life should look like (Joshua 24:15); and how Authentic Christians should conduct themselves in the Work Place (Colossians 3:23-24). The final lesson in the series is on how to govern ourselves as Christians in a Social Media Driven Age (Romans 14:13-23).

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Letter to the Romans was authored by the apostle Paul. He was not the founder of this church; however, he planned to visit. He wrote this letter to introduce himself prior to the visit and to speak to some concerns about disharmony among the diverse congregation of Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles. Chapters 1-11 outlined what Christians should **believe**—the sinfulness of humanity, forgiveness of sin through Christ, freedom from sin's grasp, and Israel's past, present, and future. Chapters 12-16 is concerned with how Christians should **behave** in every aspect of life.

Paul addresses a dispute within a mixed Christian congregation regarding dietary practices and Jewish holy days. He advises against judgment and urges believers to support one another, emphasizing the importance of accountability to God.

Paul's teachings remain timeless, relevant even in modern times. The essence lies in our communication style and conduct as believers, a message resonating across centuries even into this era of Social Media.

EXPLORING THE TEXT

I. Cease Criticism (Romans 14:13-14)

¹³ Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

¹⁴ I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

- A. Reject Untenable Reproach [indefensible criticism]
- B. Remove Useless Roadblocks [stumbling blocks]

Paul advises believers, particularly the "strong," to _____ or _____ others based on differing opinions. While individuals are entitled to their convictions, they should consider how these beliefs impact fellow Christians. It is crucial not to hinder others with one's freedom, emphasizing the need for reevaluation if one's choices become _____ for others.

Paul discusses how both strong and weak Christians can lead others into sin, whether through insensitivity or excessive rules, emphasizing the need to be considerate of others' beliefs and areas of strength and weakness, as highlighted by Paul in **1 Corinthians 8:9**.

Paul believed no food is inherently wrong to eat, but respected others' convictions to maintain unity. He accommodated requests to avoid causing offense, emphasizing harmony over division. So, he concludes, if someone believes it is wrong, then for that person it is wrong (see **Mark 7:14-23**). Paul's practice was to honor, as far as possible, the convictions of others.

II. Consider Consciences (Romans 14:15-16)

¹⁵ Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.

¹⁶ Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil;

- A. Mind Your Motives
- B. Respect Others' Restrictions

The conduct of stronger believers should be guided by _____ and sensitivity, not beliefs or insights into Scriptures. Causing distress to those concerned shows a lack of love. It is important not to be a stumbling block to others, especially over minor matters like food choices.

Mature Christians should be considerate of newer, less mature believers and avoid flaunting their _____ in situations where it could harm the faith of others. This sensitivity is important to prevent causing harm to less mature or vulnerable believers.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. What are the primary topics that Paul discusses in Chapters 1-11 and Chapter 12-16 of the Letter to the Romans?

Chapter 1-11 *What to believe*
Chapters 12-16 *How to behave*

2. Paul advises believers, particularly the "strong," to avoid doing what is based on differing opinions? (14:13-14)

Avoid Judging or criticizing and becoming a stumbling block

3. How are we to walk to avoid flaunting our liberty or freedom when we are around others who believe differently. (14:15-16)

We are to walk in love.

EXPLORING THE TEXT

III. Cultivate Community (Romans 14:17-19)

¹⁷for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

- A. Prioritize Perfect Peace
- B. Foster Fruitful Fellowship

After all, says Paul, if we let those little scruples become major points of contention, we have forgotten what the Kingdom of God is all about. It has nothing to do with what we eat or drink (**Matthew 6:31, 33**). Instead, it is living a life of

_____, _____, and _____ **in the Holy Spirit**. Arguing over scruples does not contribute to that.

Believers need to concern themselves with doing what is right in the essentials, maintaining _____, and sharing God's _____, not in forcing their scruples and lifestyles on others.

Those who serve Christ by doing right before God, maintaining peace among the believers, and sharing joy with others are the ones who will accomplish the acceptable service to Christ—they will please God and people (**Romans 12:1-3**).

Christian fellowship should be characterized by harmony and building each other up (see also **1 Thessalonians 5:11**). False believers and immature Christians have been known to use the “weaker brother argument” to support their own opinions, prejudices, or standards. “You must live by these standards,” they say, “or you will be offending the weaker brother.” In truth, the person would often be offending no one but the speaker.

While Paul urges us to be sensitive to those whose faith may be harmed by our actions, we should not sacrifice our liberty in Christ just to satisfy the selfish motives of those who are trying to force their opinions on us. Strong believers need not judge their own liberty by the troubled consciences of the weak. Each believer is to follow Christ.

IV. Counteract Conflict (Romans 14:20-21)

²⁰ *Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.*

²¹ *It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.*

- A. Prevent Petty Problems
- B. Guard Against Grievances

Food and our feelings about it, or any scruples that are not specifically condemned in Scripture, are not worth arguing about, flaunting, or judging—these should never be allowed to tear down other believers or tear apart the church. It is wrong for one believer to insist on his or her freedom when it causes others to stumble. If it causes someone else to fall, then put it aside for the other's sake (see also **1 Corinthians 10:23–24, 31–32**). Therefore, mature believers must not eat meat or drink wine or do anything else if it might cause another Christian to stumble. Truly strong believers can restrict their freedoms for the sake of others.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

4. What three characteristics are found in the kingdom of God? (14:17)

Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit

5. Believers who possess the above three characteristics are-- (14:18)

accepted by God and approved by men

6. What things are we to pursue? (14:19)

Things which make for peace
Things by which one may edify

7. Why is it not good to just eat meat and drink wine and do whatever we want in front of weaker believers? (14:20)

We could cause them to stumble

EXPLORING THE TEXT**V. Commit to Convictions (Romans 14:22-23)**

²² Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

²³ But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

- A. Hold on to Hope
- B. Hold Fast to Faith

Acknowledge differing beliefs, keeping disputes private, focusing on personal conscience, avoiding judgment, and seeking God's guidance for a clear conscience and understanding.

A believer must avoid actions in doubt to prevent condemnation. Following one's conscience when Scripture is unclear is advised, to prevent guilt. It's important not to judge those who differ in their practices.

In areas of disagreement, believers should keep their beliefs private. Those with freedoms should not pressure others, and those bothered by actions should not judge. All should seek a clear conscience before God to avoid self-condemnation.

If a believer does something that he or she has doubts about whether it is right or wrong, that action will bring **condemnation**. Believers ought to try to steer clear of **actions forbidden by Scripture**, of course, but sometimes **Scripture is silent**. Then we should follow our conscience.

To go against a conviction will leave a person with a guilty or uneasy conscience.

When God shows us that something is wrong for us, we should avoid it. But we should not look down on other Christians who exercise their freedom in those areas.

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

8. How does one feel when they refrain from condemning themselves over what they believe by faith? (14:22) *Happy*
9. Whatever we do that is not from faith is what? (14:23) *Sin*
10. He who doubts is *condemned* if he eats or does something that he believes is wrong. (14:23)

Life Application

- What area of your life can you review this week or practices that may cause difficulty for Christian friends, family, or associates?
- Do you have a passion for ministry and are you savvy on Social Media? If so, would you be interested in helping develop a ministry for our New Hope online viewers?

Resources

Barnes Notes on the New Testament.

Barton, Bruce, Philip Comfort, Grant Osborne, Linda K. Taylor, and Dave Veerman. 2001. [*Life Application New Testament Commentary*](#). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale.

Clark, Adam Bible Commentary.