

Scripture: Romans 14.

Sermon Topic: Act from Faith.

Text: Romans 14:23 -- "he who has ~~any~~ doubts is condemned, if he eats, because he does not act from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin".

Proposition: A Christian must act from faith in all areas of life; but when he does so he does not despise, condemn or treat unkindly those who disagree with him.

Date written: Jan. 27, 1966.

Dates and places used:

Blanca + Alamosa, Colo - 1/30/66
Allamore Park, Fla. 1-18-70

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Notes and places used:

James T. Newman, 1954 - 1955
Address Book, No. 1-13-70

Introduction:

1. A hillbilly with a rifle over one shoulder and a jug over the other stopped the city slicker and said, "Stranger, take a slug outa my jug".

"No thanks", said the slicker. "I hate the stuff."

"~~He~~"Drink!" demanded the hillbilly, pointing the rifle at the city man's head.

He drank, then spluttered, "Agh, that's terrible!"

"Ain't it though?" agreed the hillbilly. "Now you hold the gun on me while I take a drink". (from About Face as in Quote, 1-9-66, p.14

2. In the matter of living with other people we may not go to such extremes as the hillbilly to make ~~other~~ ^{them} ~~people~~ conform to ~~the~~ patterns we set for them, but we do often treat rather badly those with whom we may disagree. It is sad to have to admit that often the worst treatment is given to people with whom we ~~may~~ disagree on religious matters.

3. This is the situation about which we read in Romans 14, our Scripture for today. Paul spends quite a bit of time here rebuking those who

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He drank, then spit it out. "Ah, that's terrible!"

"Ain't it though?" agreed the hillbilly. "Now you hold the gun on me while I take a drink". (From About Face as in note, 1-0-0-0, 1-0-0-0.)

2. In the matter of living with other people we may not go to such extremes as the hillbilly to make strange requests for the patients we eat for them, but we do often treat rather badly those with whom we may disagree. It is sad to have to admit that often the worst treatment is given to people with whom we are disagreed on religious matters.

3. This is the situation about which we read in Romans 14, our Sermon for today. Paul speaks quite a bit of time here rebuking those who

treat badly others within the Christian faith with whom they do not agree. Matters of disagreement which he discusses are those of which day to observe as a day of worship, whether or not certain foods should be eaten or abstained from as a Christian, and the way that Christians should treat people who are non-Christian, or perhaps who are Christians that choose to worship in a different way from those to whom he wrote.

4. Perhaps as we discuss these things and add to it words from the last verse of Scripture which we read today, we will find a cure for some of the disagreements religious people face each other with, and a motivation which can give you and me reassurance as we act from ~~frank~~ faith in the things we must do.

I. It is difficult not to hate, despise or treat badly those with whom we differ in religious practice, or in other matters of great importance to us.

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1. A wealthy woman was interviewing a prospective maid. "Do you know how to serve company?", she asked.

"Sure do," answered the girl. "Both ways".

"What do you mean by 'both ways'," asked the lady.

"So's they'll come back, and so's they won't".

(from General Features, as in Quote
Jan. 9, 1966, p. 14)

2. In the day in which Paul was writing ~~about~~, ~~prohibiting~~ in the church at Corinth, where he was when he wrote our Scriptural letter to the church people at Rome, and in the church at Rome too, there were evidently different opinions on the importance of various customs, and ~~h~~ how to do them. People on the two sides of a question were extremely judgmental of each other and, like the maid who tried to arrange things so people would not come back, tried to treat those in the church with whom they disagreed so they would get out of the church. Sometimes the judgemental people even talked as if they had the power to know what ^{would be} the eternal destiny of somebody they did not like. ~~would be~~

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3. You are aware that conservative and orthodox Jews keep dietary customs which are derived from The Old Testament, and which go back thousands of years in history to their beginnings. Jesus was raised in the consciousness of such customs, and since he was in a good Jewish family, he was trained to keep them. Paul, too, had this type of background. He became a strict rabbi, insisting that Jews keep every single one of the minute and many regulations of religious custom and practice, until he was converted to Christ. In the churches at Corinth and at Rome were many people of both Jewish ~~background~~ and Gentile, or non-Jewish, background. The Jews, for the most part, were insistent that the members of the church, regardless of their background, keep the Jewish dietary ~~laws~~ laws and obey the Ten Commandments, including the keeping of Saturday, the last day of the week, as the holy day. They were very disdainful of the faith of those who did not do these things, and condemned them strongly, and predicted a dire judgment upon them by God. The Gentiles, in turn, made fun of the seemingly-silly and overdone customs of the Jewish Christians, and replied with condem-

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nations of their own. Of course, not all the Jews thought badly of the Gentiles, nor treated them badly; nor did all the Gentile Christians treat their Jewish fellow-churchmen so badly. But ~~there~~ was far too much squabbling. It was to this situation that Paul wrote from Corinth, where the problem also existed, to the church at Rome, concerning the divisions.

4. We, too, tend to ~~decide~~ and misunderstand those with whom we disagree on things religious.

a. It is very difficult, for example, ~~fr~~ a Protestant of strong fundamentalist beliefs to be kind and friendly to, much less cooperate with, a Roman Catholic, a liberal Protestant, or anyone else within or without the Christian world who does not believe as he does. The radio waves are full of programs by preachers with this bent. (Carl McIntyre broadcasts a constant negative message of distrust and condemnation toward those within the Christian fold with whom he disagrees; and he does this over approximately 500 stations. I won't be the one to tell

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what stations to tune to if you want to hear him! He is typical of those who berate others, who also believe in Christ, because they do not hold specific doctrines which he espouses, and who tries to prove them communists or other brand of traitors as a sort of blackmail effort to ~~make~~ put pressure on them to change.

b. Nor are the Fundamentalists within the Protestant fold the only ones guilty of a sort of defamation of character on this sort of thing. Within the so-called liberal fold are many who think that the very worst thing that can happen to mankind is the experience of war. They may be nearly right, at that, for war is terrible. I can't help but be amused, however, at those who preach an absolute pacifism and yet do it so very militantly. One such person, ~~a friend of mine,~~ and I were on a Conference Board of Christian Social Concerns at the same time. This Board is charged with trying to help the Christians in the Methodist Churches of our area think through and act effectively on social matters, including the matter of war and peace.

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At one meeting I wore my Army uniform, because I had to attend a chaplain function immediately afterward (I am a National Guard chaplain and a former Army chaplain). The sight of this militaristic attire set my friend off on a very unpacifistic verbal attack on me and all military people. After that I frequently wore my uniform to the meetings just to have the pleasure of irking him. So there were two people of varying and opposite opinions on a subject of Christian concern, trying to hurt each other; yet each knowing he wasn't likely to change the mind of the other.

c. In this day of an emphasis on ecumenical, tolerant Christianity, there are still ^{both} ~~clergymen and Christians~~ ^{men} who can view only with suspicion and mistrust the approaches toward friendship and cooperation being made by the Roman Catholics, the Mormans, or any other ~~branches~~ adherents to a Christian expression much different from their own. I find this quite true with some of the ministers in this our town, even now. And in some places I've known ministers, as well as lay members of churches, to

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make it clear that they would not participate in an organization if such and such a group or person did participate. We think this to be both silly and wrong. To be kind and friendly toward those with whom we may strongly disagree is not un-Christian, but very, very Christian. Even while doing this, ~~represented~~ ~~Christian~~

II. A committed Christian must act in all areas of life from the faith he holds.

1. It used to seem so silly to me to see the Jewish rabbi-chaplain on an army post where I was stationed walk two miles to his chapel on the Sabbath instead of starting his car and using it to get there. However, for some reason I still don't understand, ~~that~~ ~~represented~~ ~~work~~ the starting of his car represented work, and he would not do it. When I asked him about it, he said he knew it looked silly, but he believed there was both religious value and a value of self-discipline in it, and he would continue, regardless of what was thought. This man had a rare sense of conviction which caused him to act on what he thought right.

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2. This is the spirit that Paul urged on his ~~readers~~ original readers of our Scripture. It is summed up perhaps best in the 23rd verse, which might well be our text. He wrote, "he who has doubts is condemned, if he eats, because he does not act from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin".

He was telling the Christians at Rome that if they, or any of them, doubted that it was right to eat foods, such as Pork, which the Jews considered it wrong to eat, then ^{they} ~~he~~ would be sinning to eat these things. His teachings earlier in the Scripture also indicated his conviction that to abstain from such foods if one was convinced there was no harm in them would also be wrong except for one thing. That was that if the Christian did something which caused someone else to do something he thought to be wrong, then the Christian was wrong. For instance, to put a weak person on the spot in a crowd by offering him food or drink which he thinks it is wrong to take but which he has not moral fibre to refuse, is wrong. A Christian should never do that.

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3. Paul was also insisting that no matter how much you think another's beliefs and customs may be wrong or silly, you don't make fun of him, you don't mistreat him, you grant him religious liberty. It is God's alone to judge. Thus Paul was in reality one of the early great champions of freedom.

4. A personnel director was interviewing an applicant for a job. He said, "You're asking big pay for a beginner".

The applicant answered, "Well, the work is harder when you don't know anything about it".

(from About Face, as in Quote for Jan. 9, 1966, p. 15).

5. The world of our fathers or grandfathers was one in which we didn't know much about people of other forms of faith very different from ^{us} our own. I, for one, am glad that is changed, and that we are conversant more and more with each other. I still have my strong convictions on religious principles, but I can mingle with and talk seriously, even on religion, with both laymen and clergymen of greatly different religious practice and

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theology. I, ~~for one,~~ am glad it is that way. I think it is the way Christ would have it. I think this is what Paul was trying to tell the early-day Christians at Rome.

6. ~~It is because I believe my~~ religion demands me to be respectful of ~~different beliefs~~ other people, regardless of their beliefs; to respect their sincerity; not to be cynical about them ~~wildly~~ when they make even the wildest and craziest claims for their religion. "Love the sinner but hate the sin" is an old saying which might be modified to say, "Love the person of different faith, but hold fast and strongly to your own faith". My faith demands that I try to act on this principle.

Conclusion:

1. With Paul, we would say that he who performs a religious act because of pressure from others, to be popular, to save his skin, is a sinner, is wrong. We would, with Paul, remember that ~~even~~ ~~so~~ it is not ours to judge the sincerity of others. ~~so~~ You and I can not be sure that another man's actions are not sincere, no matter how phony they look.

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We must remember that each individual is also a child of God, and it is your and my duty to treat him as such.

2. As for our own lives, we need to have our own very definite conviction to which we cling regardless of opposition, ridicule, or hardship. We need to act from faith, doing what we believe right and ~~act~~ saying courageously what we believe, ~~at the moment~~. We know that what we believe determines what we are, so it is important to know what we believe. For we act from faith, whether we know it or not, no matter who we are. ~~The~~ faith may be in the power of money or position, knowledge or family. It may also be in the love of God for each and every one of us, that points out that God alone will judge, but he will do it mercifully and lovingly. This relieves us of the necessity to condemn others and lets us concentrate on living as close as we can to the dictates of our own faith.

3. Act from faith. That is the challenge of our Scripture, of our Christ, of our lives. As we act from faith, we will accomplish things. Not just belief, but action. Act from faith

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