–Save This Page as a PDF–

Messianic Principles
14: 10-23

Messianic principles DIG: In what way will we have to give an account of ourselves to God? What four things happen instantly when we judge another believer? Instead of judging other believers, what should we be doing? What should we do if we disagree over matters of conscience? What does Paul mean by the word "stumble?" How might some believers be stumbling blocks to other believers? What will a life of self-centeredness cost believers?

REFLECT: When has your freedom in Messiah been a stumbling block to someone else? In your opinion, what are some issues that are just not worth fighting over? What beliefs are you not willing to compromise? As you've matured in the faith, how has your sensitivity to the consciences of other believers changed? When should believers defer to a fellow believer's beliefs? Why is it more important to maintain unity than to maintain your personal "rights?"

Paul is writing to a mixed congregation of Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome under the inspiration of the Ruach Ha'Kodesh, instructing them how to get along with each other in the same Body of Messiah. They don't have the freedom in Messiah to judge each other.



Throughout the book of **Romans**, **Paul** has delivered a fountain of pithy and

practical guidelines for spiritual living. **His** counsel has alternated between choices and actions by individuals on the one hand, and the wellbeing of the Body of **Messiah** on the other. He celebrates freedom **in Messiah**, but also cautions against a tendency to make freedom the end in itself rather than a means to an end. In this passage, **Paul** reiterates that the freedom we have **in Messiah** is not a license to do anything we want, but an encouragement to always consider what is best for others.[365]

Do not judge your brother: It's always easier to stand on the sidelines and take shots at those who are serving than it is to get involved and make a contribution. **God** warns us over and over not to criticize, compare, or judge each other. **You then, why do you pass judgment on your "stronger" brother? Or why do you look down on your "weaker" brother (14:10a)?** When you criticize what another believer is doing in faith and from sincere conviction, you are interfering with **God's** business. **For all of us will stand before God's judgment seat (14:10b).** Whenever I **judge** another believer, four things happen instantly: I lose fellowship with **God**, I expose my own pride and insecurity, I set myself up to be judged by **Ha'Shem**, and I harm the fellowship where I worship. A critical spirit is a costly vice.[366]

Then **Paul** reinforces his argument for believer's **judgment** with a quotation from **Isaiah 45:23, "As I live, says ADONAI, every knee will bend before me, and every tongue will publicly acknowledge God" (14:11). Yeshua Messiah** alone will judge all mankind. **The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son (John 5:23).** And **ADONAI** alone will save all the earth. Thus, while **bending the knee** may be the act of a condemned criminal, it is also that of a pardoned **sinner**!

At the end of your life on earth you will stand before **YHVH**, and **He** is going to evaluate how well you served others with your life. **So then, every one of us will have to give an account of Himself to God (14:12).** Think about the implications of that. One day **Ha'Shem** will compare how much time and energy we spend on ourselves compared with what we invested in serving others. At that point, all of our excuses for self-centeredness will sound pretty pathetic, "I was too busy," or "I had my own goals" or "I was preoccupied with working, having fun, or preparing for retirement." To all those excuses, **God** will respond, "Sorry, wrong answer. **I** created, saved, called and commanded you to live a life of service. What part did you not understand? **God will pour out His anger and wrath on those who live for themselves (2:8 NLT).** But for believers, it will mean a loss of

eternal rewards (see the commentary on **Revelation, to see link click Cc – For We Must All Appear Before the Judgment Seat of Christ**).[367]

Therefore, let's stop passing judgment on each other in these areas of personal conscience**! Instead, make this one judgment. Instead, make this one judgment, "Do not to put a stumbling block or a snare in a brother's way" (14:13).** It is the unloving attitude of contemptuous superiority by **strong** believers and the equally unloving attitude of self-righteousness by **weak** believers by which we judge each other. From **Paul's** day to ours, those wrongful judgments have been major causes of disrespect, disharmony, and disunity in the Universal Church made up of **Jews** and **Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14)**. The **strong** brother is permitted to do anything he wishes in these amoral areas, with the exception of **stumbling** his **weaker** brother. He can choose not to use his freedom in **Messiah** to do so.

The teaching of this verse, which expresses the central of this chapter, is a midrash on **Leviticus 19:14**, which says: **You are not to place a stumbling block before the blind,** or, more generally, you are not to bring cruel intended harm upon someone who is helpless. **The rabbis interpreted "blind" metaphorically to mean those unlearned in Torah (Sifra to Leviticus 19:14, Bava Metzia 75b, 'Avodah Zarah 21b-22a).** This meaning for **"blind"** would include both those whom **Paul** calls **weak** in faith, and those whom **he** considers **strong** in faith, but inclined to pride; until their attitudes change both are relatively helpless, and it is wrong to cause them to commit **sin**, either in fact or in their own opinion. The inspired authors of the B'rit Chadashah echo the same sentiment (**James 4:11-12** and **5:9; Ephesians 4:29; Matthew 5:9**).[368]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, I look up to **You** with wonder and awe of **Your** deep **love** expressed in undying chesed kindness. **Yeshua** died as **the** sacrificial **lamb** (**John 1:29)** in our place **(Leviticus 1:4, Second Corinthians 5:21). You** put the **sins** of **Your** children **as far as the east is from the west. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His mercy for those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us (Psalms 103:11-12).** When I consider the vastness of the universe in which our tiny blue planet spins its existence, I am humbled at **Your** wonderfully complex and expansive sovereignty. **You** who are the mighty creator, **the King of Kings and Lord of Lords** could easily come down harshly on anyone who is weak – but **Your love** continues to call them to strength in **Your** truth and **You** model kindness and patience. May we follow **Your** path of mercy to all. May we*

***love** and pray for them. Thank **You** for being such a wonderful **Father**. In **Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

Nothing is unclean in itself: I know – that is, I have been persuaded by the Lord Yeshua the Messiah – that nothing is unclean in itself. But if a person considers something unclean, then for him it is unclean (14:14). Paul is certainly not saying, "Anything goes!" **His** remark here has nothing to do with human behavior, but with *tum'ah*, or ritual uncleanness. It is not surprising that **Paul**, having alluded to **Leviticus 19** in the previous verse, a chapter full of commandments about ritual uncleanness, continues with a principle on that subject. It is, nevertheless, a surprising conclusion for **a Jewish scholar** who sat at the feet of **Rabban Gamali'el** to reach; indeed, **he** had to be **persuaded by the Lord Yeshua the Messiah Himself.** For the concept of ritual uncleanness permeates not only **the Oral Law** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ei – The Oral Law**), one whose six major divisions has **"Ritual Uncleanness"** as its central topic, but also **the Torah of Moshe** itself, mainly **Leviticus 11-17**.

The Bible does not always explain why some things are pure and others not. Hygiene is not the issue; for if it were, there would be no reason to exclude Gentiles from the application of these mitzvot. **And the rabbis do not speculate much on the reasons.** Since the mitzvot of ritual purity apply only to Jews, the statement that **nothing is unclean in itself** should be enough to free any Gentile whose conscience still bothers him in regard to such matters. As for Jews, even in rabbinic Judaism, most of the purity mitzvot have generally fallen into disuse (see *Encyclopedia Judaica* 14:1412).[369]

When the **stronger** believer insists on exercising his freedom to eat certain food, distressing the **weaker** believer, the **stronger** believer violates the cardinal virtue of **love**. **And if your "weaker" brother is being upset by the food you eat, your life is no longer one of love.** The **eating** of the **stronger** believer, coupled with **his** attitude of superiority and scorn toward those who think differently, can pressure **his weaker** brother into **eating** something that **he** isn't **fully convinced** about **in his own mind (14:5b),** thus, violating **his** own conscience**.**

Do not, by your eating habits, destroy (Greek: *apollumi*, meaning *to cause pain or grief*) **someone for whom the Messiah died (14:15)! In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish (Matthew 18:14).** Although **perish** (Greek: *apollumi*) normally carries the ideal of total destruction or even death, it sometimes, as here, refers to *ruin* or *loss* that is

not permanent. When **Jesus** speaks of **perishing**, **He** relates it to sanctification, or our spiritual growth as believers over the course of our lives. **Messiah** doesn't want us to be spiritually wounded, even for a little while. When we fall into **sin** it destroys our usefulness to **Him**, to the Church, and it weakens our right relationship with **Him** and other believers. For one believer to wound another believer is to attack the will of **ADONAI** and oppose **Him**. **The Lord** actively seeks the spiritual well-being of all **His** children, and we should do no less.[370]

It is possible to so abuse our liberty in **Messiah** in regard to fellow believers that we create conflicts within the Universal Church that give the world cause to criticize and condemn those who claim to hold brotherly **love** in such high esteem. **Therefore, Paul** says: **Do not let what you know to be good,** that one need not be in bondage to rules about **food**, **be spoken of as bad,** as a result of your flaunting your freedom to **eat** what you want **(14:16).** Although it brings much blessing and enjoyment to those who understand and exercise it properly, our liberty in **Messiah** is not simply for our own benefit and certainly not for our selfish use. It is a gracious gift from **YHVH** and a wonderfully **good** thing. But like any other divine blessing, it can be misused in ways that are outside of, and often contrary to, **God's** purposes.

Here is a good example. A **strong** and a **weak** believer sometimes would go to dinner at the house of an unbelieving Gentile. When the host served the meal, he might mention that the meat had been used in a pagan sacrifice. The **weak** believer would be immediately disturbed and tell the other believer that he could not, in all good conscience, eat such meat. Out of love for his **weaker** brother, the **strong** believer would join in refusing to eat the meat, understanding that it is better to offend an unbeliever than a fellow believer. Although that unusual and selfless act of love might temporarily offend the unbelieving host, it might also be used by **the Ruach** to show the depth of **God's love** and draw the unbeliever to the gospel.

Likewise, many Messianic believers, because they had been raised kosher, could not bring themselves to eat meat that still contained blood, nor could they eat an animal that had been strangled. When a **weak** Messianic believer found himself at a meal where such meat was being served, any **stronger** believer present, Messianic or Gentile, should, out of love for his brother, also refuse to eat it. Such careful exercise of freedom in **Messiah** is vital to the unity of the Body of **Messiah** and our witness before, and to, the unbelieving world. Giving up our freedom is a small price to pay for the sake of both believers and potential believers **for the Kingdom of**

God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, shalom and joy in the Ruach Ha'Kodesh. Anyone who serves the Messiah in this fashion both pleases God and wins the approval of other people (14:17-18).[371]

Do not tear down God's work: The Bible calls **Satan the accuser of our brothers (Revelation 12:10).** It's **the devil's** job to blame, complain, and criticize members of **God's** family. Anytime we do the same, we are being tricked into doing **the Adversary's** work for **him**. Remember, other believers, no matter how much you disagree with them, are not the real enemy. Any time spent comparing or criticizing other believers is time that should have been spent on **building up** the unity of our fellowship. **So then, let us pursue the things that make for shalom and mutual upbuilding (14:19).**[372]

Don't tear down God's work for the sake of food. For everything created by God is good, and nothing received with thanksgiving needs to be rejected, because the Word of God and prayer make it holy (First Timothy 4:4). The B'rit Chadashah does not make pork or ham kosher, but it allows the freedom to eat non-kosher ham, for example. **True enough, all things are clean** and **good** in **themselves (14:14** and **16).** The danger is that, when they are exercised selfishly and carelessly by **strong** believers, those very blessings can become **evil for anybody by his eating to cause your brother to stumble (14:20).**

What is good is not to use our freedom in **Messiah** to **eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble** by doing something contrary to **his** own conscience **(14:21).** The pleasure of **eating** or **drinking** offensive **food** or **drink**, or the pleasure of doing anything else our liberty allows us to do, is absolutely insignificant compared to the spiritual warfare of a brother or sister in **Messiah**. It is worse than insignificant. It actually becomes **sinful** if it might cause another believer, for whom **Messiah** died, to stumble.[373]

The belief you hold about such things, keep between yourself and God. Happy is the person who is free of self-condemnation when he approves of something! Compared with the Talmud, "It was taught: If there are things which are allowed but which some treat as prohibited, you must not permit them in their practice" (N'darim 15a). But the doubter, or the **weak** believer, **comes under condemnation if he eats, because his action is not based on trust. And anything not based on trust is a sin (14:22-23).** One could call this the principle saying of the B'rit Chadashah thinking and behavior.

Paul forces us to ask which is more important: getting our own way . . . or living **God's** way? The cultural landscape changes constantly, but the underlying ones remain the same. Will we let **ADONAI** help us **love** one another despite our tendencies not to do so? Will we make freedom mean simply pursuing our desires or a means to pursue the desires of **YHVH**? Ultimately, we must recognize **Messiah's** is **Lord** even over our freedom.[374]