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"JUDGE" IN ROMANS 14:3

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Romans 14 is bound to be the most misused text among us today. Everything from error on the Deity of Christ, the days of Creation, mental divorce, baptism washing away previous wives and a hundred other moral & doctrinal matters are crammed into this chapter. The over riding cry is that we may somehow fellowship people whose ideas, practices or teachings are **sinful**. Simply, this passage could not possibly teach fellowship with sin, since many other passages clearly forbid this (Rom. 16:17; 2 Jn. 9-11; etc.). The latest assertion that I have heard is that the word "judge" in Rom. 14:3 means to discipline or break fellowship. Let us examine whether this is true or not.

Verse 1 states "receive" the one who is weak in the faith. As noted, many passages clearly forbid fellowship with sin, so this verse cannot be endorsing fellowship of anything sinful. Verse 1 adds: "but not for disputes over opinions" (NAS, WEB, Etc). So, the differences that are to be fellowshiped here are **permissible opinions**; personal decisions that are **not sinful**.

Now consider the text: "3 LET NOT HIM THAT EATETH DESPISE HIM THAT EATETH NOT; AND LET NOT HIM WHICH EATETH NOT **JUDGE** HIM THAT EATETH: FOR GOD HATH RECEIVED HIM." The assertion is that "judge" means discipline or breaking fellowship. Does that fit here?

Paul is warning the strong brother (who eats meats) against "despising" the weak (who does not eat meats). And Paul warns the weak brother (who doesn't eat meats) against "judging" the strong (who does eat meats). Both sides were **viewing** the other improperly. Both sides had sinful **attitudes**, which Paul says must stop. These **attitudes** may well result in arguments, disputes or even breaking fellowship; but the **attitudes** are here addressed, not the conduct of disputes & breaking fellowship.

Consider further the definition of the word "despise" (Strong 1848) is to set at naught, have a low opinion of, make little of, look down upon. Effectively this says it is a sin to **think** this way of a brother over a matter of opinion.

Also, the definition of the word "judge" (Strong 2919) is to pass judgment on, find fault with. It means **properly, to distinguish**, i.e. decide... Vine says (p. 280, B. Verbs I. KRINO) "**primarily denotes to separate, select, choose**; hence to determine, and so to judge, pronounce judgment." Vine further states of KRINO as it is used in Romans 14:5: "(h) to form an opinion, Luke 7:43; John 7:24; Acts 4:19; Rom. 14:5)." In Rom. 14:3 it is translated "judge", in v. 5 it is translated "esteemeth".

Thus, the primary meaning is the distinguishing, thinking or deciding of something. Paul's statement is effectively this: "*How can the strong brother **think** this way of the weak? He has not sinned. And how can the weak **think** this way of the strong, he has not sinned.*" This is the clear point of Rom. 14:3. It is not expressly addressing breaking fellowship, **it is expressly addressing sinful attitudes** that arise over matters of indifference & authorized opinion. Again, these attitudes frequently lead to conflicts, strife, disputes & even broken fellowship; but Paul is not addressing that aspect of their conduct here. Rather he is addressing the source of the whole problem, which is their **sinful thoughts** toward one another.

Note also the parallel in attitudes in both parties. The strong "despises" the weak (thinks or esteems him as in error), and the weak "judges" the strong (thinks or esteems him as in error). They are BOTH thinking the same thing of one another, just from different sides of the issue. They were also both told NOT to do this. It is a sin, therefore, to think this way of one another over matters of authorized opinion.

Yes fellowship can be affected & eventually broken by these disruptive & evil attitudes, but Paul already addressed that they need to "receive" one another in fellowship (v. 1a). Now Paul is digging deeper into their thoughts & misconceptions about each other (v. 1b, 3). I believe defining "judge" as only meaning "discipline" or "breaking fellowship" misses the emphasis & depth of Paul's point. Have you ever known where brethren remained in "fellowship" while retaining **sinful attitudes**? For example, in correcting problems (in the church or even in the family), we may address the outward conduct but not address the bitter, resentful & condescending attitudes displayed along with the conduct. This is a huge point that must not be overlooked in dealing with problems! True fellowship is not attained until we have "the same mind & judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 2:2-4) toward one another.

Note also the general statement of Romans 13:4, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?" This one statement applies to BOTH the

weak & strong from verse 3. What the strong did ("set at nought") and the weak did ("judge") in 14:3 are both comprehended & rebuked by Paul's rhetorical question about "judging" (14:4). So here is an inspired explanation of "judging" in this context. It is used **synonymously** with the word in v. 3, "despise" or "set at naught". Hence in this context it refers to **thinking** a certain way, **the attitude**.

Paul brings up the attitude problem again in 14:10. But notice, the exact same words used in 14:3 referring **first** to the strong & **then** the weak, are here REVERSED. The strong is "setting at nought" in v.3 and is now it is called "'judging" in v. 10. The weak is "judging" in v. 3, now it is called "setting at nought" in v. 10. In this context, they are again used **synonymously** & **interchangeably**. And yet again Paul makes the general statement about not "judging" one another (14:13) which applies to what **both** were doing. Thus, the word "judge" is used interchangeably with a sinful attitude. Paul is **not** saying: "but disfellowship this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or occasion of stumbling in his brother's way". Paul is saying: "Determine, think, decide" not to throw stumbling blocks in another's way. It is one thing to recognize the result that may come from such attitudes (division, disfellowship, discipline); it is another to make that one possible application the rule & overlook the attitudes specifically addressed in the text. This changes the interpretation of the text & brings incorrect conclusions.

Furthermore, the same word "judge" (Strong 2919) is used in Rom. 14:22: "Happy [is] he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth" (KJV, MKJV, NKJV, TCNT). "Happy is he that judgeth not himself in that which he approveth" (ASV, RSV, WEB, YLT). Let us try being consistent in how the word "judge" is used in this context. Does it mean "breaking fellowship"? If so, "Happy is he that does not break fellowship with himself in that thing which we allows"? Or is it judging in the primary sense of the word, thinking, determining, deciding? So that the man is happy who does not "think" himself guilty in what he does? The latter is obviously the correct definition.

Now consider the consequences to this subtle shift in the definition. If "judge" means "discipline" or "break fellowship" in Romans 14:3, then the limits of fellowship **must be broadened**. Instead of Paul condemning as sinful the attitudes & thoughts they had toward one another over this matter of opinion; Paul would only be condemning actual breaking of fellowship over matters of opinion. You see, this would mean we can tolerate brethren who bind their opinions, think

others are sinning, even those who debate over & publicly push their opinion as truth - just as long as they don't cross the line of actually breaking fellowship. For then, and only then, would we have to identify them as divisive, contentious, etc.

In short, this approach empowers false teachers to run amok among us teaching & promoting their error, while we all sit back and smile at how wise, gracious & longsuffering we are. As Paul said, "For you bear with the foolish gladly, being wise. For you bear with a man, if he brings you into bondage, if he devours you, if he takes you captive, if he exalts himself, if he strikes you on the face" (2 Cor. 11:19-20). Why can't we just get it into our minds that fellowship with error is NOT acceptable to God? Why must every man & his cousin invent some new way to fellowship the wolves that devour God's people?

Brethren beware. This is nothing but a decoy, a ruse, a fake & false approach that will lead us down the Ed Harrell - Romans 14 - Unity in doctrinal diversity perversion of fellowship. Do not submit to this doctrine, no, not even for an hour - that the truth of the gospel might remain with you (Gal. 2:5).

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- **Door to Door** - Every Tuesday @ 6pm.
- **Home Bible Study** – Sat., August 5 & 19.
- **Men's & Ladies Classes** - Every 2nd Sun. @ 5pm.
- **Business Meeting** – Sun. Aug. 27 @ 5pm.
- **Gospel Meeting** - Ron Roberts, Oct.15-20, 2006.
- **GM in Knoxville** - Doug Hill, Nov. 17-19, 2006.
- **GM** - Jeff Smith, April 15-20, 2007.
- **GM** - R. McPherson, Oct.14-19, 2007.
- **GM** - TBA April 2008.
- **GM** - Lanny Smith, Oct.12-17, 2008.

PRAY FOR

Mag Bumbalough, Thelma Cunningham, Holly Jernigan (Joyce Gardner's niece), **Mary Cox, John Ross Key** (Mary Cox's son), **Marci Miller** (Alisa Fletcher's mother), **Monie Petty, Dave Poteet, Misty Poteet, Rose Taylor, Dorris Williams, Horace Jones** (Doris William's brother), **Ocia Bell Jones** (Doris William's mother), **Ruth Williams** (Betty England's niece), **Robert England, Pauline Hickey, Nanny Wtaker, Dylan Roberts** (grandson of Marilyn's friend), **Johanna Fletcher, Ed Williams** (Kidney). Those in Iraq: **Jason Zelenak** (Alisa Fletcher's brother, returns home August).