

lesson thirteen

SEPTEMBER 18-25

The Heart of **Christianity**

“Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God” (Rom. 14:10, NRSV).



Rom. 14:17–19

Introduction

The Potluck Debacle

I remember it as if it were yesterday. Although I was about six years old at the time, I was still capable of sensing the tension in the air. My church family was gathered in the church hall, waiting to partake of one of our famous potlucks. You see, our church was renowned for the delicious feasts we lovingly prepared on a monthly basis. In fact, one of the best indications that it was “lunch day” was the obvious swell in the size of the congregation! People came from everywhere just to enjoy the curries, pastries, sandwiches, and other varieties of the best vegetarian cuisine available.

It was horrific! Shocking even!

But, on this particular day, something wasn't quite right. The ladies responsible for heating the food appeared a bit flustered. I saw one of them emerge from the kitchen and whisper something in the ear of one of the elders. He quickly stood up and accompanied her back to the kitchen. Being a curious child, I quickly scuttled across the room and followed them. I had to see what was happening!

Can you guess what the confusion was about? It was horrific! Shocking even! It turns out that someone had actually dared to bring a dish of noodles—laced with finely chopped pieces of meat—to our sacred potluck lunch! I giggled to myself—the look on the ladies' faces was priceless!

To tell you the truth, I'm not quite sure how that situation was eventually dealt with. I can only assume that it was handled in a tactful and gracious manner. In Romans 14–16, Paul provides some useful instructions about how to deal with such situations. In these beautifully crafted chapters, he encourages us to always strive to maintain harmony with each other. Instead of focusing solely on minor differences of opinion, he tells us to accept each other, as Christ first accepted us.

As Seventh-day Adventists, the issue of health and diet is close to our hearts. But sometimes, we become so focused on the minor details that we forget to look at the big picture. In Paul's day, for example, Rome was populated with a mixture of many different ethnic and religious groups. Similarly, the world we live in is filled with different ethnicities, beliefs, and ways of life. In order to reach the many segments of our society with the wonderful message of the gospel, we must listen to what Paul has to say about unity, harmony, and love. That's what we will be focusing on in this week's study.

If someone were to ask you, “What does it mean to live a Christian life?” what would your response be? Would you rattle off a list of things Christians do, or would you go to the very heart of Christianity—Christ Himself? These are the issues Paul addresses in the final section of his letter to the Roman Christians. How do we interact with others, and most important, as His ambassadors, do we reflect Christ’s image in our own lives?

His lifestyle was the strongest witness.

Passing Judgment (Rom. 14:10–12; 16:17–19)

In the first few verses of Romans 14, we see that the issue unfolding is one of passing judgment on another. Time and again the issues of quarrelling due to differences of opinion crop up. Paul says that no matter how well intentioned we are, we should avoid quarrelling about comparatively inconsequential issues. Specifically, he mentions people arguing about what food to eat and about what days should be esteemed as being more important than others. He specifically advises people whose faith has enabled them to leave behind the observance of all ceremonial holy days that they should not despise those whose faith is not as strong.¹ We are all responsible to God for our actions. He expects us to be fully convinced personally on the things the Holy Spirit has convicted us of. However, we should strive to create unity rather than division and obstacles.

The Key to a Righteous Life (Rom. 3:23; 14:4; 2 Cor. 5:10)

All are to appear before the judgment seat of Christ to account for their deeds, whether good or evil. So rather than looking at each other’s faults, we are to be aware of our own circumstances and surroundings, not being proud lest we fall, which we will, due to our sinful nature. We do, however, have hope, and that hope is Jesus! He enables us to stand. So what is the key to a righteous life? It’s not looking at each other, or even at ourselves. Only by fixing our eyes on Jesus will we have the power to overcome our sinful nature. This, however, doesn’t imply that we are saved by our works. Even though we are all under the law, it is through the gift of Christ’s grace that we have salvation. “He, the Sinless One, was treated as we deserve, that we, fallen and sinful, might be treated as He deserved.”²

Lest They Stumble (1 Cor. 8:13)

Therefore, as ambassadors of Christ, we must be very careful what we do, so that we do not cause others to fall, be confused, or be offended. We don't know how great the effect of our actions can be on someone who is observing. Although we aren't accountable for another person's conscience, we are responsible for their welfare. We should be prepared and willing to give up our freedom in these comparatively inconsequential matters rather than causing another believer to fall.

The Aim of a Christian's Existence (1 Cor. 9:19)

The aim of our existence is not merely a matter of what we do. Rather, it is our submission to the Lord, doing all to His glory and according to His will. However, we are not His slaves! It is only when we accept and submit to Him that we are truly free. "Among Christ's followers there is to be no force, no compulsion. A spirit of love and sympathetic tolerance is to prevail at all times. . . . There is no room for self-righteous criticism."³

I like to recall the time when my father told me his testimony. From a very early age, he always had been passionate about automobiles. At the age of 7, he already was driving his father's truck. As he grew older, his love for cars grew stronger. Soon after turning 18, when he could finally compete, my father became the first Montenegrin⁴ to become the champion of the former Yugoslavia in motor sport. However, all this time, he and his two brothers were unable to be baptized because they competed on the Sabbath. Many pastors tried to pressure them into giving their lives to the Lord, but this just pushed them further away. It wasn't until another pastor moved next door to them that things began to change. His approach was drastically different from the others'. He spent time with them as they worked on their cars; and when their races weren't on Sabbath, he would attend them. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:19, "For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them" (NRSV). Like Paul, this pastor never chastised my father and his brothers. His lifestyle was the strongest witness. We also are to live that way. Then others will see Christ in us and be drawn to Him.

REACT

1. Is there something in your life you need to give to the Lord today, in order to be more like Him?
2. Is there someone you may have grieved in the past to whom you need to apologize?
3. What can you do to make your church more harmonious?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 636, 637.

2. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 268.

3. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 637.

4. A person from Montenegro, a region of southeast Europe bordering on the Adriatic Sea.

Testimony
*The Better Way
Is Better Lived*

Rom. 14:1–13

“In this country [Australia] there is an organized vegetarian society, but its numbers are comparatively few. Among the people in general, meat is largely used by all classes. It is the cheapest article of food; and even where poverty abounds, meat is usually found upon the table. Therefore there is the more need of handling wisely the question of meat eating. In regard to this matter there should be no rash movements. We should consider the situation of the people, and the power of lifelong habits and practices, and should be careful not to urge our ideas upon others.”¹

“Teach by example.”

“Do not watch others in order to point out their faults or errors. Teach by example. Let your self-denial and your victory over appetite be an illustration of obedience to right principles. Let your life bear witness to the sanctifying, ennobling influence of truth.”²

“It is of little use to try to reform others by attacking what we may regard as wrong habits. Such effort often results in more harm than good. In His talk with the Samaritan woman, instead of disparaging Jacob’s well, Christ presented something better. ‘If thou knewest the gift of God,’ He said, ‘and who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink; thou wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water.’ John 4:10. He turned the conversation to the treasure He had to bestow, offering the woman something better than she possessed, even living water, the joy and hope of the gospel.

“This is an illustration of the way in which we are to work. We must offer men something better than that which they possess, even the peace of Christ, which passeth all understanding.”³

REACT

1. We cannot gain salvation through what we eat or drink. Why is it then that as Seventh-day Adventists we are encouraged to consume a vegetarian diet? In what circumstances would it not be practical to consume a vegetarian diet?

2. Jesus revealed more truth to His disciples only when He knew they were ready (John 16:12, 13). Should we follow Jesus’ method?

1. *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 462.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 465.

3. *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 156, 157.

Rom. 14:1–5, 13–15, 21

Evidence

When Your Tummy Rumbles and Someone Stumbles

The first generation of Christians was made up of Jewish and Gentile converts. Most of the Gentile converts, especially those addressed in the book of Romans, were of pagan background. Both classes of the early Christians had unique customs, traditions, and cultures; and here lay the root of misunderstanding.

Romans 14 is not a new divine license to now eat any type of animal flesh.

The Jews observed many ceremonial holy days throughout the year. These pointed to the coming of the Messiah and were separate from the seventh-day Sabbath of the Ten Commandments. When Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins, these ceremonies were no longer necessary because they had met their fulfillment in Him. Many Jews recognized the fulfillment of those holy days, but others insisted that they still be kept. The latter unfairly urged them upon the Gentile Christians.

Meanwhile, the Gentile Christians who had worshiped idols now realized the error of their ways and were repulsed by even the food that had been sacrificed to false deities. They questioned the integrity of the Jewish Christians who would eat such food. The Jews, however, felt that “concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one” (1 Cor. 8:4, NKJV).

Romans 14 is not a new divine license to now eat any type of animal flesh, canceling the health and hygiene principles that God gave in detail. It is not a letter permitting the arbitrary change of the seventh-day sacredness to any other day of the week. In this chapter, Paul is writing to the Christians in Rome, giving them godly council. I can imagine Him saying, “Don’t judge one another. Some of you understand more than others, so don’t try to coerce or manipulate your brother if he understands something a little differently than you. And don’t be a stumbling block to your sister, needlessly offending her conscience by doing something she isn’t comfortable with.” Paul introduces this idea in Romans 13:10, “Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (NKJV). The crux of his message is, “Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another” (Rom. 14:13, NRSV).

REACT

Discuss the link between Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 10:31–33.

How-to Judging Appropriately

Rom. 14:4, 10–12, 20

Judgment is the act of assessing a situation, event, or circumstance, and then coming up with a conclusion. When talking about judgment in a biblical sense, many of us see ourselves standing in front of God while He assesses everything we've done. If we've accepted Christ's righteousness as our own and live according to the wooing of the Holy Spirit, we need not fear God's judgment. Here are some questions concerning what we might or might not be doing to prepare for God's judgment.

You also should be careful that what you do does not cause someone else to sin.

Whom are we to judge? (Rom. 14:4). During judgment, laws or beliefs are used as a guideline to judge what is right and what is wrong. Today, many people have their own guidelines that they've created themselves. At times, these people also might acknowledge other laws that they think are right and true. However, it is not up to us to judge them. Read James 4:11, 12.

How do your actions impact the world? (Rom. 14:15, 16). What example are you setting for others? What are you eating? What are you drinking? What things do you talk about? Your answers to these questions give you and others a picture of your true character and the god you follow. If you claim to be a Christian, what you eat, drink, and talk about should reflect your relationship with Christ so that others will be attracted to Him. You also should be careful that what you do does not cause someone else to sin.

What things do you value? (Rom. 14:20, 21). There are so many things a person values. We must always ask ourselves, Am I valuing the right things? Do the things that I value help me to grow spiritually? Do they show that I walk with God and value a relationship with Him?

Who is the perfect judge? (Rom. 14:10). Many people wrongly set themselves up as judge. They take great delight in condemning others because it makes them feel "holier." However, the Bible states clearly that there is only One who is qualified to judge. There is only One who is fair and just—Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior (2 Cor. 5:10).

REACT

1. What specific things happen when we set ourselves up as judge?
2. Rather than judging one another, what should we do?

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Mic. 6:8;
Matt. 7:1–5;
Gal. 5:1, 13–26

Opinion

Living in Christian Freedom

As Seventh-day Adventists Christians, it is important for us to have beliefs that define us. Even by our name, we declare as a group of diverse individuals that Jesus is the Christ. Some other elements that unite us are the doctrine of salvation through Christ, belief in His resurrection, the Sabbath, and living a life that reflects His character. All too frequently, however, we make the mistake of believing that our personal opinions also should be universal. This is apparently not a new problem, as Paul spends a sizeable amount of time arguing for the so-called law of liberty in Romans. As he reminds us, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Micah 6:8 does not say, . . . “Do not surf the Internet on the Sabbath.”

Who are we, then, to judge another of God’s servants according to our standard? Our opinions are certainly not doctrine. We forget that all that is asked of us is to “do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8, NKJV). Notice that Micah 6:8 does not say, “Do not wear jeans to church,” “do not wear jewelry,” “do not surf the Internet on the Sabbath,” or “do not eat meat.” Even Paul points out that our salvation is not determined by what we eat or drink, but that it is a gift from God. Therefore, we are not to judge another for whom Christ has died.

On the other hand, while there is no “thou shalt not smoke,” we are to remember that because both our time on earth and the bodies we inhabit are gifts from God, we are to take care of our health and set a good example for those who might be struggling. It is one thing to say “Liberty! Liberty!” and quite another to forget about love for God and for our fellow humans.

We are meant to be Christ’s representatives. It is no good to be a legalist or an anarchist. Instead, we are to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and temperance. These are the hallmarks of Christ’s character. And against such there is no law.

REACT

1. What beliefs and practices are essential to our faith as Seventh-day Adventists? How well has your own young adult group assimilated these practices into their daily lives?
2. What beliefs and practices are nonessential to our faith as Seventh-day Adventists? Why then do we promote these beliefs and practices?

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Exploration
Judgey McJudgey

John 7:24

CONCLUDE

We are all born with inherent abilities and propensities. Created in the likeness of God, we are naturally gifted with talents that enhance life, the church, and society in general. However, born into sin, we are naturally inclined to behave in ways that are detrimental to others. Sin has programmed us to be self-centered, self-righteousness, and opinionated. The natural desire to sit in righteous judgment of everything from television commercials to people stems from this flawed nature; but that's not an excuse to be Judgey McJudgeys, otherwise known as know-it-alls. We all have the same choice: to be filled with the Holy Spirit so we can become like Jesus or to give in to our propensity to be evil.

CONSIDER

- Observing and listening during church potluck and then creating a graph or chart that illustrates the number of judgmental comments you heard people make.
- Composing a psalm that asks the Holy Spirit to give you the resolve to be less judgmental with each new day.
- Developing an action plan for when you are in a situation that tempts you to make judgmental statements.
- Writing and performing a short satirical skit on judging within the context of Adventist health principles.
- Starting a money jar where every bill represents a judgmental thought you had or judgmental comment you made. (Use the lowest denomination bill of your country's currency or a middle-range coin.) Do this for about two weeks. When finished, count your money, remembering as you do how it got in the jar. Donate the money to a favorite charity and pray that God will help you to be less judgmental and more complimentary.
- Having an accountability partner—someone you can confide in, get encouragement from—to aid you in your fight against being judgmental.

CONNECT

Herbert Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, chap. 42 (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1998); Laurie Beth Jones, *Jesus, Life Coach: Learn From the Best* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2004); Max Lucado, *Just Like Jesus: Learning to Have a Heart Like His* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2003).

Background Characters in the Old Testament

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for fourth quarter 2010, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1 Story and History

Logos: Gen. 39:6–12; Josh. 3:9–17; 1 Sam. 24:1–6; 1 Kings 12:1–16; Job 1:1–12.

Memory Text: “Every Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the person dedicated to God may be capable and equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17, *NET*).

Though most folk harbor no great love for the study of history itself, most people do love a good story. Every civilization has a rich repertoire of stories that explain (or claim to explain) the origins, values, relationships, and structures of its culture. These stories, told over generations, are often teaching tools.

In the modern age, storytelling was downplayed: people looked for facts and scientific answers to explain life. However, facts alone could not answer life's most important questions. Today, a new generation, often dubbed “postmodern,” has rediscovered the power of stories.

In that sense, the Bible is contemporary because it is full of stories. Not legends, not “cleverly devised myths” (2 Pet. 1:16, *ESV*), but historical and personal stories that reveal truth about God and His interaction with fallen humanity. These stories describe real people, battling with real-life problems and interacting with the living God, who offers answers to these problems.

Every story needs a setting. This week we will explore different settings and their historical contexts in order to understand better the characters we'll be studying all quarter.

Lesson 2 Caleb: Living With the Wait

Logos: Numbers 13; 14; Joshua 14; Judg. 1:12–15.

Memory Text: “My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning. Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption” (Ps. 130:6, 7).

He saw the best of times and the worst of times. Caleb knew what slavery was like. He had been there when the Lord had led his people out of Egypt with a mighty hand. He had seen the sea open before Israel and swallow the Egyptian chariots and army. He had been with Israel at Mount Sinai and had seen Moses descend from the mountain with God's law. He was one of the first to see the land of Canaan. And through no fault of his own, he had to spend his best years wandering in the desert with the Israelites. He watched all of his generation die there too. At last, as an old man, he is able to enter into the land of Canaan. Even then he shows courage and faith in God.

Caleb is a leader who seems to work more behind the scenes than in front of the audience. This week we will learn from his gentle leadership style. We will get to know a great leader willing to take risks and to lead by example; someone who is generous and encourages leadership in younger people. But beyond the many positive character traits of Caleb, we will study a story relevant to us, who live at the end of earth's history as we wait to cross over into the heavenly Canaan.

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P. O. Box 5353
Nampa, ID 83653-5353 U.S.A.