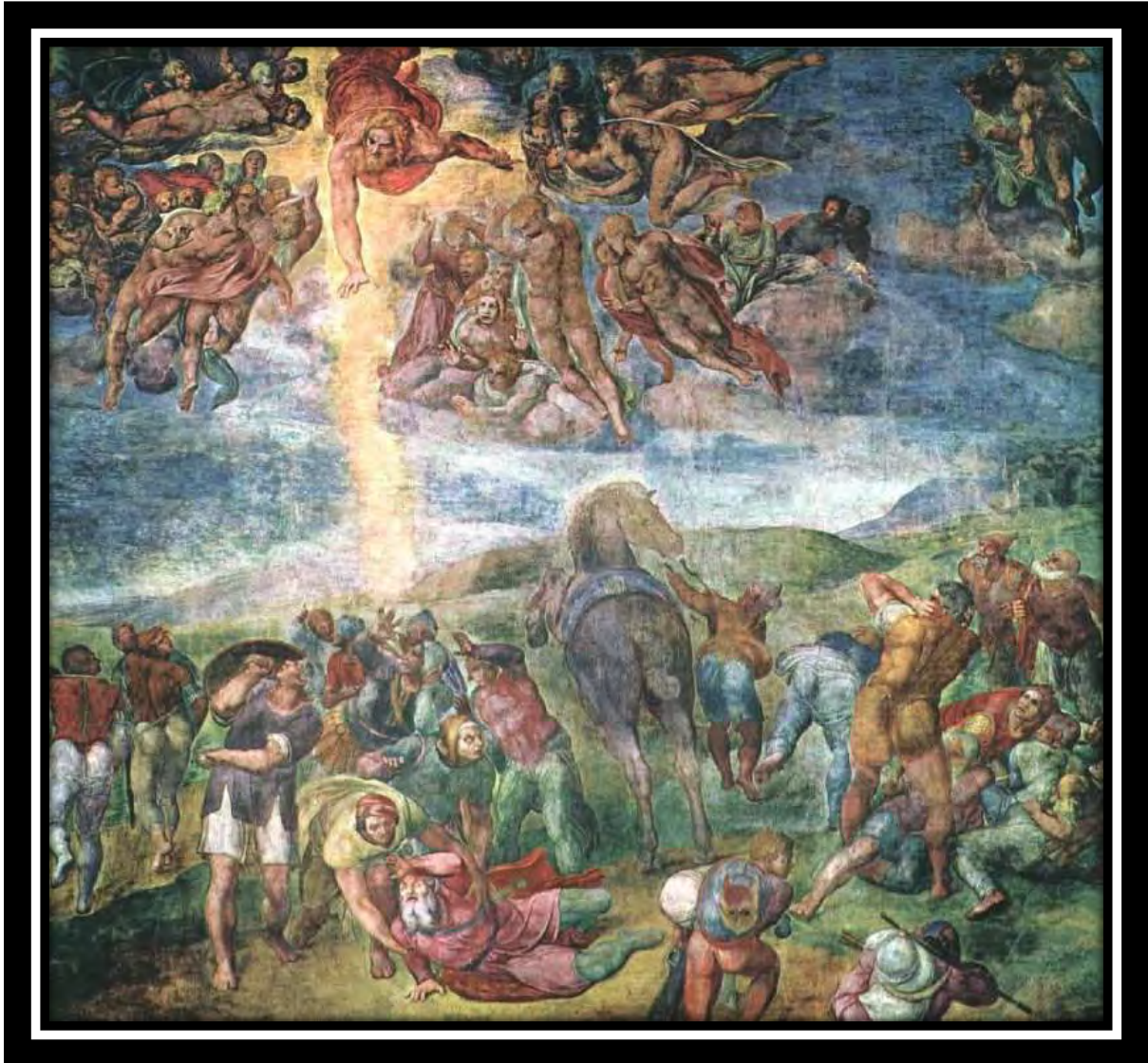


# ROMANS—WEEK 13

## USING JUDGEMENT



F. Michael Slay  
*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

## The cover image is the Conversion of Saul by Michelangelo Buonarroti

This section contrasts various sins and calls us to love and not judge, as we are not qualified. It also calls us to respect the beliefs (particularly dietary) of others.

Lastly it warns us that we need to respect our doubts and only do things that proceed from faith.

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Romans, Week 13 — Using Judgement

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1 Romans 13:8–10 (NKJV)

*Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,” “You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*

This command sums up everything because God’s glory is the purpose of everything. Our main job as Christians is to glorify God. That’s why it’s first in the Westminster Confession of Faith Shorter Catechism.

Q. “*What is the chief end of man?*”

A. “*Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.*”

The command to love our neighbors has become our brand. It defines us in the eyes of the public. It’s the best known way that we glorify God.

So, if we’re going to take this seriously, we need to think about how to do this well. Paul didn’t say it would be easy. How can we best love our neighbors?

This is more about the mind than the heart. Love here means, as Olaf said in the movie *Frozen*, “putting someone else’s needs before yours.” OK, so what’s the secret to doing that well?

Learn what their needs are. That takes connection. The secret sauce for loving your neighbor is befriending them. To be the kind of neighbor who glorifies God, you must get to know the people you are trying to love. You find out what their needs are by listening to them talk about their lives.

Love is a listening skill.

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“How can I pray for you?” Few lines are as important to the task of loving our neighbors as this one. It opens people up. They almost always come up with something, and it may be deep.

But if this is just a line, they’ll soon see that it’s all phony. There are two important ways to prevent that. First, pray right then. Don’t just promise to pray later. I know I forget all too often.

Second, take notes. I don’t just forget to pray; I even forget what the prayer request was. When writing down prayers, be sure to get everything right, including the spelling. This shows that you take their requests seriously—plus it sets up future conversations. That makes the kind of caring connections that bring glory to God and can even prepare the soil for the gospel.

We are called to do more than just care for our neighbors; we’re called to care *about* our neighbors. This takes us back to Romans 12:15—*Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.* (NKJV)

Love can’t be faked.

2 Romans 13:11–14 (ESV)

*Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

Everything in this passage is simple enough, except the command to wake up. As a sinner, I've been accused of a lot of things—and rightfully so. But being asleep? That's a new one. What am I missing?

As usual, the context is the key. This passage changes the tone. Whereas previous passages commanded us to love our neighbors and even our enemies, this one tells us to cut out the *orgies and drunkenness*. What?! How can both of these commands be written to the same audience? Can the same people who struggle to love their enemies also struggle with *sexual immorality*?

Absolutely. That's the multi-layered, multi-faceted nature of sin. Being charitable doesn't suddenly make you immune to some unrelated sin. The "total" in "total depravity" refers to how thoroughly depravity runs through us. Don't assume that your friends don't have major struggles. People rarely share their deepest, darkest secrets.

But it's even worse than that. Notice that Paul mentions *quarreling and jealousy* in the same breath with *orgies and drunkenness*. He puts them on the same level. Do you?

This passage isn't just for some Christians; it's for all. We call ourselves sinners (as I did above) but aren't serious about it. Those of us who haven't committed "marquee" sins pay lip service to being sinners, but we don't really think we're in the top tier. That's wrong.

Have you ever heard someone say, "My pride caused my divorce."? Of course not. Yet, pride is a major destroyer of marriage, maybe the leading one. No one talks about their pride, yet C.S. Lewis called pride "spiritual cancer." "Pride is how the devil became the devil."

And that's just one example. We've memorized all the words to the gospel, but we don't really get it. The sins that our society sneers at get all the attention, but the kingdom of heaven has other priorities.

We do need to wake up.

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My favorite friends are the ones who use, "humility enforcement." That is, they show me the disrespect that befits my station. This goes hand-in-hand with self-deprecating humor.

While this kind of talk is light-hearted, it's still realistic. These friends take the words, "I'm a sinner," seriously—and it shows.

It's the nudge I need to wake me up.

3 Romans 14:1–9 (ESV)

*As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.*

*One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.*

How can Paul tell Christians who eat meat to not *despise the one who abstains*, while calling those who abstain from meat “weaker?” Isn’t he despising them right there?

No, that’s not how he means it. Consider this.

Suppose you know a child in the first grade who can add and subtract but doesn’t know anything about multiplication and division. Should anyone “despise” this child for their ignorance?

Of course not; they’re only in the first grade. Multiplication is taught in the third grade.

So it is with Christians. Not everyone is at the same place in their walk with the Lord. Some Christians are “weaker” in some areas. They may be strong in other ways. These aren’t permanent conditions anyway. Everyone grows.

Now Paul is implying, clearly, that eating meat is OK, but this is only about the ceremonial law. This isn’t about modern dietary science.

Except as it applies to the main point of this passage. Paul is teaching that we shouldn’t *despise* or *pass judgment* on people we disagree with. *Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?* We should never despise people we disagree with—on diet, exercise, or whatever.

We’re all *servants* of Christ.

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This passing judgment thing has gone nuclear lately, especially in politics. We don’t listen. If people won’t even be open minded about things as minor as tax policy, what chance do we have with the gospel?

Actually, a lot. We have a special help line that’s open 24/7.

Still, be shrewd. Avoid getting pulled onto tangents that the enemy throws up only to distract.

4 Romans 14:10–19 (ESV)

*Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.*

*Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.*

Dietary laws and Sabbath practices are just the examples Paul uses to make a point. He wants us to apply this concept generally. *Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.*

We tend to think that modern Christians have put this problem behind us. Not so! We’re far worse in this respect than anything Paul saw. The issues are different, but the effect is the same. We think that folks have to agree with our doctrines to be Christians.

Think I’m kidding? How about, “salvation by faith alone”? The Bible says that salvation is by faith alone, but is knowing that doctrine essential for salvation? If so, then how was the thief on the cross saved?

This is strong stuff; we need to be careful here. There are many doctrines that are true, but not necessary unto salvation. We’re never going to fully understand heavenly things this side of eternity anyway.

So, let’s not be quick to declare something essential for salvation. The key phrase here is, “*Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.*” That almost seems too broad. What’s the rule?

There are other key passages—especially Romans 10:9—but this passage notes two essential things, “*serves*” and “*Christ*”. You have to *serve*, and the one you *serve* has to be *Christ*. “*Serve*” isn’t really doctrine; it’s just saying, “Get off the couch.” But errors of doctrine can mean you’re not serving *Christ*.

Serving *Christ* means serving the Lord of the universe. You must be accurate about who that is.

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*So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.* One of the essential ways we serve Christ is through the *upbuilding* of other Christians. This is deficient in many modern churches. We pursue converting unbelievers. We think about our own sanctification and have plans and goals for growing in Christ. We have Christian education programs.

But we are not intentional enough about encouraging one another to grow in Christ.

5 Romans 14:20–23 (ESV)

*Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*

Even though Paul clearly says it's OK to eat meat, he's giving two cases where you shouldn't. *Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. ... But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith.*

In other words, you mustn't eat meat in front of someone who would be offended by it. Also, unless you're absolutely sure about the doctrine you should abstain.

Once again, eating meat is just the example; we need to generalize this to apply it to our lives. And what Paul's saying here is pretty strong stuff. If you're doing something you know is OK, but it offends someone, you should stop—even if you think the offended one shouldn't be offended.

Can't that give control to someone who's obviously in the wrong? Yes, and teaching them the correct doctrine can be a priority, but not necessarily the first time it comes up. Remember, the goal is always the glory of God and the sanctification of believers. If you have to cave once or twice to honor someone's sensitivity, that's often the right thing to do. Yes, that can be grating, but at least then they'll listen to you when you get around to explaining things.

Of course, there are exceptions. Don't conform if that means doing something wrong. Also, people can be manipulative. If they aren't serious, don't take them seriously.

But in general, we should make a rather curious sacrifice. Sometimes we need to honor people even when they're wrong. That seems silly, but it's not the biggest sacrifice we're called to make. Just do it.

The other command sounds simple but actually has complex roots. There's great liberty in Christ, but you can take it too far. *Whoever has doubts is condemned if he ignores those doubts.*

That's because our conscience and the Holy Spirit are sometimes what stops us from doing something stupid. Forging ahead in the face of doubts is ignoring voices we should never ignore.

Learning to listen to the Holy Spirit is one of the keys to growing in Christ.

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Discerning the leading of the Holy Spirit can be difficult. This passage teaches one of the easier aspects of that. If you're about to make use of some Christian liberty and you start having second thoughts, that means, "Think twice. Resist the urge to just keep going with what you had planned." Respect your doubts.

That's good exercise for building up your conscience. Think of it as, "Christian resistance training."

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. Can you change your "feelings" about a neighbor?
2. Does anyone enforce humility on you?
3. What kinds of judgement are OK? What kinds aren't?
4. What are the minimum core beliefs to be saved?
5. When has a doubt made you stop and think?

*Items for prayer:*