

A Life Built on Faith
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I'm guessing we have some HGTV fans in the house. We Wipfs have one; Judah just can't get enough. There's a way in which our faith in God is kind of like designing and decorating a house. I know many of you have done something like that over the years when you've either built or remodeled a home or a cabin or maybe you're just TV fans. So imagine, the size of your lot and the size of your budget permits about a 2400SF home. The beauty, aesthetics and functionality of the home are almost endless. You could go with a ranch or maybe a mid century modern. YOU could go with an open concept or a closed kitchen. I'm noticing all these different kinds of trends with master baths that are a little too open for my taste. You have a buffet of options for your cupboards, furniture, fixtures and colors all to match your design palette. But at the same time, there are also some more fixed, non-negotiable elements in your home. If the size is going to be about 2400SF and you've got about \$250K budget, you're going to have a layout of approx. 40 X 60 like the rest of the 2400SF homes. Code will dictate most of the heating and electrical work; you'll be using a lot of the same materials like the other homes in the neighborhood. The unique character of your home most likely isn't going to be found in the particular structure, but instead in the furnishings, decor and style.

Faith is kind of like that. While there is a wide array of expressions of faith within our own church family, the basic structure of our faith is going to be built on the same maxims or truths. The word *maxim* simply means an expression of a basic truth. Our faith has those. We find basic truths, maxims, in the scriptures and they lay out for us the structure of our faith by which we build and design our lives. Here's a maxim that every Christian should include in the primary structure of their faith: Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus." Though we have committed sin and though we still commit sin, because of the all-powerful, completely-sufficient, sin-forgiving death of Jesus on the cross all followers of Jesus are free from the guilt, the judgment, the condemnation of sin. There is no guilt for a believer in Christ, PTL! That's a basic or foundational truth that we build our lives and faith on. Because of Romans 8:1, when we remember our past sins and are tempted to feel guilty, instead we rejoice that Jesus has forgiven us of our sins and has removed all condemnation. Because of Romans 8:1 when Satan tempts us to despair of our ongoing sin, we confess and repent of that sin knowing it too is forgiven and we sing the praise of his grace rather than shrink in shame.

There are many others. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable.... These maxims and more shape the structure of our faith and provide the boundaries of our life. Our passage today provides for us one of these maxims. It provides for us one of these statements of truth that provides the structure of our life and faith giving us the ability to design the aesthetics and beauty of our faith according to how God

directs our lives. So, let's read our passage today and see what God has for us (READ Romans 14:20-23).

These verses provide a simple summary of what we've talked about so far in this series so let's briefly touch on those; towards the end of this passage is the maxim he provides and we'll camp there for the remainder of sermon.

- Vs. 20a - Don't for the sake of food destroy the work of God. We talked about this last week. When we don't take into consideration the sensitivities and fragility of a friend, we can unlovingly discourage their faith; we can cause irreparable harm. I've detailed various ways we can do this in previous sermons in this series so please go remind yourself of them.
- Vs. 20b - It's not that there's something inherently unclean specifically about certain food or drinks; it's not that Sunday is this especially holy day that we have to revere. That's Paul's point in vs. 20. But if someone on the basis of conscience thinks there is something impure about certain food, if someone on the basis of conscience sees Sundays as especially holy (and can't go shopping on that day because of that) then that's the case for them. Don't discourage your friend's path of faith about such things; that's not walking in love.
- Vs. 21 - "It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble." If I bring you a plate of cookies and say to you, "Man, these cookies are really good!" what am I saying? I'm saying, "You've gotta try these!" When Paul says, "It's good not to eat meat so your brother doesn't stumble" he's saying, "make sure you stop eating meat that hurts your friend faith in Christ." If the peace of Christ is going to reign in our church family, we are going to have to make some sacrifices for one another. This is one of those sacrifices.

Vs. 22 is something new; Paul says, "The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God." He's highlighting here the way to practice your faith appropriately versus the inappropriate way. The inappropriate way would be in public where it disturbs the faith of your brothers and sisters. But if you keep that to yourself, that's all well and good. So, take eating meat as an example. The local markets only sell meat that has been first offered to their pagan gods. You know there is only One True God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. You know that meat is clean; you have no problem eating it. But you're shopping in part to prepare for the potluck at church tomorrow and you have some dear brothers and sisters who won't eat that meat on the basis of conscience; they also struggle seeing other people eat that meat. So, what do you do? Can you never eat Beef Brisket again? Paul says, "Keep it between yourself and God." Go ahead and buy it... but eat it at home. Make a spinach salad and some PB&J sandwiches for the potluck.

Paul is not trying to say there is no place for Christians to enjoy what they do approve; what he is saying is that building up and encouraging your brother and sister is much more important than you eating and drinking whatever you want whenever you want to. Exercise that freedom in Christ in times and in ways that don't hurt the faith of your friend.

He supports this by his following sentence in vs. 22b; “Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.” It is a blessing to have a free and clear conscience. If meat truly is clean; if there truly is nothing impure or wrong in eating certain kinds of food, then it is a blessing to have a conscience that is clear about it. That’s Paul’s point; Christian, enjoy what God has made to his glory, but with careful consideration for your brothers and sisters.

Look at the first sentence in vs. 23, “But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith.” The first part of that sentence really isn’t new. We already know that the one who thinks something is unclean really is unclean to him or her even if it’s not unclean in itself. So, in contrast with his friend, he can’t enjoy the blessing his friend enjoys. But what is new (and this starts getting at what will be our primary focus this morning) is *why*. Why is one condemned if he doubts? It’s because his eating is not from faith. And then we see the maxim at the very end of vs. 23, “For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.” That’s the maxim - that’s the truth - that should ring in your ear. That’s the maxim that should be a part of the structure of your faith. Whatever I do that’s not from faith is sinful. I sin every time I do something that’s not done in faith.

Now, this is helpful in a variety of ways for us. There’s a hint in that statement that should help us in our walk with Jesus. Let me explain that by stating this: if this is true (which, of course, it is since it’s the Word of God), then at the heart of all my sinful words, choices and attitudes is unbelief. Every time I sin it’s first and foremost the result of my failure to trust God. Every sin. When I tell a white lie to my teacher about my homework. When I look at pornography. When I gossip about a coworker. When I get angry at my kids or when I criticize my husband. Whatever my sin may be, it’s fundamentally a failure to trust and believe in the Lord. Certainly, there is this horizontal dimension, but before that there’s a vertical dimension. Whatever doesn’t proceed from faith in God is sin. Another way of saying that would be: All my sin comes from disbelief in God. Can I show you how? Here are some examples.

- When I lie to my teacher about my homework, I’m not believing God cares if I lie (even though his law says “you shall not lie.”)
- When I look at pornography, I don’t believe God can see what I’m doing or I don’t believe sexual immorality is as wrong as God says.
- When I gossip about my coworker, I don’t believe God will protect me from their poor treatment so I need to protect myself.
- When I get angry at my kids, I don’t believe God’s kingdom is more important than my kingdom.
- When I criticize my husband, I don’t believe God can change him so I’m going to try to change him through my critical words..

In all of these instances of sin, if our faith in God was more pure, if our faith in God reached deeper into our soul, we’d resist the sinful words, actions and attitudes and respond in way that honors God.

But there's help in this word and here it is: cultivate a deeper trust and faith in the Lord. If your sin is a result of lack of faith, then developing faith by the grace of God will keep you from sinful responses. We're going to talk more about this in two weeks, but Paul says the word of God plays a critical role in us being a community at peace and us living lives by faith.

Now, let's break this down: how does this work? Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. First of all, we sin every time we disobey a clear command of the Lord and that disobedience comes from unbelief. Let's talk about drinking alcoholic beverages. I've preached before and Paul says it himself in this passage, drinking wine isn't sinful in and of itself. There's not something essentially unclean or immoral about such drinks. But there is clear teaching that drinking a certain way is wrong and sinful. So, for example, becoming drunk is expressly forbidden by the scriptures multiple places.

- Eph. 5:18 ~ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.
- Prov. 23:20-21 ~ Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat, for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags.

The Bible is clear; drunkenness is forbidden. Everyone of us here, whether we enjoy alcoholic beverages or whether we've decided to abstain, should agree and should obey the command of God to resist drunkenness. It's debauchery; debauchery means a lifestyle that's given up on the order of God's way. That doesn't sound like a follower of Jesus so don't get drunk.

Now, let's say we do get drunk. We know what the Bible says, but we weren't keeping track of how many beers we were drinking; we got caught up in celebrating the Packers victory over the Cowboys. So, that was sinful and disobedient, but how was it unbelief? How was it, at the heart, a lack of faith?

It was a lack of faith in one of these ways.

- It might have been a lack of faith in God's judgment of sin. You just weren't taking serious God's condemnation of drunkenness
- It might have been failing to believe sobriety and obedience to God is better, more rewarding than cutting loose at the party.
- It might have been a failure to believe God sees or cares what I do.
- If you lacked faith in God's word that his kingdom and righteousness was more important than your celebration then you would have resisted the sin of drunkenness.

All of these are examples of how faith is at the heart of our disobedience. Even though it's clear from the Bible we still will sin and that sin originates from a lack of faith.

Well, let's you drink alcohol, but don't get drunk and you're only 17 years old. Is it sinful then to drink and if so, how is that a failure to believe in God? Yes it is and that's a failure to believe God. There's something more important to God than you enjoying a cold one with friends; what's more important is your submission to the authorities that God has placed in your life. So, the law of the land is that you have to be 21 years old to drink alcohol. And guess what God's word says (Rom. 13:1), "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God." To

disobey the government is to disobey the Lord. So, underage drinking is sinful and the result of unbelief; it's failing to believe God is good in establishing this government with these laws in your life.

But what about when there isn't a specific Bible verse? How does it work then? It works the same way, but now my conscience is guiding me rather than the explicit teaching of God's word. So, I'm not underage, I'm not going to get drunk. But in my walk with the Lord, I am not at peace in my conscience that I should drink alcohol. I've prayed and I have studied, but I'm just not comfortable. I would feel guilty for drinking.

Look at vs. 23, "But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith." Those questions, that unsettled spirit, those feelings of guilt and condemnation are doubts. So, to drink anyway is to drink without faith. And anything we do outside of faith is sin.

Paul is teaching us this so we can help each other live in faith. Again, that's the goal: a community at peace who trusts God to judge and who are willing to sacrifice for others in love. In our last sermon we'll return to the practical steps we need to take to be a community at peace. But I'd like to encourage this word to you today. Proceeding in faith is a wonderful way to live. To have a clear conscience is a blessing. A few years ago when I bought my boat I put off registering it with the state. When I say put it off, what I mean is I didn't want to do it. I have this rebellious part of me that doesn't like authority. But when you read the fine print, you are required by law to register that with the government. I let 90 days pass. Then 6 months, then 1 year and then 2. But do you know what I was doing that entire time? Looking over my shoulder. Wondering what the consequences might be. And then I read things like Romans 14 and see that I'm also accountable to God. My failure to register my boat was actually a failure to trust God's good order in my life. So, a year or two ago I came to my senses and did what I should have done years ago. And do you know what I've done since? Slept like baby; I haven't thought twice about it. God's way, living by faith, is really for our good, friends. Live by faith, meaning, don't violate God's word; don't violate his way and your conscience. Who cares what others are doing? They will answer to God themselves. You live by faith and encourage your friends to do the same.

Key vs ~ Romans 14:23

Questions for the week

- Share a maxim, a basic truth, given to us by God that shapes the structure of your faith.
- Has there been a time when you acted, but doubted? Where your conscience wasn't clear?
- How has God's word today challenged your routines in life?