

Romans 19 - When Perry Mason Shows Up at Church Our Walk in the Church (Part 1)

In the last section of Romans, chapters 12-16, we are looking at the relationship of the Law to our Christian walk. In chapter 12, we saw our walk as we serve God by the measure of faith He has given us instead of the Law. In chapter 13, we saw our walk in the other part of the kingdom of God, the secular world. This covered our formal social obligations to the government and our informal social obligations to our neighbors in the world. In the next part, we are going to examine our walk in the church with respect to the Law.

Chapter 14 covers how we should be careful when it comes to judging each other in our church relationships with respect to the Law.

Everyone is familiar with Matt 7.

Matt 7:1 Judge not, that ye be not judged.

This is one of the most commonly quoted and most commonly misunderstood passages in the Scripture. Jesus followed up with how we are supposed to first remove the beam out of own eye before we deal with the mote in our brother's eye. He doesn't say "Don't judge at all." As we look at the Scriptures today, we are going to begin looking at how we work with other believers through difficulties.

1. Righteous judgment -

One of the illustrations in the bulletin points out the problem we usually have in church when we *don't* judge.

As Dorothy Sayers observed, "In the world it is called *Tolerance*, but in hell it is called *Despair*, the sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and

remains alive because there is nothing for which it will die." – Charles Colson

When it comes to Christian doctrine, we have to judge righteously.

John 7:24 Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.

We have to be careful not to just do what seems to be right.

Prov 16:25 There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death.

Peter and Paul both warned us to be careful to judge false teachers and their false doctrine.

2Pet 2:1-2 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

2And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

1Tim 4:1-16 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

...

13 Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

...

16Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

2Tim 4:1-4 I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

2Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

3For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

4And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

In order to guard against compromise by tolerating error, we are told to study God's Word and rightly divide it.

2Tim 2:15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

2Tim 3:16 All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

The word *study* speaks of the diligence we are to use when it comes to handling God's Word. We use *hermeneutics*, the laws of interpretation, *apologetics*, the laws for defending our faith, and *polemics*, the laws for attacking false doctrine and bad practice.

In the early part of the 1900s when churches were fighting modernist's skepticism, there were certain critical issues that emerged to determine true Christianity. They were called *the fundamentals* which were the basis of our Fundamentalism. Because Fundamentalism crossed denominational lines, they focused on the issues that were being challenged by Modernism that absolutely defined what it meant to be a Christian church. Of all the issues, there were only five that were at the top of the list:

- Inerrancy of Scripture - the Bible is without error
- The Virgin Birth of Jesus
- Substitutionary Atonement - Jesus was substituted for us in the judgment of God
- The Resurrection of Jesus
- The Second Coming of Jesus

As important as many issues are, there are other issues that are not as critical. In chapter 14, Paul addresses the problem of dealing with less critical issues.

2. Thank you, Mr. Mason -

Sometimes we slip over into an abuse of legitimate laws of hermeneutics, apologetics, and polemics by inappropriately applying them. When we do this, we can easily and up treat others harshly. This happens when we are dealing with Scripture that is not clear to us or that is not intended to be conclusive.

Luke 9:49-50 And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us.
50And Jesus said unto him, Forbid *him* not: for he that is not against us is for us.

Jesus did not say that the man was *with* Him, *of* Him, or one with *them*, or one *of* them. He didn't even address whether the man was saved or not (although he probably *was* saved). What He said was more in the spirit of what Moses was dealing with in Numbers 11.

Num 11:24-29 And Moses went out, and told the people the words of the LORD, and gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people, and set them round about the tabernacle.
25And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that *was* upon him, and gave *it* unto the seventy

elders: and it came to pass, *that*, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease.

26But there remained two *of the* men in the camp, the name of the one *was* Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: and the spirit rested upon them; and they *were* of them that were written, but went not out unto the tabernacle: and they prophesied in the camp.

27And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp.

28And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, *one* of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them.

29And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD'S people were prophets, *and* that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!

The seventy elders were gathered round the tabernacle, but there were two others who weren't prophesying exactly according to the right formula.

When things don't go exactly as we expect them to we take legitimate study methods and misuse them to go *Perry Mason*.

By *Perry Mason* I am referring to how people are impressed by an entertaining fictional lawyer in a fictional court and then try to emulate him to make their arguments sound better. What happens when Perry Mason goes to court would not pass in a real court. People make the mistake and use the *perception* of what a lawyer does to justify what *seems* right to *them*. TV writers take license in the TV courtroom drama and people in church take license and expect their creative arguments to be just as effective. On TV it is entertaining. In church it can get ugly. One author listed a number of silly things church members

fight over:¹

- A deacon accused another deacon of sending an anonymous letter, and decided to settle the matter in the parking lot (The church could have sold tickets to this event and raised a lot of money).
- A fight over which picture of Jesus to put in the foyer (I just want to know who took the pictures).
- An argument on whether the church should allow deviled eggs at the church meal (only if it's balanced with angel food cake for dessert).
- A disagreement over using the term "potluck" instead of "pot blessing."

This one might really sound farfetched, but I had someone not too long ago who shared with me that he took strong issue when I used the word *luck* in a sermon. He would have preferred the word *blessing*, or at worst *fortunate*. I actually do like to avoid the words *luck* or *fortunate* because we know that —

Jas 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

Everything good that we have is not a matter of luck, it is a blessing from God. I think Fortunate is a bigger problem because it is related to Fortuna, the goddess of luck. The problem with all this begins to come out when you find out that *luck* comes from a German word for *happiness*. One of the words in the Bible for *blessing* comes from a Greek word that also means *happiness*. Now do you see how we are starting to play Perry Mason here? We're cobbling together a

¹<https://churchanswers.com/blog/twenty-five-silly-things-church-members-fight-over/>

few concepts and building a case that will certainly inspire someone to stand up and confess that they are the killer of the English language. Such mangling of logic plays out as well in church as Perry Mason would in a real court of law. There actually are times when *luck* is the right word to use. What would be truly revealing is whether the discussion about luck is remembered or what the sermon was.

3. With charity for all -

On the truly critical issues, it is much easier to set everything in order, but not everything is necessarily so clear. What do you do when things don't wrap up so neatly a la Perry Mason?

A popular saying in churches is "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." This is accredited to Augustine, but the trouble with this is how you determine what is non-essential and that he was not always so charitable. As I mentioned earlier, there are clearly some issues that are definitely essential. I think that I would not suggest that other things are non-essential as if we can just ignore what we want to in the Bible. What Paul does emphasize in Romans 14 is the attitude of being charitable in all things. This sermon is not about how to determine the line between critical and not so critical issues. What we are dealing with here is how we treat each other when we get to something that is not so easy to discern.

Paul first points out that everyone can have an equal argument for whether they keep kosher and observe religious days or not.

Rom 14:1-8 Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, *but* not to doubtful disputations.

2For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.

3Let 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.

4Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

5One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

6He that regardeth the day, regardeth *it* unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard *it*. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.

7For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

8For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

I have previously covered the observance of special days. What we need to emphasize, here, is that the Bible says that when other believers differ because of what they are particular about, we should not receive them to *doubtful disputations*. This means we shouldn't try to impress people with our Perry Mason style to prove something that might be not so clear.

Rom 14:7-12 For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

8For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

9For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.

10But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

11For it is written, *As I live*, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

12So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Trying to discern how critical something is might be elusive at some point, but being charitable is certainly always in order. There are those who are not actually Christian according to the clear and critical issues. But, we also have to be prepared to be accepting and let God be the judge when it comes to the harder things to figure out in the Bible. We are accountable to God as a church for the decisions we make, but this is how we can walk with other believers who don't quite do things the way we would.

If anything, if someone is convinced that he is right, he would actually have a problem if he didn't act or teach according to his best understanding.

Rom 14:22-23 Hast thou faith? have *it* to thyself before God. Happy *is* he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.

23And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because *he eateth* not of faith: for whatsoever *is* not of faith is sin.

It doesn't take long before we get to issues that are harder to explain, but we all must keep moving forward and doing things the best we can.

There is also an issue with how we can walk with each other on a more personal level. If someone says or does something that doesn't seem quite right, do you pass judgment on them and punish them by banishing them? I'm not talking about clear sin issues or heresy, here. Would you just dismiss them from church? Of course not. If we did that, how long would it be before everyone was dismissed? I think anyone would have to agree that no one would want that, and yet that is exactly what happens. It is a reverse-banishment. When

someone gets offended, what they sometimes do is far worse. They might pride themselves on having done their Perry Mason best and feel justified to not just dismiss *one* person who offended them, they also kick out all the good people who *never* offended them. In other words, they leave. Isn't that the same thing as if you dismissed everyone in the church? You've got to imagine that over the course of more than four decades of ministry, there are a lot of strange things we have heard. But through it all, we have to keep moving forward together as a church. Many things that might seem so all important prove to be nothing worth killing the church over.

We will cover what to do next more thoroughly when we get to Romans 15, but we need to be charitable by giving others the benefit of the doubt and not being so concerned about what *we* deserve. We don't throw people or the church overboard but accept that they, like us, are children of God who are still growing. Just as we would want someone to work with us, we should be willing to work with them to whatever extent possible.

This brings me to one of my favorite Scriptures about serving God:

2Tim 2:24-25 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all *men*, apt to teach, patient,

25In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

We need to be careful in all that we do to not fight but to be honestly trying to understand God and His Word.

4. What absolutely is critical -

All things considered, there is one thing that above all else you actually *do* have to have perfectly right. You can't afford to have a wrong doctrine of salvation. There are many things that

accompany salvation that we might not get quite right, but salvation itself has got to be God's way. Thankfully, God is absolutely clear when it comes to salvation.

- Salvation is not a reward for how much good you do or how well behaved you are.

Eph 2:8-9 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God:

9Not of works, lest any man should boast.

- We need salvation because we are sinners on the way to Hell.

Rom 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

- Christ died to take our judgment.

1Pet 3:18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

If you are already saved, you might need to consider how charitable you are toward other churches not quite like us. But, it might be the opposite. Perhaps you are fine with others but have been afraid to take a strong stand on your own doctrine out of fear of offending others. Or, maybe it has been more personal and you are not accepting of someone in church who is growing just like you are.

If you are *not* already saved, there is grace for you to grow in your understanding, but don't think you can just expect God to be tolerant of your bad doctrine of salvation. God is gracious. He will never run out of grace. However,

you can run out of God's grace. The moment you pass from this life without surrendering your heart to God, you will run out of God's grace.

Matt 7:1

1. Righteous judgment - John 7:24, Prov 16:25, 2Pet 2:1-2, 1Tim 4:1-16, 2Tim 4:1-4, 2:15, 3:16,
2. Thank you, Mr. Mason - Luke 9:49-50, Num 11:24-29, Jas 1:17
3. With charity for all - Rom 14:1-23, 2Tim 2:24-25
4. What absolutely is critical - Eph 2:8-9, Rom 3:23, Rom 6:23, 1Pet 3:18