

Much Worse and Far Better Than You Can Imagine

Romans 14:10-23

Romans (no. 40 in the series)

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Peter Hiatt

Video and audio versions available online:

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This document was prepared by Brett Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Brett know. Thank you!

Prayer

So, Lord God, we pray that we would do that, we wouldn't let the thorns and thistles grow, that we would invite you, Lord Jesus, to be born in us. So, I pray that you would cause us, Lord God, to preach and that you would preach (through us). So, Father, we pray that you would help us to hear your word, receive your word, incarnate your word. In Jesus' name we ask it, amen.

Message

As I was looking at the text for today, chewing on it through the week, I kept getting this an uneasiness and a pressure deep in my gut. It brings back countless memories of angry letters from angry people deeply offended at things I've said, the agony of wondering if I was wrong or right, and then the struggle of trying to NOT be offended that they took offense. It brings back countless memories of acquiescing to the religious scruples of Pharisees and it brought back one memory in particular, from one particular day around 1985, and just to talk about it I will risk offending you, right now.

I will need to say the F-word. I asked the staff this week, "Do you think I can say the F-word?" I grew up as a pastor's kid, who really didn't get the concept of hell, but I was pretty convinced that if you said the "F-word," you were going there. And now I'm going to say the F-word: F-f-f-f-fart.

As a child, I thought that word was the evil "F-word." In my house, you could do it as long as you ignored it (didn't enjoy it) or said, "excuse me." But if you did it, and appeared to enjoy it, or—God forbid—laugh about it... well, my dad, Reverend Dan Hiatt, did not approve. The first R rated movie that I was allowed to see was so controversial, because in it there was a scene in which cowboys sat around a campfire eating beans, passing gas, and laughing—Blazing Saddles.

As we look at our text, remember that Paul has been talking about the "strong in faith" and the "weak in faith," that eat only vegetables.

Romans 14:13-23:

Therefore let us not pass judgment [krino: judge] on one another any longer, but rather decide [krino: judge] never to put a stumbling block [proskomma] or hindrance [scandalon: offence, stumbling block] in the way of a brother. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ For if your brother is grieved [lupeo: saddened, offended, distressed] by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy [apollumi: “damn”] the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ So do not let what you regard as good [“the Good of you”] be spoken of as evil [blasphemeo: blasphemed]. ¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. ²⁰ Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats [“eating through stumbling”]. ²¹ It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble [“anything in which your brother stumbles”]. ²² 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 [not judging himself in what he approves]. ²³ 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.

So, I remember sitting in my boss’s office—the Reverend Steve Marsh. Steve was probably about 28 and I was all of 24. Next to me was the best man in my wedding, Dave Jones. And we were vehemently arguing about the pros and cons of passing gas. It was 1985. All of us worked at Bel Air Presbyterian Church—Ronald Reagan’s church and home of the Rich and Famous. I was the new High School Youth Director, Dave was my assistant, and Steve was our boss.

If you’ve ever tried to lead a 10th grade boys bible study, you know that it can be incredibly hard to get those boys to open up. Until someone passes gas and laughs about it. I didn’t have many skills, but that was one that I had mastered, and my friend Dave could literally burp the entire alphabet. Great for ministering to 10th grade boys, but problematic for Steve trying to minister to their parents and the holy folks that kept us all in business.

Steve had just graduated from Seminary. Dave and I were still in Seminary. And so of course we were all quoting Scripture, right and left. I’m sure my recollection is not entirely accurate, but I remember Steve saying something like: “Romans 14:15. Peter your brothers are grieved, saddened, and offended... so you’re not walking in love... let’s pursue what makes for peace... it’s wrong to make your brother stumble... whatever does not proceed from faith is sin... are you certain that you should be just... farting?” And I would answer, “Nothing is unclean in itself... maybe 10th grade boys are grieved that you make all these rules about farting?”

It seemed to me that, in Paul’s terminology, the 10th grade boys who could pass gas and laugh about it while praying, were “the strong in faith.” And that the anal-retentive religious crowd with all their rules about farting were “the weak in faith.” And yet if that were true, Paul is

arguing that “the strong in faith” shouldn’t fart and laugh about it in front of “the weak in faith,” for that might cause the weak in faith to violate their own conscience and destroy themselves by laughing at farts when they thought they should be serious about farts, the “weak in faith,” Steve and the Parents.

But Steve wasn’t claiming to be one of “the weak in faith,” but one of the “strong in faith,” worried about causing one of “the weak in faith”—one of the 10th grade boys to stumble—by violating their own conscience. And if that was the case, Steve did have a point. Paul writes that “nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone that thinks it’s unclean...” I imagine that some parents, like my parents, had told their boys, “No farting and laughing,” and so “farting and laughing” wasn’t just farting and laughing, it was lawlessness.

St. Augustine’s first confession in *The Confessions*, was taking fruit from a tree, but not because he wanted the fruit, but because it was forbidden. He wanted to assert his will, his independent will. So, he and his buddies—probably 10th graders—stole the fruit, and then just threw them at pigs. When my son Coleman was little, we made a rule: No eating the toothpaste. And now we have videos of Coleman sneaking toothpaste and eating alone. I said, no eating dirt. And so, Coleman would eat dirt and then hide from me. I really don’t care whether or not he eats dirt or toothpaste, but I’d die just to convince him that he never needs to hide his heart from me.

In Rome and Corinth, the weak in faith thought that eating meat was worshipping an idol. The strong in faith, knew that eating meat could just be eating meat. But if they led their weaker brothers to eat meat, those weaker brothers might eat meat and then hide their hearts from God our father. And so, the 10th grade boys might fart, laugh, and then hide their hearts from their parents, or worse, their Creator and that would destroy them.

And yet, right in the middle of the text, Paul writes, “Do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil.”ⁱ And so, I regarded farting and laughing as good, and now I was willing to educate Steve, my Dad, and even the parents, if need be. And isn’t that exactly what Paul is doing in almost all his letters? He won’t eat meat in front of the weak... until he educates the weak that the meat is good for “everything is indeed clean. (Rom. 14:20).” He won’t acquiesce to the scruples of the Pharisees, and yet he won’t violate the scruples of the Pharisees if he thinks they’ll listen to the Gospel, first.ⁱⁱ I thought Steve was acquiescing to the Pharisees... and sacrificing me. And I imagine that Steve thought I was what Karl Barth calls a “Pharisee of freedom,”ⁱⁱⁱ and more than willing to sacrifice him.

Now it all seems silly when talking about farts and bacon. But just substitute some other created thing, like wine, whiskey, marijuana, gold, sex, reproduction, or gender and suddenly, no one’s laughing.^{iv} Or debate other rituals like the sabbath, baptism, communion, or rules for immigration, wealth distribution, officers in the church or soldiers in war and suddenly, no one’s laughing.

In regard to the Old Testament Law and meat sacrificed to idols, no one was laughing in Corinth, Colossae, Galatia, or Rome. And in regard to farting and laughing, no one was laughing in Steve’s office that day in 1985. I wouldn’t let it go or wouldn’t stop letting it go, so to speak.

Steve was sweating; his eyes were red. He looked at me and demanded to know, “Why is it necessary for you to fart?” I wasn’t sure quite what to say, and so I said, “Sometimes, I just have to.” And then, Dave started laughing. And at that, Steve just kind of lost it; he blurted out, “Well I sure wouldn’t want to be farting when Jesus comes back.”

I’m pretty sure Jesus already knows, and yet it does raise the pivotal question: What happens when we all stand before the throne? God’s Throne—that is—The Judgment Seat of God, also called the judgment Seat of Christ; that would be Jesus Christ. You know, Jesus seemed to violate all sorts of religious scruples. He made wine at a feast where folks were already tipsy. He healed a man with spit—knowing full well that spittle (bodily excreta) is unclean, according to the Pharisees. And he did all sorts of stuff on the sabbath that infuriated the Pharisees. And yet he died for the Pharisees—one of them being Rabbi Saul, whom we call Paul.

And now this is really weird, but not only did Jesus offend [*scandalizo* in Greek]; he kind of turned the offense into the judgment saying, “blessed is he that is not offended at me.” And weirdest of all, Jesus not only offended, but all of Scripture testifies that he, himself, is the offense, the *skandalon* and the *proskomma*. And Paul is fully aware of this, for just a few chapters back in Romans 9, he wrote: “They, Israel, have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling [*proskomma*] and a rock of offense [*skandalon*] and whoever believes in (or on) him will not *be* put to shame.’” And now Paul, using the same words writes, “Therefore let us not judge one another any longer, but judge to never put a *proskomma* or *skandalon* in the way of a brother.” Then he concludes by writing “Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.”

But faith in what? That farting is good or not good? That eating meat is good or not good? That a national abortion ban is good or not good? “To fart or not to fart?” That is the question, Paul! And if I don’t have an answer, how could I do either, in faith?” It’s all confusing and yet, Paul does begin our text with a “Therefore” and we should always ask what the “Therefore” is there for.

Romans 14:10, what we preached on last time:

¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on [*krino*: judge] your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹for it is written,

“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.”

¹²So then each of us will give an account [*logos*: word] of himself to God.

Romans 14:10-12 (ESV)

Romans 14:13-16:

¹³Therefore let us not pass judgment on [*krino*: judge] one another any longer, but rather decide [*krino*: judge] never to put a stumbling block [*proskamma*] or hindrance [*skandalon*: offence, stumbling block] in the way of a brother. ¹⁴I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. ¹⁵For if your brother is grieved [saddened, offended] by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy [*apollumi*: damn] the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶So do not let what you regard as good ["the good of you"] be spoken of as evil [*blasphemeo*: "blasphemed"]. ¹⁷For

See? Maybe we've had such a hard time understanding, and let alone doing, Romans 14:13-23 because hardly anyone, at least in the institutional church, has believed Romans 14:10-12 for about 1500 years. But much, or maybe most, of the early church did. And I did, at least a little, starting around the first week of October 1995.

For three years I had been the Sr. Pastor of a little church on Lookout Mountain—a church that was then growing into a flagship church within our denomination—everyone seemed to really like me! I was thrilled, and I was exhausted, and I was swamped with anxiety over all the scruples of the Pharisees—and foremost of those Pharisees was me. Was Pokémon good or evil? Who was wrong and who was right? Was I wrong, or right? Was I rightly testing the spirits or was I quenching the Holy Spirit? Was Lana a prophet, or a false prophet, when she told me that God told her to send me to the laughing revival in Toronto Canada?

And now, I'd like to tell you about something that I've told you about numerous times in bits and pieces, but haven't told you about, all at once in a sermon, for many, many years. But before I do, I want to say that some claim to have experiences like this rather often and I imagine their telling the truth. I've only had this experience once, on this one day. And I'm not saying that you need to have this experience on any day, and yet I'm convinced you will have it on "that day" and, actually, you do, in some form, every day.

And if that's not cryptic enough, let me also remind the Pharisee in you that "It is an evil and adulterous generation that seeks for a sign." And that to Thomas the resurrected Jesus said, "Blessed are those who haven't seen and yet believed." So, you don't have to "see:" but, I want you to believe.

I want to share with you my Damascus Road Experience. I've been chewing on it for 27 years, and I'm constantly reminded of it by Paul in our studies in Romans. Lana said, "I want to send you to the laughing revival in Canada."

- I said, “Are you cool if I come back and say they’re all nuts?” She said “Yes.”
- I said, “Can I bring Susan?” She said “Yes.”
- I said, “Can we visit Niagara Falls?” She said “Yes.” And I said, “We’re in!”

What I witnessed at the conference utterly blew my mind. I’d seen religious people fake stuff thousands of times. But what I saw I couldn’t explain away. And what they preached, sang, and prayed I didn’t want to explain away because it was just what I had been preaching, singing, and praying back home. It’s just that now folks would suddenly drop to the floor intoxicated with joy or roaring like a lion; I even saw a group of middle-aged church ladies that started laughing and, yes, “farting laughing in the Spirit”—a vortex of uncontrolled farting, laughter, and worship; It blew the doors off of the 10th grade boys Bible Study at Bel Air Presbyterian Church.

And for an entire week I would lift my hands and cry out to God—“Do me, hit me, send your fire!” And nothing, zip, nada. The first night, Susan said “I don’t want these people touching me.” But someone just walked by and said something like “God bless you, dear.” And my wife collapsed, was gone, and when she came back around, with tears in her eyes, she described an ecstasy that utterly eclipsed our honeymoon.

I confessed every sin I could think of, made promises about the number of beers I’d drink and not drink, movies I’d watch and not watch, and still nothing! I had worked like crazy, studied like crazy, pastored like crazy. Susan didn’t even have her quiet times, and Jesus takes my wife on a honeymoon. I was deeply hurt, I was offended, and I told Jesus “You won’t even talk to me. So, I quit; When I get back to Denver, I’ll resign.”

On that last day, I went to a seminar led by a Presbyterian like me. I sat next to a really large native American Pentecostal man, named Anthony, who was obviously just tripping with Jesus. And a frail little old Roman Catholic lady named Rosemary. At the end of the seminar, the leader just told us to stand and pray with the people next to us. I held hands with Anthony and Rosemary and the next thing I remember was the audible Voice of God^v; He said, “Peter, you don’t love my bride very much, do you?”

And suddenly, I knew that I had left geology and gone into the ministry because I hated the church—Hated the church—because of what the church had done to my dad in a meeting in downtown Denver where I watched him tried on the floor of the Denver Presbytery.^{vi} And because of what the church had done to me and my family through a million judgments. And so, I had judged the church, and refused to forgive the church; I had somehow vowed to “show the church” by fixing the church, which was some sort of secret twisted dark hatred for the church.

I must have convulsed and let out a sob, for Anthony laid me down on the floor and I began to just weep and wail uncontrollably. It’s quite a shock to suddenly realize that what you had considered to be your very best deeds, and what others considered your very good deeds, were actually your worst deeds, even the devil’s deeds.

And yet, (this was the utterly crazy thing), although I was utterly convicted, and knew that I had chosen the evil, there wasn’t a drop of condemnation in the Voice of the Lord. No blame. But only the deepest compassion—In fact, I honestly felt like I wasn’t sobbing, so much as HE was

sobbing through me, for me, and on behalf of me, even as me, as if, HE was repenting me, and I was just watching.

He must've sobbed through me for about an hour, for when I opened my eyes, everyone was gone, and the hotel staff had set up chairs around my body in preparation for the evening meeting. I remember thinking, "Wow, Jesus didn't even mention beer or dirty movies. And I had absolutely no idea—no idea—about the evil in my own heart. I can't even begin to judge myself, let alone my neighbor." I was undone.

You see, for a moment, I think I stood before the Judgment seat of God. And at least a little, gave an account, or Jesus gave an account, of my Old Man, the typos, the vessel of wrath, my body of sin & death, my false self, my flesh, my ego. I felt utterly undone, wondered if I'd lost my mind, and did not know what to do—resign or not resign, eat meat, or not eat meat. I didn't know. And for 27 years now, I've wondered, what exactly did Jesus mean by "my bride?"

Well, I found my way back to our hotel room where I found Susan and told her what had happened and that maybe I had some kind of breakdown. She'd had enough wild encounters with God for the day and so she sent me back to the evening meeting alone. I found Rosemary the Catholic, and said, "Would you just pray for me? I don't seem to fall down, so I'll just lay down and would you pray?" I lay on my back with my hands in the air, as together we prayed an Eastern Orthodox prayer, "Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

As I prayed, I felt tingling in my fingertips, like when you sleep on your arm funny, it falls asleep, but then it begins to awaken and tingle as the blood begins to flow and the nerves begin to fire. Then, I thought "That's weird; my whole body is beginning to tingle." Someone came by and said, "Let it come in waves," and it did, like electricity now pulsing through my entire body. And then I noticed this pressure on my wrists, and before long I realized my hands were being held in place in the air, and I sincerely thought that God was going to break my arms and I was thrilled.

I've always been a sceptic and so, I thought: "This will be irrefutable conclusive proof for the existence of God." It was a few weeks later that I remembered that I had always prayed, "Lord I can't seem to hear your voice, so if I'm ever out of your will, just break my arms." And it was earlier that day that I had prayed, "Jesus, you don't talk to me, so I'm leaving the ministry." Well, I was absolutely aware that he could break my arms. And that knowledge is still a huge comfort to me to this day—God is not held hostage to my bad decisions and he's utterly capable of breaking my arms.

But he didn't break my arms, and yet the energy, the presence, the Love, was so intense that I thought he might kill me. And I was totally cool with that. But I was also aware that I might not be totally cool with that, I might be utterly terrified of that, if I hadn't already begun to realize that I knew him, and he knew me. I could probably yell stop, and it would stop, but I didn't want it to stop.

- It was not a feeling I had conjured up in my brain.
- It was not the result of my will, my obedience.

- (In fact, he had just revealed my disobedience—my sin).
- It was not a religious technique or protocol I had learned in some meeting.
- It was not knowledge of Good and evil I had taken from a book... or a tree.
- It—and now I should say he—He was a presence more real than space and time, and this is the thunderclap: I knew him, because he knew me.

I remember thinking, it's not about tingling fingers, audible voices, and manifestations—pay attention to what he's showing you. And I remember this distinct impression, “Peter, it's not about this; It's not about signs, but who they point to—it's me and you know me.” And then, it was as if God pulled back a curtain that had covered all things and I woke—I woke to reality, I knew, I believed—at least a bit—that he was absolutely everywhere, all the time, loving me. I had been least aware of his love, when I most believed that I had to earn it.

He pulled back the curtain, and I couldn't help but thank him for everything. I remember thanking him for a Sunday School teacher and the flannel graph, for he showed me that HE was flannelgraph Jesus and I knew him, for he knew me through the felt characters on the flannel graph, and the love of my teacher—he knew me, and I knew him. I remember thanking him for Bono and U2, because I used to hate Christian Music, but I'd sit in my old mustang, listen to U2, and think about Jesus, and Jesus showed me that my every good thought was him speaking to me, in me, from the depths of me, and through me.

He pulled back the curtain, and I couldn't help but praise God, because I absolutely wanted to praise God, or maybe Jesus wanted to praise God through me. I mean it was hard to tell if I was speaking, or he was speaking through me and as me—the Word of God, the Logos of God, My Creator.

You see, for at least a moment, I think I stood before the judgment seat of God and gave account—logon—of myself, the Jesus of myself, that is my true self, the Vessel of Mercy, the New Man, the Eschatos Adam—I gave my true self to God as an offering of praise. I don't know how long the experience lasted in space and time, and yet the reality is eternal—it's every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all that is within them praising God and the Lamb on the throne.^{vii} And check this out: that reality is here and now. And so, he confronts you every day as a smile, a hug, or a glazed doughnut. And he speaks through you as a smile, a hug, and a glazed doughnut handed to your neighbor, with just a smidgeon of love.

When I got back to Colorado, for about a month, I found it literally impossible to worry, as if my heart was convinced that I was thoroughly known, entirely loved, and God was in absolute control. But then, surrounded by a river of lies^{viii}, it seemed to wear off. And yet I still remember the Truth, and for 27 years I've been reflecting on the Truth and finding the Truth all over Scripture—particularly in Romans.

You see I think what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus—at least in some measure—happened to me one day in a hotel ballroom in Toronto. And since that day some things have become entirely obvious:

1. I am utterly incapable of judging myself, let alone my neighbor.

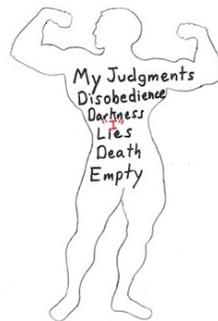
But God will judge the hell out of me, and his heaven into me, and nothing is better than God's judgment. So far from teaching people to run from God's judgment, I will always implore you to run into God's judgement; to run into the arms of Jesus.

2. I am utterly incapable of judging you, and yet I do know that you are far worse than you ever imagined, and infinitely better than you can even begin to believe.^{ix}

In other words: You really do have an old man, a body of sin and death, and it's far worse than you ever imagined, and one day you will ceaselessly praise God for freeing you from yourself. And that you, that constantly praises him, somehow is him and an absolute gift from him and is infinitely better than you can even begin to imagine.

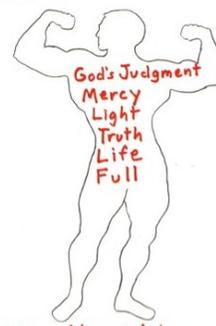
In fact, your experience of your old man, will cause you to endlessly praise God in ecstasy for your new man and as the new man. In other words, "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" and God's grace in you is faith, hope and love in you—the judgment of God in you.

The "Me" that I create



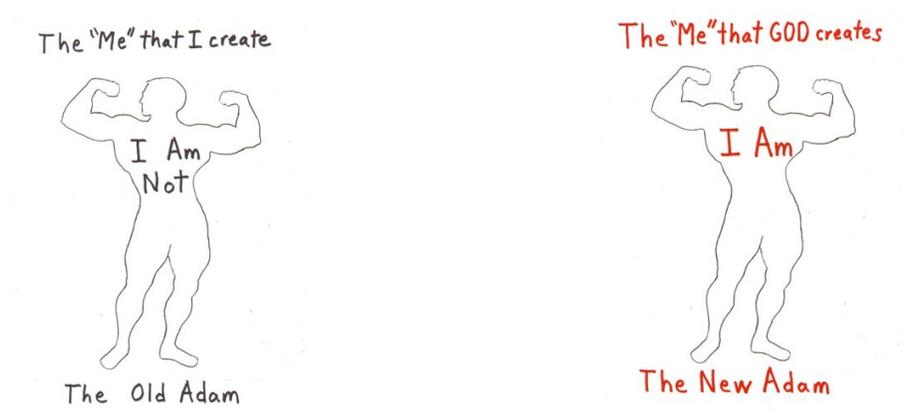
The Old Adam

The "Me" that GOD creates



The New Adam

The old man is constructed with your judgment—your sin. And your new man is constructed with God's Judgement—absolute Grace



The old man is a dream, a shadow of who it is that I AM is.
The new man is who I am, and we are—the Image and likeness of God.

3. I realized I couldn't judge, but I could preach that God's judgment is good in the hope that we'd all surrender to his judgment.^x

It was obvious to me that God wasn't finished with me, but that he would finish me, and that in every moment I worshipped God and surrendered to his Word, he was judging the hell out of me and heaven into me.

4. I couldn't judge, but I hoped that everyone would be judged by God.

In fact, I kept asking, "God you did that for Paul; you did that for me; I've watched you do it for others—why wouldn't you do it for all?" And for 27 years I think God has been asking me, "Yeah, good question, why wouldn't I do it for all, particularly when I keep saying that I will do it for all."

¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on [*krino*: judge] your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹for it is written,

“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.”

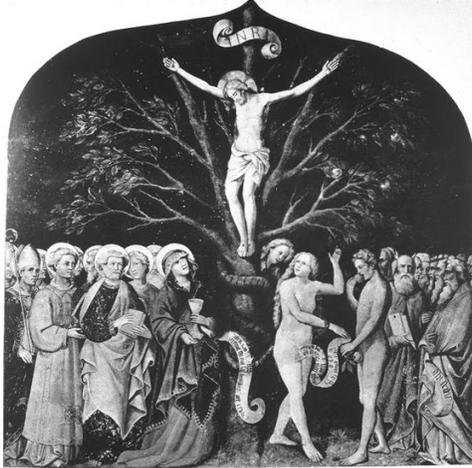
¹²So then each of us will give an account [*logos*: word] of himself to God.

Romans 14:10-12 (ESV)

Romans 14:12 ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to me, and every tongue will confess (“give praise”) to God.’ So, then each of us will give an account [a *logos*] of himself to God.

¹³Therefore let us not pass judgment on [*krino*: judge] one another any longer, but rather decide [*krino*: judge] never to put a stumbling block [*proskamma*] or hindrance [*skandalon*: offence, stumbling block] in the way of a brother. ¹⁴I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. ¹⁵For if your brother is grieved [saddened, offended] by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy [*apollumi*: damn] the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶So do not let what you regard as good [“the good of you”] be spoken of as evil [*blasphemeo*: “blasphemed”]. ¹⁷For

THEREFORE—for this reason—let us not judge one another any longer, but rather judge to never put a stumbling block [*proskomma*] or hindrance [*scandalon*] in the way of a brother. So, what is THE stumbling block, THE stumbling stone?



"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena

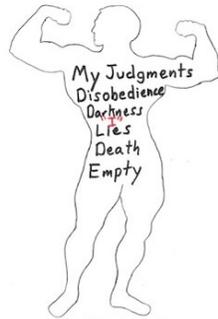
Well, isn't this THE Stumbling stone, this tree in the middle of the garden, Jesus Christ and him crucified, the Judgement of God and Word of God?

- It was God that planted the tree in the garden.
- It was God that consigned all to disobedience that he might have mercy on all.
- It was God who decided, as in Adam all die, so in Christ will all be made alive.
- It was God who said, "Let us make man in our image."
- It was "Grace that taught your heart to fear and Grace your fears relived."

This is the judgment of God, and it doesn't belong to you. God does not tempt to evil, but He does lead us into temptation, that we might choose the evil and come to know that we are forever chosen by the Good, who is himself--Grace. This is the Judgment of God, this is Love, and it doesn't belong to you, and yet God has chosen to give it—give himself—to you. This is the Stumbling Stone, the Foundation Stone, the Corner Stone. But what does it mean for me to place a stumbling stone in front of you?

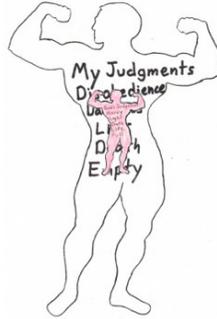
Well, isn't it for me to point to this tree and say, "You know, we ought to take more knowledge of Good and evil from that tree—make more laws, more regulations, more ways to judge God and judge each other." And isn't that how I encourage you to manufacture more old man, which only imprisons the new man deeper and deeper in fear and shame?

The "Me" that I create



The Old Adam

The "Me" that GOD creates



The New Adam

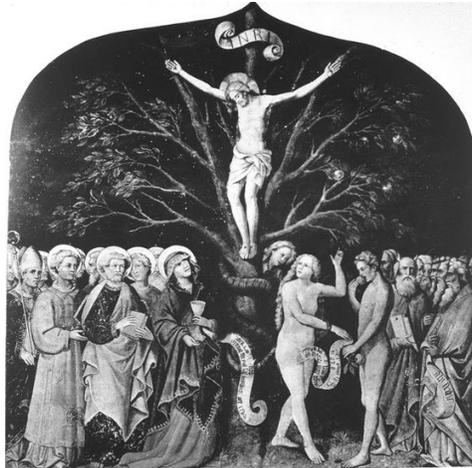
See him there, imprisoned like a baby in a womb? “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us (save us, give birth to us) from evil.”

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul talks about all the things that he talks about here in Romans—stumbling stones and food offered to idols—but he begins the discussion with this fascinating verse that we read last time.

¹Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. ²If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. ³But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.

1 Corinthians 8:1-3 (ESV)

“Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that ‘all of us possess knowledge.’ This ‘knowledge’ puffs up, but love builds up. ² If anyone imagines that he knows something...” 37 years ago in Steve’s office we all imagined that we knew something, and we were desperate to know who was wrong and who was right. “² If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. ³ But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.”



"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena

You see? I can entice people to take knowledge from the tree to justify themselves. And, in this way, crucify Christ, destroy the Life, and manufacture the evil; I can lead them into temptation. Or I can testify to God's judgment: Christ crucified and risen from the dead. And, when people surrender to Christ—the living Christ, our Husband—they are impregnated with Christ and give birth to Christ: the Love of God in human flesh. In other words, I can live by the law, and everything will die. Or I can surrender to Love, and all creation will live.

Romans 14:13-23:

Therefore let us not pass judgment [krino: judge] on one another any longer, but rather decide [krino: judge] never to put a stumbling block [proskomma] or hindrance [scandalon: offence, stumbling block] in the way of a brother. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ For if your brother is grieved [lupeo: saddened, offended, distressed] by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy [apollumi: "damn"] the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ So do not let what you regard as good ["the Good of you"] be spoken of as evil [blasphemeo: blasphemed]. ¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. ²⁰ Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats ["eating through stumbling"]. ²¹ It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble ["anything in which your brother stumbles"]. ²² 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 [not judging himself in what he approves].

That is, "Blessed is the one who has stopped judging himself." To the Corinthians, Paul wrote, "It's a very small thing that I'm judged by any of you. I don't even judge myself. But I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me." Paul didn't know when he was wrong and when he was right.

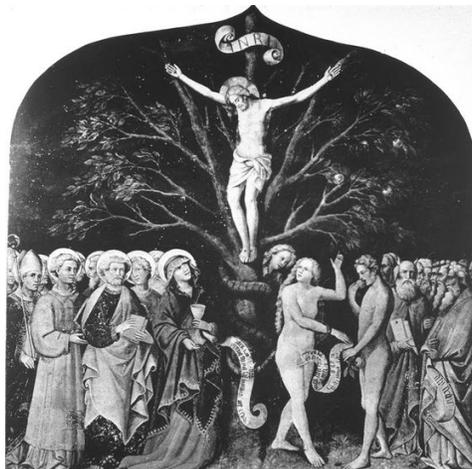
Romans 14:23:

But whoever has doubts is condemned (that is damned) if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

Faith in what? What if I don't have faith that eating meat is OK. And I don't have faith that eating only vegetables is ok? I mean it sounds like I'm damned if I fart and I'm damned if I hold my farts, and maybe I am, for either way, I'm not farting in faith.



Don't deny it, y'all fart. But do you fart in faith? Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin?^{xi} Faith in what? Well, shouldn't we be asking the question Faith in whom? (Faith means "trust")



"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena

If your faith is in knowledge, I bet you're trusting yourself as the savior? But if your faith is in Christ, you're trusting the Life, who is the Good, you're trusting your helper, your husband, who is "with you." As I was nailed to the floor by the power of God, and as I realized that my old man was dead and my new man wouldn't stop worshipping, and I was happier than I've ever

been, before or since. I yelled to Rosemary, “Jesus just called me a dork...” She looked concerned and said, “Oh honey, he would never call you that.” But I knew exactly what he meant—he was speaking my language: 10th grade high school boy language—he said, “Peter stop being a dork, and stop doubting my love for you.”

Do you know why I was so intent on justifying myself in Steve’s office that day? Well, because I didn’t believe I was justified; to be more precise: I didn’t really believe that Jesus loved me. And do you know why Steve was so intent on correcting me? I bet it was for the same reason: He didn’t really believe that Jesus loved him. So, which one of us was right, and which one was wrong? Well, we were both far worse than we knew, and far more right than we could imagine. The worse was on us; and all the righteousness was God.

You say, “Fine! But who was right and who was wrong about farting?” Well, I don’t know, and I don’t think I’m supposed to know. It wouldn’t surprise me now to find out that I was farting because I hated the church and Steve could tell. (Steve is a great guy with lots of wisdom.) And it wouldn’t surprise me now to find out that I was farting because Jesus was actually loving 10th grade boys through me, his body. And it wouldn’t surprise me in the least to find that both of those things were happening at exactly the same time in the same place.

And yet the Good and the evil cannot be separated with knowledge in my head, which only buries me deeper in sin and shame. The Good and the evil can only be separated by standing before the throne, the judgment seat of God, and listening to his Word as he says to me and to you “Now do you believe I love you?”

You, his church, are his bride. Stop doubting his love for you. And I think he’s been showing me that all humanity will be his church, his body, and his bride. But to be honest, I think the hardest thing for me to believe, is that I am his Bride.

“Peter, you don’t love my bride very much, do you?” That crucified my old man. “Peter, Stop doubting my love for you?” that’s the resurrection of the eternal man—I am the Lord’s beloved—that’s who I am. May you stand before the Judgment Seat of God, right now.

Communion

Prayer

And so, Lord God, you are love, and your word is love, and your word is flesh is Jesus. And Lord Jesus, you are with us—you say you will not leave us nor forsake us. You are the same yesterday, today, and forever. And you are the judgement of God upon humanity. So, we praise God for you, Lord Jesus, standing on the throne, loving us. And so, Jesus, we invite you to lead us. So, Lord God, if you want to lead us into the dessert for forty years, do that. If you want to knock us all down, do the thing like on Pentecost, I’d prefer that, that would be great. But we offer ourselves to you, as a sacrifice, holy and acceptable, because you are good. And it’s in your name that we know the father, that we praise, that we worship, that we live. Amen.

Benediction

I shared this story at my father's funeral—my father who wouldn't even allow me to say the "f" word. Shortly before his passing, I took him on a Presbytery retreat, and we shared a bed and a room. Earlier in the evening we'd gone to dinner with Aram Haroutunian and Gary Reddish and ordered a big bowl of onion dip and I ate most of it. That night, I just couldn't contain myself and so finally I rolled over and I said, Dad I'm so sorry, I just have really bad gas.

And my 83-year-old Dad just got really animated; I think he turned on the light, looked me and the face, and said, "Peter, God made your body and it's a marvelous thing. Don't you ever apologize to me for your bodily functions. You're just wonderful." And I said, "Um uh, ok Dad."

If you didn't get any of my message. Or you thought it stunk. This is my point: Love can make the stinkiest farts smell sweet. Believe the Gospel and breathe Free.

The Gospel is neither anal retentiveness nor anal expressiveness.
The Gospel is Love in absolute freedom, and that's called grace.

Endnotes

ⁱ I suppose this could mean that the weak might eat meat because of the strong, but then speak of it (blaspheme) it in their hearts. And so, Paul is saying "Don't eat meat."

Or it could mean if you, the strong, consider eating meat to be good, educate the weak, so they'll stop speaking of it as evil. And so, Paul is saying "Educate the weak."

It seems to me that Paul is probably doing both.

And yet I also suspect that he's pointing to something even more profound. Literally translated he says, "Don't let the Good in you be blasphemed." The Good in us is Jesus in us, and when we turn him (the Lord of Love, who justifies us) into laws (knowledge of Good and evil, which we use to justify ourselves) we deliver him up to crucifixion in our hearts and trap ourselves in a dream that turns into a nightmare and then into hell.

ⁱⁱ For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. – 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (ESV)

ⁱⁱⁱ Karl Barth, *Romans*, p.515 (pp. 512-520)

^{iv} For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. –1 Timothy 4:4-5 ESV

^v I had never heard God's voice like this before, and I haven't heard it like this since that day.

^{vi} This is another story, but that room was the room in which the Sanctuary met for its first full year of existence. Unaware of what we were doing, Frances and I arranged for the Sanctuary to hold its Sunday Night Services at Central Presbyterian Church. When I told my mother where we would be meeting (My father had passed by this time), she immediately said, "Don't you know what that place is? That's the room in which you saw your father tried on the floor of the Denver Presbytery." All at once, I remembered the carpet, the funky cross down front, the entire room. God tricked me into standing in the very spot I say my Dad

tried, in the very room I had taken a vow to “show the church,” and preach the Gospel to the Church for a year. He arranged for me to “love his bride” in that very spot—where I had been wounded so deeply, and where I had wounded in return...

^{vii} Revelation 5:13

^{viii} Revelation 12:15

^{ix} I do indeed, Sir," said Caspian. "I was wishing that I came of a more honourable lineage."

"You come of the Lord Adam and the Lady Eve," said Aslan. "And that is both honour enough to erect the head of the poorest beggar, and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor in earth. Be content."

- C. S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*

^x These biblical characters, however clean or tawdry their personal histories may have been, are not paralyzed by the past in their present response to Jesus. Tossing aside self-consciousness they ran, clung, jumped, and raced to Him. Peter denied Him and deserted Him, but he was not afraid of Him.

Suppose for a moment that in a flash of insight you discovered that all your motives for ministry were essentially egocentric, or suppose that last night you got drunk and committed adultery, or suppose that you failed to respond to a cry for help and the person committed suicide. What would you do?

Would guilt, self-condemnation, and self-hatred consume you, or would you jump into the water and swim a hundred yards at breakneck speed toward Jesus? Haunted by feelings of unworthiness, would you allow the darkness to overcome you or would you let Jesus be who He is—a Savior of boundless compassion and infinite patience, a Lover who keeps no score of our wrongs?

- *Abba's Child*, Brennan Manning

Ruthless trust—that is, trust without self-pity—ravishes the heart of the Father.

- Brennan Manning

^{xi} But too often it has been overlooked that the opposite of sin is not virtue, not by any manner of means. This is in part a pagan view which is content with a merely human measure and properly does not know what sin is, that all sin is before God. No, the opposite of sin is faith, as is affirmed in Romans 14:23, "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." And for the whole of Christianity it is one of the most decisive definitions that the opposite of sin is not virtue but faith.

- Soren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*

We live under the illusion that if we can acquire complete control, we can understand God, or we can write the great American novel. But the only way we can brush against the hem of the Lord, or hope to be part of the creative process, is to have the courage, the faith, to abandon control.

For the opposite of sin is faith, and never virtue [H. A. Williams], and we live in a world which believes that self-control can make us virtuous. But that's not how it works."

- Madeleine L'Engle, *Walking on Water*

Almost every night when I wake up the devil is there and wants to dispute with me. I have come to this conclusion: When the argument—that the Christian is without the law and above the law—doesn't help, I instantly chase him away with a fart...

- Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, vol 54 of Luther's Works, p. 78 (Thank you Baxter Kruger)