

Dear Friends and Family,

This week has been busy here at First Baptist! Our evenings are full of children and volunteers, music and snacks, as we share the Gospel of Christ with children through Vacation Bible School. Last night at VBS I asked the children "What is sin?" The kindergarteners yelled out examples. Lying, hitting, pinching and eating the last cookie were top responses. We came to the consensus that sin was *doing something wrong*. How true.

One definition of sin summarizes it well.

Sin is "*to miss the mark*".

"Sin" is actually an old archery word yelled out when the archer misses the bullseye of the target. This week, as you read and study through Romans 14, I'd like you to keep the following story in mind. You see, what Paul is calling us NOT to judge is one another's preferences in how we live out our faith. Some choose to eat, while others do not. Some choose to hold one day above another. Remember that Paul is addressing preferences. He affirms that we hold our brothers accountable to sin but not regarding preferences.

The great king called his first Lieutenant. "The strength of my army is in the archers," he said. "Go into the ranks and find those who do not know the bow and teach them, that my army may be strong to defend us against my enemies. On the new moon I will hold a contest to see your progress."

The Lieutenant knew that most of the foot soldiers were incapable of handling the bow. He did as the king commanded, but despised the king for asking him to do this thing.

He found twenty common soldiers and commanded them to appear before him for training the next day. He outfitted them with bows and quivers and lined them up. "Do you see the target before you?" he asked. Each nodded. Twenty paces in front of each man was the silhouette of an approaching warrior, black paint on a white cloth with a large red heart painted on the chest.

The Lieutenant raised his bow and shot three arrows at the target before him. The first went into the very center of the heart. The second pierced the cloth right beside the first and the third did the same.

"Shoot at the heart," he called, "and do not miss." The soldiers hesitated. None of them had handled a bow. They raised their weapons cautiously, drew the first arrow and shot at the target. Each missed.

To the ones whose arrows furrowed into the grass before the target, the Lieutenant yelled about how much it cost the kingdom to fletch arrows. For some, the arrows sailed over the straw bales and struck the stone wall behind the target. The Lieutenant cursed and berated them for breaking the tips. "Do you know how hard it is to sharpen and true an arrowhead?" he asked with a sneer. Others hit the stanchions that held the targets. "I told you not to do that," the Lieutenant yelled, "It warps the arrow shaft!"

Day after day, the Lieutenant berated the soldiers for their inability to hit the heart on the target. Day after day, their resentment grew and many would have quit, except they were soldiers and could not.

On the new moon, the king called the Lieutenant. "Show me your archers," he said. The Lieutenant began to make excuses. "They are lazy and incompetent, not fit for this noble task. I tried, but it is of no use. They continually do as I have told them not to do."

The king was angry. "Show me your archers," he demanded.

The king watched as one by one, each archer stood before him and tried to hit the target. In their fear of the Lieutenant and respect for the king, they failed. With much shame they made the same excuses as the Lieutenant, explaining how many things can go wrong and how hard archery is because of them.

The king called the Lieutenant and in his anger dismissed the Lieutenant from his service. Then the king called his son. "The strength of my army is in the archers," he said. "Go into the ranks and find all those who do not know the bow and teach them, that my army may be strong to defend against my enemies. On the new moon I will hold a contest to see your progress."

The Son knew that most of the foot soldiers would fail in handling the bow, but did as his father commanded out of joy that the king had asked him to do this thing.

He found twenty common soldiers and commanded them to appear before him for training the next day. He outfitted them with bows and quivers and lined them up. "Do you see the target before you?" he asked. Each nodded. Twenty paces in front of each man was the silhouette of an approaching warrior, black paint on a white cloth with a large red heart painted on the chest.

The Son raised his bow and shot three arrows. The first went into the very center of the heart. The second split the first from nock to tip and the third split the second in the same way.

"Shoot at the heart," he called, "and do not miss." The soldiers hesitated. None of them had ever handled a bow. They raised their weapons cautiously, drew their arrows and shot at the target. Each missed.

The son knew how long it had taken him to master the bow. He knew the pitfalls and the cost of warped shafts, dull tips and stripped fletchings. But he pulled the soldiers aside one by one. "Concentrate on the heart. Never lose this focus. You will lose fletchings. You will break shafts. You will dull the points of the arrows, but focus on the heart."

Day by day he watched his minions inch their way forward, concentrating on the painted red hearts of the approaching warriors. With each failure, the Son patiently offered instruction, teaching, and correction on their technique. When a soldier would become lazy or unfocused, he would rebuke them carefully, bringing them back to the focus on the heart.

On the new moon, the king called his Son. "Show me your archers," he said.

The king watched as one by one, each of the archers stood before him and tried to hit the target. They were afraid of the king and respected the Son, but each let

his arrows fly. Many hit their mark in the red heart. Many missed. With each miss, the Son would turn to his father and say, "They are learning, as I had to learn." The father would nod and smile. The last man was an excellent archer, consistently hitting the heart, but when he failed, the king noticed that his son was silent.

"How did you teach them?" The king asked when the contest was over.

"As you taught me," said the Son, "with great patience, much grace and a singular focus on the heart."

"The last man ..." observed the king, "You offered no defense when he failed."

The son looked down as if ashamed. "He is a talented archer, perhaps better than the others, but he resents using his talent to serve his king."

The king was angry. "Throw him out. He is not fit to serve. In the heat of battle, he will seek his own interest above mine. As for the others," the king smiled, "Put them all with my other archers. They have shown themselves worthy," he said.

Day 1: READ Romans 14:1-4

Contrast the teaching style of the Lieutenant vs the King's Son in the above story.

What does Paul say here about the strength of a person's faith?

Consider the archer at the end of the story who was gifted, yet did not have the King's interests in mind. Why is he important to notice? What does this teach us?

Day 2: READ Romans 14:5-9

Paul says that we must each be fully convinced in our own mind. Again, is he talking about major doctrinal issues?

What if we disagree that Jesus was born of a virgin as foretold in the Old Testament? Even if we are both fully convinced is that something Paul is instructing us we should just ignore?

Day 3: READ Romans 14:10-12

What judgement will we all stand before?

Given this context what will we be called to account for?

The beauty of the judgement is that we will be spared from the Great White Throne judgement when all those who are condemned will be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15). At this judgement, only those who are "dead" are judged according to their deeds. This is not physically dead, this is spiritually dead. We know this because of the context of Revelation 20 that "anyone's name not found written in the book of life" is judged according to their deeds.

We know that works cannot save us so this judgement is not one of salvation but one of condemnation.

As believers, we will stand before the Bema Seat of Christ and be judged based on our “Good Works”. This is what is spoken of directly here in Romans 14:10 as well as in 2 Corinthians 5:10. The account we will give is of our works for the Lord. This has nothing to do with our salvation, which was sealed by the blood of Christ, but our rewards in Heaven.

Day 4: READ Romans 14:13-23

Once again, context is key. Would Paul really say that nothing is unclean? (Romans 1:28-32).

Remember that there is a progression throughout this letter to the Romans. In chapters 1 and 2, Paul spoke of unbelievers. Yet here in chapter 14, Paul is speaking of brothers in the faith.

Read through this section and outline what we are called to do as brothers and sisters.

“The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *his eating is not from faith*; and whatever is not from faith is sin.” Romans 14:22-23

Reflect on this verse this week. Consider your own faith. Consider your convictions before God. Consider what you approve. Consider what you doubt. On what are these based? You are constantly inundated with information, true and untrue, from sources seeking to convince you, win you, and direct you. Instead, may your life, convictions, and approvals be based on the truth of Scripture, the unchanging word of God! For we know that *“Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.”* James 1:17

Your brother in Christ!

Pastor Matt

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**Dr. Matthew Long**

Senior Pastor

[FBC of Havelock](#)

*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us **RUN** with endurance the race that is set before us -- Hebrews 12:1*