

Romans 14

Paul is addressing a specific issue within the Roman congregation, namely passing judgment on fellow Christians when it comes to disputable matters. The first lesson to learn in living harmoniously with other Christians is to stop judging one another.

What did Paul mean by those whose faith is weak (v. 1)? Those whose faith was not strong enough to allow them to exercise the full liberty they had in Christ. Not weakness in basic Christian faith, but weakness in assurance that one's faith permits one to do certain things.¹

The "weak," appear to have been mainly Jewish Christians who refrained from certain foods, and observed certain days, because they remained loyal to the Mosaic Law. The weak in faith often have an overly sensitive conscience about doing things that are permissible for a Christian.² They still harbor the remnants of a legalistic spirit. They have not yet worked out the implications of the gospel. They have yet to comprehend the concept of grace.

How should this weak brother be treated (v. 1)? He should be accepted without passing judgment based on amoral (non-moral) matters.....something that is neither right nor wrong in and of itself. Spiritual maturity is not a requirement for fellowship.

What example does Paul use to illustrate his point (v. 2)? The weaker brother chose not to eat meat. For some reason this Christian believed that he would please God more by not eating meat than by eating it. He was wrong. God has not forbidden Christians from eating any food (1 Timothy 4:3-4). Eating food is an amoral matter. It is neither morally good nor morally bad; what we eat does not in itself affect our relationship with God.³

How should people of different views treat one another (v. 3)? The meat eater should not look down on the vegetarian with a condescending attitude. Nor should the vegetarian judge the carnivore as immoral, because God has accepted them both. If God has accepted them, so should they accept, and even welcome, one another.

How are people not to treat one another regarding these matters (v. 4)? Judging our brothers is inappropriate because we are not their masters. Each person stands or falls before their own Master, God. Paul isn't telling these Christians to *erase* their differences; he tells them to rise *above* them as Christian brothers and sisters.

What issue is raised in vv. 5-6? The importance of personal conviction in disputable matters of conduct (which are morally neutral). Each one should examine his own heart to make sure he is doing what the Lord would want him to do. We are accountable to the Lord and not to other Christians. Judging our brother is inappropriate because these are matters of conscience. These are not fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. They should not be allowed to become tests of fellowship.

What is the point Paul is making (vv. 7-8)? From beginning to end, people's lives are connected. Paul reminds the Roman Christians that "No man is an island." Even in death, the important thing is one's relationship with the Lord. The Lord should be the goal and object of the lives of His people. Both in life and death, we belong to Him.

For what purpose did Jesus live and die (v. 9)? So that He might be "Lord" of both those who have died ("the dead") and those who are still alive ("the living"). Paul's point was that He is the Judge, and we are not.⁴ His lordship began at salvation and continues even in death.

Why we should not judge or show contempt for one another (v. 10)? It is inappropriate and unwarranted because we will all answer to the ultimate judge when we stand before God's judgment seat.

What do we learn regarding the Judgment Day (vv. 11-12)? All will have to bow in judgment before God in humility and give account of himself/herself before God. If this is the case, we should let God deal with our brother.

The issue of the believer's eternal destiny is not in question here. That issue was settled at the moment of salvation when the believer placed his faith in Christ. Rather, each believer's life will be reviewed and he/she will be rewarded for what they have done at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10).

What should we resolve to do (v. 13)? The Greek word translated "obstacle" or "stumbling block" refers to an object on a path against which someone strikes his foot and consequently stumbles or falls (1 Corinthians 8:9). The

stronger brother's liberty might retard the weaker brother's progress as he walks the Christian path. It might set him back temporarily, or even do permanent damage to his sensitive conscience (Matthew 18:6-7; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:1-2).⁵

How does the reference to "unclean" fit the discussion in the context (v. 14)? Paul knew that there was nothing intrinsically unclean about meat that was not kosher or sacrificed to an idol. Yet there was *nothing* that could justify the destruction of a Christian brother over food.

What point is Paul making (v. 15)? If your behavior regarding amoral things is creating spiritual problems for another Christian, then your conduct is not loving (12:10). The issue now is not my personal liberty; the issue is walking in love toward one whom Jesus loves and died for. If Jesus was willing to give up His life for the sake of that brother, I can certainly forego my liberty in Christ and give up my lobster dinner.

What may result if we do not follow the principles taught here (v. 16)? Our liberty in Jesus and freedom from the law is good, but not if we use it to destroy another brother in Christ. If we do that, then it could rightly be spoken of as evil and give occasion to others to condemn us for our loose morals.

What does the kingdom consist of (v. 17)? Righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit which are the essentials of Christian fellowship and harmony.

What does the kingdom not consist of? The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking. **What is the point?** If we place food and drink before righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, then we are hopelessly out of touch with God's priorities and His heart. What really counts is not dietary regulations but spiritual realities.

What really matters (v. 18)? Serving God with a heart for His righteousness, peace, and joy is the kind of service that is acceptable in His sight, and will also win the approval of men.

What two things should we pursue (v. 19)? The things that lead to peace and mutual edification. Such as those things which build one another up as opposed to tearing one another down. **What might be some examples?**

What does Paul mean when he says "Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food" (v. 20)? God is doing a work in the life of each of His children. If eating or drinking something will cause a brother to stumble, even if we have the personal liberty to do so, we are not free to eat or drink in that circumstance. While freedom is a right, it is not a guide for conduct. Love is our guide for conduct. Rights are to be laid aside in the interest of love.⁶

What conclusion does Paul reach (v. 21)? Don't do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. People willingly alter their pace of walking while leading a small child by the hand so the child will not stumble. How much more should we be willing to alter our Christian walk for the benefit of a weaker brother or sister in Christ whom we are leading (1 Corinthians 8:9; 10:23)?⁷

How does v. 22 relate to the theme of the chapter? If you have strong faith and feel the liberty to partake of certain things, praise God! But have your strong faith before God, not before a brother who will stumble. Do not condemn yourself based on what you approve.

What conclusion should be reached about one who doubts (v. 23)? If a person does what he believes to be wrong (has "doubts"), even though it is not wrong in itself, it becomes "sin" for him. He has violated what he believes to be God's will. His action has become an act of rebellion against God for him.⁸ Paul's bottom line is: if we can't do it in faith, then it is sin.⁸

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Romans, 2017 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), p. 195

² Ibid. p. 196

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. p. 197

⁵ Ibid. p. 199

⁶ Ibid. p. 201

⁷ Ibid. p. 202

⁸ Ibid.