

# Romans

## Chapter 14

### II. Practical Godliness - Part 4

Romans chapter 14:1 through 15:13 form the last part of the practical section of the book. Chapter 15:14 through 16 are filled with personal greetings and various closing remarks and as such form the conclusion of the book. However, we should be careful not to minimize this last section just because it falls at the end. It is filled with many practical truths that, if lived, will enable us to live and work harmoniously in the Church of our Lord. This section divides itself up into two major sections. In Romans 14 we find Paul's teaching on doubtful things, and Romans 15:1-13 is a call to unity and love.

#### G. Doubtful Things - Romans 14:1-23

If any of us have been Christians very long, we can all think of some things in the area of conduct and actions that the Bible has nothing to say regarding. For example, dancing, various forms of modern entertainment, total abstinence from alcoholic beverages, and others. Whenever some of these topics are raised, immediately people react in a negative and censorious manner condemning even the thought of doing such things. Others merely shrug their shoulders in indifference. It is to these issues that we find answers in this chapter of Romans. Paul lays down the general command to all believers regarding unity in verse 1, addresses the weaker Christians instructing them regarding judgmentalism, and then addresses the stronger Christians regarding the care and understanding of the weaker brethren.

##### 1. The General Call to Unity - Romans 14:1

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

The particular issue that Paul is really talking about in this chapter is the issue of doubtful things, particularly, the issue of meat offered to idols. It was the custom in those days for the priests of the pagan temples to take the meat and vegetables offered to the gods down to the market after they had taken the portion that they desired. In this way they kept from wasting the meat as well as made some money on the side. For the stronger Christians, that is, those who were aware of the liberties they had in Christ, eating meat offered to idols was no big deal since the idols were dead anyway. However, many weaker Christians were quite offended to eat meat offered to idols since they may have been recently converted from a background of paganism. For them to eat this meat would defile their consciences and cause them to sin. Therefore, this particular issue was no small matter to be swept under the rug, but one that must be dealt with from both sides. It is Paul's point in these 23 verses to show that it is not wrong to eat the meat, but the stronger Christian must defer to the weaker for the sake of the body. In this passage, as well as the one in 1 Corinthians 8, the weaker Christians are always the ones that do not understand their liberty in Christ. The stronger Christians, on the other hand, are the ones who understand their liberty, but are willing to sacrifice it to help the weaker brethren.

The command given in verse 1 is succinct and to the point. We are to receive all weak believers with open arms into the Church without being argumentative. This is a very important issue since there are two major things that will destroy a Church, sin and disharmony. Satan knows that if he can get a Church involved in deep sin or can cause that Church to experience bickering and divisions, he has won a major battle. Unfortunately, we all too often give Satan a hand by being censorious or snooty about many issues that matter very little in the eternal scheme of things. Those issues that cause division and disharmony are to be avoided unless they fall into the area of moral truths. For example, the issue of playing cards is not an issue of moral truth whereas the toleration of adultery in the Church is. Sin must be dealt with, and dealt with firmly. However, petty issues of preference should be avoided for the sake of unity and harmony.

## 2. Instructions to the Weaker Christians - Romans 14:2-12

Paul turns his attention first to the weaker Christian. He makes four specific points in these eleven verses regarding the error of judgmentalism: 1) the Lord receives all believers, 2) the Lord empowers all believers, 3) the Lord is sovereign over all believers, and 4) the Lord will judge all believers himself.

### a. The Lord Receives All Believers - Romans 14:2-3

**14:2 For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. 14:3 Let 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.**

Paul's first point is that God has received all believers regardless of their dietary preferences. Extending this idea to our time, the Lord receives all Christians regardless of their tastes and preferences in the area of doubtful things. Paul's emphasis in saying this is that it is not right for us to criticize and condemn others when God does not condemn and criticize them. When our Lord ministered on earth, there was an incident where the disciples told him about a man they forbade to cast out demons because that man did not happen to be in the same group as the disciples. Jesus rebuked this attitude by telling them that anyone that was for them was not against them. It is too easy for us to condemn those outside of our little group for not doing things "the orthodox way". Paul's rebuke in these two verses is sharp and to the point. One, don't you who eat look down on those that eat not, and don't you who eat not despise those who do. Diet is a matter of preference, not morality.

### b. The Lord Empowers All Believers - Romans 14:4

**14:4 Who 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.**

Secondly, not only does the Lord receive all believers regardless of their preferences and tastes, but he empowers all believers to do the work for which he has called them. We are all servants of the Lord,

and as a result we are not in a place to evaluate one another's tastes in the area of doubtful things. Just like you would not be expected to live up to the expectations of someone who was not your boss, even so we should not be expected to live up to expectations of those who are not our "spiritual" boss. That does not mean we are not to be sensitive to other's feelings (that is in the last part of this chapter), but it does mean we are accountable to the Lord for ourselves. God empowers all believers to fulfill the task to which he called them, and it is him alone who has the right to evaluate the purity of that service.

c. **The Lord is Sovereign Over All Believers - Romans 14:5-9**

**14:5 One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. 14:6 He 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. 14:7 For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. 14:8 For 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. 14:9 For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.**

The third point Paul makes to the weaker Christian is that all believers serve the Lord regardless of their preference. In other words, preferences in the area of doubtful things does not remove or lessen the responsibility each believer has to please his sovereign Lord. In verses 5 and 6a, Paul uses the area of observance of days. There are some Christians who view Sunday as a holy day and frown on any activity that results in laughter or gaiety on that day. Other Christians view Sunday as a day in which to unwind and enjoy God. To them, the idea of a Sunday without laughter and joy is unthinkable. Which one is right? Both are! The one who views Sunday in a restricted sense does so because he feels that it pleases the Lord for him to do so. The one who views the day in a more unrestricted sense does so because he feels it pleases the Lord. Both desire to please the Lord, so both are right. It is just a matter of individual preference and taste. Paul's point, however, is that neither one has a right to criticize and condemn the other. In verse 6b we find the same argument applied to food. Those that eat the meat offered to idols do so realizing that an idol is nothing and everything is to be received from the Lord in thanksgiving. Those who do not eat do so to abstain from the very appearance of evil. Both desire, and do, please the Lord, and therefore neither has a right to condemn the other.

In verses 7 to 9 we find the reason for this attitude, namely the sovereignty of the Lord in the life of the believer. All that happens to the believer is the result of God's sovereign design. If we live, we are to live for God. If we die, we are to die for him. Either way, we belong to God and therefore have a responsibility to submit to his authority in our lives. Verse 9 says that we were purchased with the death of Christ on the cross. He is sovereign not only because he is God, but

because he redeemed us with his blood. Who are we to condemn one another?

d. **The Lord Will Judge All Believers - Romans 14:10-12**

**14:10 But 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. 14:11 For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. 14:12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.**

Paul's final point is probably the strongest of all. We are not to judge one another since it is ultimately Christ before whom we will stand and give an account. We are to operate under the realization that criticism from others means little since it is Christ whom we must please. Paul had this same attitude in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 in which he stated that it was a small thing for him to be judged by the Corinthians, or even himself, since Christ is the ultimate judge. We need concern ourselves with pleasing only one person, Christ. Because of this, we are to refrain from condemning others in the area of doubtful things. However, in areas of morality and holiness, we are to judge one another, and as a result, restore one another (Galatians 6:1-3).

**Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.**

3. **Instructions to the Stronger Christians - Romans 14:13-21**

Paul now turns his attention to the stronger Christian in the remainder of this chapter. It is easy for a Christian who understands his liberty to run roughshod over the weaker believer. This attitude, however, does not promote unity and harmony, but division and discord. In these eleven verses Paul gives five reasons for limiting our liberty: 1) we should not cause others to stumble, 2) we should not hurt one another, 3) we should not forfeit our testimony, 4) we should not destroy the work of God, and 5) we should not flaunt our liberty in Christ.

a. **We Should Not Cause Another to Stumble - Romans 14:13**

**14:13 Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.**

The first reason we need to limit our liberty and refrain from a critical attitude to weaker Christians is that we should not want that weaker

brother to be offended, and as a result, stumble. Perhaps an illustration would make this easy to understand.

Suppose there is a new believer in the Church who has just been saved out of a background of alcoholism. For years this person has been a slave of the bottle and as a result of God's grace has recently found deliverance. However, just because this person has been delivered from this sin does not necessarily mean they have obtained complete mastery over it. What will happen to this believer if he is encouraged to partake in communion in which real wine is used? What happens if he is visiting the home of another believer whom he looks up to, and finds that this other believer has some wine stored in his refrigerator for social occasions? What could happen, is the weaker Christian thus exposed to his previous lifestyle, could be tempted and as a result fall into sin. The whole idea here is not is alcohol right, but is it right to create a situation in which a weaker brother could be ensnared by temptation? The answer to this question is obviously no! This is Paul's point. We need to be very careful to not create situations in which weaker believers could be tempted to sin. If we do so, we sin.

**b. We Should Not Hurt Our Fellow Believers - Romans 14:14-15**

**14:14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 14:15 But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.**

The second reason we need to defer our liberty is for the sake of our love for one another. Our attitude towards fellow believers should be one of such love that we go out of our way in order to not offend him. Now we know that it is not possible to offend no one. However, as much as we are able to, we need to be sensitive to others and refrain from activities that cause offense.

Perhaps the best example of this point would be that of the meat offered to idols. Paul himself states in verse 14 that nothing is unclean in and of itself. On the basis of this statement alone we can infer, correctly, that eating meat that has been first offered to an idol is not sinful. However, there are undoubtedly those Christians who would view this as being extremely offensive. If they were to see us eating this meat, they would become very distraught. If we, as strong believers, find that this is the case, then we are to refrain from eating that meat in deference to their conscience. This is what verse 15 states. If our brother is offended, we are not acting in love if we continue to eat. Instead of doing that, we should refrain from eating so that he is not ruined. The word "destroy" in verse 15 is *apollomi* and often carries the idea of ruining. We are to ruin one another because of meat.

**c. We Should Not Forfeit Our Witness - Romans 14:16-19**

**14:16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of: 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. 14:18 For he that in these**

**things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. 14:19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.**

The third great reason we need to limit our liberty is that we might maintain our witness to others. It is hardly a testimony to the greatness of God if we cause division and discord over something like meat!

In verses 16 Paul tells us to make sure that our good is not evil spoken of. The word “good” is “agathos” and refers to the liberty we have in Christ and all the good that goes along with that. The liberty that we have in Christ is something that we cannot fully appreciate since we live under grace and not law. However, the message of liberty to the average first-century Jewish convert was something that sounded like licentiousness. To be told that the Old Testament dietary laws are no longer binding would be very difficult to believe. It is for this very reason that those who understand this liberty need to refrain themselves from using it lest the weaker Christian be offended. The reason for this is in verse 17, **“the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”** When someone thinks of the kingdom of God, they should not think of the liberty to eat meat and all that entails, but they should think of righteousness and peace and joy. Christ did not come to loose men from the bondage of the dietary laws of the Old Testament, he came to free men from sin. This is where our emphasis should be. Instead of stressing our liberty in Christ, we need to stress the righteousness of the kingdom. This is the real purpose for which we are called.

Note that in verse 18 this is the way in which we please God. God is pleased when we uphold holiness, peace, and joy to the world, not liberty in the area of doubtful things. Paul is making a contrast in our attitude. It is true that our liberty in Christ is a precious thing, but that is not the reason we are Christians. Instead of emphasizing doubtful things, let us follow after those things that build up one another. When we do this, then we truly please God and manifest ourselves as members of his kingdom.

**d. We Should Not Destroy the Work of God - Romans 14:20-21**

**14:20 For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. 14:21 It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.**

The fourth reason to limit our liberty is so that we do not destroy the work of God. The redeemed Church cost Christ his blood on the cross. To sacrifice that on account of a doubtful thing should be unthinkable. In Ephesians 2:20-21 we find Paul using the metaphor of a building to describe the Church. He states that all the redeemed are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets and grow together for a habitation of God. However, when we exercise our liberty without thought for one another, we break down the unity of the Spirit and cause division in the building of God. We do not have to create unity, we have to stop creating division.

In verse 21 Paul sums up our attitude towards others. If our liberty causes a brother to stumble, that is fall into temptation and sin, or if it causes our brother to be offended, or it causes him to be weakened in the faith, we are to refrain from that. To exercise our liberty in such cases is sin.

e. **We Should Not Flaunt Our Liberty - Romans 14:22-23**

**14:22 Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. 14:23 And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.**

The last reason we should limit our liberty is that our liberty is not something to be flaunted. Our liberty in Christ is too precious and costly to be treated cheaply.

In verse 22 Paul tells us that if we have liberty, then we should exercise that before God to the hilt. We can stand before God and praise him for being delivered from the bondage of ceremonialism and ritualism. However, we should conduct ourselves with restraint when we deal with a weaker brother. Some of those things we find perfectly all right he would find sinful. Verse 23 gives us a definitive statement regarding the sinfulness of violating our conscience. The principle is this, if we violate our conscience by exercising liberty in a doubtful area, we cause ourself to sin. We should never, under any circumstance, violate our conscience. If we do that, there will come a time when our conscience will not warn us when we encroach on sin. If something “feels” wrong to us, even if it is a doubtful thing, we should refrain until such time as we have grown in our liberty. We need to maintain a pure conscience before God because, as verse 23 states, “**whatsoever is not of faith is sin**”.