

Romans 14 (NLT) (Part 1)

INTRODUCTION

Before we begin our study of Romans 14 let me give you some background information. Paul was trying to straighten out some misunderstandings in the Christian Church at Rome. We have to understand the situation Paul was addressing so that we can really get the meaning of this text.

The church in Rome was comprised of a diverse group of individuals. Before coming to faith in Christ some of the church members followed the Jewish religion. Other members of the church had no religious background. I will refer to the Jews who were born again through faith in Jesus Christ as Jewish Christians. I will refer to those with no religious and no Jewish background who were born again as Gentile Christians.

Growing up under the Jewish Faith and teachings the Jewish Christians were accustomed to very strict dietary laws. They were forbidden to eat foods such as pork or shellfish. Their meat had to be processed using a specific method under the supervision of a priest. The food markets in Rome did not process meat according to the Jewish custom. Therefore the meat was considered unclean by Old Testament standards. More troubling to the Jewish Christian was the fact that the meat in Rome was dedicated to idols. Given how carefully the Jews handled their food it was difficult for the Jewish Christian to ignore the way the meat in Rome was processed.

The gentile Christian had no problem eating the meat from Rome. They would simply pray and bless the food and trust the Lord to make it clean. Cultural differences like this between the Jewish and the Gentile Christian had the potential to bring division and arguments into the church.

Let's look at some other issues that were potentially divisive to the church in Rome.

In the Old Testament the Jews were instructed to hold religious festivals on certain days of the year. Each of these festivals pointed in some way to the future work of Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus came and fulfilled these festivals rendering them no longer necessary. But many Jewish Christians wanted to continue to observe these special days to honor the messiah.

The Gentile Christians in the Roman church had no connection to the holy days. When the holy day came about the Jewish Christians felt right at home while the Gentile Christians felt like outsiders.

Let's look at a third issue that will come up in our text. It had to do with the wine sold in the Roman markets. Most Jews served table wine in their homes. Wine was commonplace in the Jewish culture. But the wine in Rome was poured over statues to worship idols and spirits. This type of idol worship is called a libation. The Jewish Christians felt very uncomfortable drinking wine that was dedicated to idols.

Therefore many of them skipped the wine. They also skipped the meat and ate only vegetables. They did not have the faith to consume the meat and wine from the Roman markets. Because they did not have the faith to eat the Roman meat and wine this passage refers to those who abstained as the *weak in faith*. With that said, let's start working our way through chapter 14.

Verses 1-3 Title: STOP JUDGING ONE ANOTHER

A good title for verses 1 through 3 would be "stop judging one another."

¹Accept other believers who are weak in faith,

Accept can also mean receive or welcome. Think about a person whom you consider to be weaker in the faith than you are. Now think about

your attitude toward that person. Have you given any evidence to that person that you truly welcome them and you are glad that God has led them into this church or into your life? You don't have to agree with that person on everything. You don't have to approve of everything that person does. You might want them to change before you show them love and approval. After all, you don't want to condone their sin.

But here is how it works in the love economy of the Lord. Jesus Christ showed us love and grace before we changed. Before we ever got it right Christ died for us. Therefore we must sincerely love people before they change. If you have not taken the time to love a person and reach out to them, then you have not earned the right to correct that person about anything. Also, when you show love to a person that has problems they will open up to you and you will be able to help them work through their issues. If you want someone to change, then get it started by showing them love and inviting them into your life.

and don't argue with them about (*disputable matters NIV*) what they think is right or wrong. ²For instance, one person believes it's all right to eat anything. But another believer with a sensitive conscience will eat only vegetables. ³Those who feel free to eat anything must not look down on those who don't.

In verse one Paul tells the strong in faith to stop arguing with those who do not feel comfortable consuming meat and wine dedicated to idols. Apparently some people were trying to talk the Jewish Christians into eating things that made them uncomfortable. They did not respect the position of those who abstained.

The things they were arguing about are called "disputable matters". People often argue about disputable matters. One example I can think of in

our culture is the moderate use of alcohol. Some Christians have no problem drinking alcohol in moderation while other Christians would have a big problem with it. Let's say you are a recovering alcoholic and a husband and wife invite you over for dinner. As you sit down at the table you notice wine glasses on the table. You also notice a bottle of red wine. As you sit down the husband pops the cork on the bottle, and reaches over to fill your glass. You hold up your hand and say; "no thank you." The couple looks indignant. They tell you that the bible says it is fine to drink in moderation and they continue to put pressure on you. But they do not know that it took you four tries and seven years to finally get off the booze. They do not know that for you one drink might lead to many more.

If you have the liberty to have wine with your meal, you cannot look down on those who abstain. There are probably really good reasons why they don't feel comfortable having wine. Some have lost their sons or daughter to drunk drivers. Others have struggled in the past with alcohol; so don't get down on those who have a problem with it. The next part of our text gives us the other side of the issue.

And those who don't eat certain foods must not condemn those who do, for God has accepted them.

ENOUGH RULES TO GO AROUND

Paul tells the Jewish Christian that they better not try to take their problem with eating certain meats and drinking wine and make a hard fast rule for everyone. It is tempting to look down on those who don't have the same habits as us.

In our culture if we believe we should never touch a drop of alcohol or never play cards or never listen to country music we have to realize that the bible calls us the weaker brother or sister. We are the weaker brother or

sister because we don't have the faith or control to do these things in moderation. We cannot make up rules that are not in the bible.

You might bring up the passage that says; we should not do anything that will cause our brother to stumble. That is true, but we have to keep that passage in context. Doing things that will cause someone to stumble is talking about how members of the church treat one another. This is about our relationships with one another. It is about treating one another with respect when we come down on different sides of a disputable issue. It is not about finding out through gossip that someone had wine with his or her lunch. If that is what the passage is about then Jesus caused people to stumble. He created strong wine at a wedding.

With that said, there are some things that we cannot allow. Murder, or adultery drunkenness among members of the church must be confronted. But when we treat every difference of opinion like we would treat murder or witchcraft, then we have lost our message and our heart.

VERSES 4-9 Title: SLAVES OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

Verses 4 through 9 could be titled Slaves of The Lord Jesus Christ. No one will answer to you or to me on the judgment day. We belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. We were purchased by the price of his blood and his cross. Sometimes when we get a judgmental attitude we get the idea that people have to answer to us. In disputable matters we cast doubt on the salvation of people when in fact we might be the weaker brother or sister.

⁴Who are you to condemn someone else's servants? They are responsible to the Lord, so let him judge whether they are right or wrong. And with the Lord's help, they will do what is right and will receive his approval.

Remember we are talking about disputable matters. If I use the New American Standard Version and someone else uses the New International Version or the King James, I better not condemn that person. The word condemn means that we treat people with a difference of opinion over disputable matters just like we would treat someone who is not a believer and who is condemned to eternity in hell. Yet that is the way we often treat those with whom we disagree.

⁵In the same way, some think one day is more holy than another day, while others think every day is alike. You should each be fully convinced that whichever day you choose is acceptable. ⁶Those who worship the Lord on a special day do it to honor him.

My mother attends a messianic church. She really believes that people should worship the Lord on the Sabbath, which is Saturday. She believes the Ten Commandments are in effect until the return of the Lord. The Ten Commandments tell us to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.

To honor the Lord Jesus Christ some of the early churches moved their weekly worship service to Sunday, the day Jesus Christ rose from the dead. The book of Hebrews tells us that it is still commanded that we meet together for fellowship. So I believe that the Sabbath command is still in effect but that it is ok to worship on Sunday rather than Saturday.

Should I try to talk my mother out of worshipping on Saturday? This text tells me to leave it alone and to accept her as a fellow believer. This is a disputable matter. What is not disputable is to set aside one day.

Those who eat any kind of food do so to honor the Lord, since they give thanks to God before eating. And those who refuse to eat certain foods also want to please the Lord and give thanks to God.

The problem is that each group is not seeing the heart or motives of the other. They are not taking the time to see things from the others perspective. Both groups love the Lord but they express it in a different way. Let's look at a modern day example.

Those who love hymns love them for their theological message and they grew up with those worship tunes in their minds. It is what God has used to bring them close to Jesus. Yet some who love contemporary music look down on those who love traditional music and think that they are just being obstinate and are afraid of change.

Then there are those who prefer traditional music. And because of their personal preference they find things to criticize about contemporary music even when the words of a contemporary song are straight from the scripture. Each group is singing to God in a different way. Many times disputable matters like this are too difficult for so called grown up Christians to deal with in love and respect. These are the type of issues that we have to work through in the modern church giving equal respect and honor to one another.

⁷For we don't live for ourselves or die for ourselves.

We do not live in a vacuum. Every thing we do affects other people. If our so-called freedom in Christ is causing harm or confusion for others then we are not living as though we owe the debt of love spoken about in chapter 13.

⁸If we live, it's to honor the Lord. And if we die, it's to honor the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

We are talking about matters of life and death. Life and death and seeing people go to heaven are more important than getting our way about

disputable matters. We are here for Jesus Christ to do everything that will point out his glory and encourage and strengthen other Christians.

If we come down on the other side of a disputable matter are we treating others like they belong to the Lord as much as we do? Belonging to the Lord must be our main focus. Everything else pales in importance.

⁹Christ died and rose again for this very purpose—to be Lord both of the living and of the dead.

Christ died to deliver us from judgment. For any believer to claim to have the authority to tell others how they should think or act in disputable matters is to usurp the position that Christ alone holds.

TAKING IT HOME

1. Did you realize that if you don't feel comfortable playing cards, or having a glass of wine the bible calls you the weaker brother or sister? With that in mind, are you respecting those who come down on the other side of what the bible calls disputable issues?
2. If people are struggling with real sin issues, what are you doing to reach out to them in love so that you can earn the right to help them with their struggles?