



Love Takes Precedence Over Liberty Romans 14

Introduction

In these last chapters of Romans, Paul is applying the truths of the gospel to everyday life. In chapter 12, he wrote, *do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind* (12:1). Christians are not to allow themselves to be squeezed into the mold of secular society. Christians are to live lives that are holy and acceptable to God. Christ has died for us, redeeming us from slavery to sin and propitiating God's wrath against us (Romans 3:24-25). We are now *dead indeed to sin and alive to God* (Romans 6:11). The Holy Spirit dwells in us, enabling us to put to death the deeds of the body (Romans 8:13) and giving us firm assurance of our salvation (Romans 8:16). Christians are new men and women in Christ and we have a new way of living. Paul has been explaining in chapters 12 and 13 what the new way of living looks like: we humbly serve God and the body of Christ with gifts He has given us by His grace (12:3-8); we are genuine, loving people who overcome evil with good (12:9-21); we submit to civil authority (13:1-7); we show love to our neighbors in practical ways (13:8-10); we are not apathetic or lazy. Considering all that God has done for us, and looking ahead to the glory which is to come, we behave like the blessed and holy people we are; we live in the light of God's love. We live for Him and not for ourselves (13:11-14).

In Romans 14, Paul turns his attention to relationships between believers. As God's beloved children, we need to live in a way that glorifies Him and uplifts and unites our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is not always easy. Christians are all different. "The church was never meant to be a cozy club of like-minded people of one race or social position or intellectual caliber" (The Epistle to the Romans, Leon Morris). The church is composed of men and women who are different ages, races, and levels of spiritual maturity. We have diverse backgrounds, social standings, political views, education, attitudes, and personalities. This means that there will be differences of opinion and people will be divided. But we need to learn to get along and love one another. We all love the Lord Jesus and that is the basis of all relationships within the church. If we love the Lord, we have no right to judge or despise our fellow Christians. Our aim is peace and building one another up in faith.

Romans 14 is a call to unity in the church. Paul gives instruction to both the more mature believers, those

who felt free to exercise their liberty in Christ, and the less mature believers who did not yet have that freedom of faith. The more mature believers were apt to look down on the less mature who still put themselves under ceremonial requirements or other trappings of legalism. The less mature were judgmental of those who exercised freedom. It was a question of Christian liberty and conscience, and the answer is always love. Yes, Christians have freedom in Christ, but when issues arise and the good of our fellow believers is concerned, we are to defer to them in love.

Outline of Romans 14

- I. Do Not Judge Your Brother - Romans 14:1-12
- II. Do Not Cause Your Brother to Stumble - Romans 14:13-23

I. Do Not Judge Your Brother - Romans 14:1-12

Christians are not to judge one another. We are all servants of God, all serving Him in faith, and one day we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account for ourselves. We are not called to judge and criticize others for whom Christ died.

- A. Respect the opinions of others - Romans 14:1-8

Paul addresses the more mature believers. This probably means that they were in the majority. He calls them to, *receive one who is weak in faith* (14:1). The Greek word translated *receive* means literally "keep on taking to yourself". The more mature believers were to accept the weaker believers in love and not pass judgment on their opinions. They were not to look down on them or treat them as inferior, but to accept, and keep on accepting, them as equal members of the fellowship.

The term *weak in faith* does not mean weak in the Christian faith. It means being weak in the confidence that faith allows certain liberties. The *weak in faith* did not understand that when a person is justified by faith in Christ, things like food, drink, and ceremonial rites are not important. Some of the Gentiles who came to Christ found the pagan society from which they had come so offensive that they turned away from it completely, even to the point of giving up eating meat or drinking wine. Also, there were Jewish converts who clung to the law of Moses and continued to observe the Jewish dietary laws, the Sabbath, and special feast

days. People in the first century who came to Christ brought baggage from their former lives, just as many of us do today. There were differences of opinion then, as there are now, and these differences can raise issues of contention.

1. The question of eating - 14:2-4

One of the major differences of opinion was food. The more mature believers were convinced that their faith permitted them to eat anything. But the weak in faith ate only vegetables. The less mature Jewish believers kept to the strict dietary laws of Leviticus 11. The less mature Gentiles may have been concerned about eating meat which had been sacrificed to an idol, an issue which Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 8:4-13.

- a. *Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats* - 14:3

The meat eaters, as the majority, would have a tendency to look down on those who did not eat meat and fail to take them seriously. On the other hand, the minority non-meat eaters would tend to be critical and condemn those who did eat meat. Paul issues his warning to both sides. Each side was to be tolerant of the other.

- b. *For God has received him* - 14:3

Neither side was to judge the other because God has accepted them both. He has not passed judgment, but has welcomed them into the fellowship of believers.

- c. Do not be presumptuous - 14:4

Who are you to judge another's servant? Only the master has the right to judge. Servants are not to judge one another. As Christians, our master is God, and we are to leave the judging to Him. It is the Master's opinion that counts, not the servant's. Furthermore, God is concerned and will defend your fellow servant and *make him stand*, meaning that He will acquit and save him. R.C. Sproul sums up this passage: "You refrain from your meat to the glory of Christ; I will eat my meat to the glory of Christ. We both belong to Christ and we will let Christ make the decision. We are not supposed to fight with each other over it" (The Gospel of God, Romans).

2. The question of days - 14:5-8

Another difference between the mature and immature believers had to do with days, probably referring to ceremonial days as described in Galatians 4:9-10 and Colossians 2:16. Some Jewish Christians wanted to continue to keep all the Jewish holy days which were meaningless to the Gentile Christians.

- a. *Let each be fully convinced in his own mind* - 14:5

As our minds are renewed (Romans 12:2) by exposure to God's word, our minds instruct our consciences and we are to live (be transformed) in accordance to what our conscience tells us. The mature and the immature are each to live according to their conscience and not place demands on the other.

- b. Whatever we do, we do as unto the Lord, for *we are the Lord's* - 14:6-8

In this passage, the stress is on the Lord. The important thing is that those who observe days do not do it for their own pleasure, convenience, or edification but to serve the Lord and honor Him. The same is true with eating. Whether one eats meat or vegetables, both give thanks to the Lord.

Christians do not live for their own personal gratification but to do the will of God. Whether we live or die, it is God, not self, that is important. We are the Lord's both in life and in death.

B. Reasons for not judging - Romans 14:9-12

Paul has warned against judging. He has shown that in matters such as eating and observing days, matters that are morally neutral and where God has made no specific prohibition or command, Christians are to be tolerant of those with different views. Paul proceeds to give the reasons for not judging.

1. Christ is Lord and Judge - 14:9-11

Christ died and rose again from the dead as Lord of both the living and dead. He is Lord, so we should not judge one another as though we were Lord. We are all brothers and sisters under Christ who is the Lord and Judge.

Both mature and less mature believers serve Christ in whatever they do, so they should not despise or judge one another. Christ will one day judge all, the eater and the non-eater, the day-keeper and the non-day keeper. So our judgments of one another are irrelevant. Each one will have to give account to Christ and not to any other person. It is His verdict that is important, not ours. See Romans 2:16; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:8.

As was his custom, Paul quotes from the Old Testament Scriptures to confirm what he has written. He uses Isaiah 45:23 to confirm Christ as Lord and Judge and to bring his readers to submit humbly to the judgment of Christ. *As I live, says the Lord* is an oath which enforces the importance and certainty of the words which follow,

Every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God (14:11, NASB).

2. *Each of us shall give account of himself to God - 14:12*

On the Day of Judgment, each and every believer (us) will give an account of himself or herself before God. Jesus said that we will give an account for *every careless word* that we speak (Matthew 12:36). Whatever we sow, we will reap (Galatians 6:7); it is from the Lord that we will receive our reward, and those who have done wrong will receive the consequences, with no partiality (Colossians 3:24-25).

"As we shall be called to so fearful an account with God, we should not be engaged in condemning our brethren, but should examine whether we are prepared to give our account with joy, and not with grief" (Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, Albert Barnes).

II. Do Not Cause Your Brother to Stumble - Romans 14:13-23

Paul has shown how Christians are to act in regard to the convictions of other believers. We are not to judge one another. Now he talks about how a Christian's convictions and actions may affect others, and how we are to act in relation to one another. "For all its popularity among some Christians, judgment of others is an activity from which believers do well to abstain" (The Epistle to the Romans, Leon Morris).

A. Act in love - Romans 14:13-15

A Christian is never to put a stumbling block or any obstacle in the way of any other believer. Each of us should judge our own actions and consider how they will affect others. One Christian should never cause another to go against his or her conscience or to do something that would lead to sin.

1. *Resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way - 14:13*

Jesus also warned against stumbling blocks and hurting others: *Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes* (Matthew 18:7). See also Mark 9:42 and Luke 17:1-2).

2. *There is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean - 14:14*

Paul is *convinced by the Lord Jesus* that what he writes is true. He has no doubts. His relationship with Christ

makes him absolutely certain that nothing is unclean, (See Acts 10:15) unless a person thinks it is unclean. Then it is unclean for him, but only because he believes it is unclean. It is a matter of conscience.

3. *Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died - 14:15*

To allow food to be a stumbling block (14:13) is not love. The one who thinks it is all right to eat anything should put aside this freedom for the sake of a brother who may be hurt by it. Christians are never to allow their freedom to cause a brother or sister in Christ to stumble. Paul addresses a similar problem in his first letter to the Corinthians (8:9-13). *Beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.*

Food is not the important thing, so a Christian should be willing to give up his or her freedom in eating for the sake of a fellow Christian and for love. Love, not food, is the standard. Christ died for your Christian brother and sister. How unlike Christ it would be to do what is harmful for him (or her).

B. Serve Christ - Romans 14:16-18

Rather than pursuing liberty, concentrate upon serving Christ.

1. *Do not let your good be spoken of as evil - 14:16*

To insist on one's liberty at the expense of other believers might cause what is good to be blasphemed as evil. *Your good* may refer to one's Christian liberty. Others might see your liberty as self-indulgence and not freedom in Christ, thus speaking of it as evil. Alternatively, *your good* may refer to the gospel; Martin Luther believed it is *what you are in God and what you have from God*. In that case, the gospel may be criticized by nonbelievers who see your insistence upon liberty as lack of love in the church.

2. *The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit - 14:17*

Issues of individual freedom are not the essence of the kingdom of God. The essential things are righteousness,

peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. These are the things a true believer holds dear, not forcing one's lifestyle on other believers.

a. *Righteousness* - 14:17

Righteousness is our right standing before God. Righteousness comes from God and is found in Jesus Christ. See 1 Corinthians 1:30 and Philippians 3:9. Righteousness should distinguish a Christian's way of life in the world. Judaism was distinct because of the ceremonial laws and outward forms of service, but Christians are set apart by righteousness. *We are to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age* (Titus 2:12). See also Romans 8:13 and 1 Peter 2:9-12.

b. *Peace* - 14:17

Those who have peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1, 10) should also seek peace with others (Romans 12:18, 14:19).

c. *Joy in the Holy Spirit* - 14:17

Christians have joy because we are free from condemnation, sin, and guilt (Romans 8:1-2, and 9-11) and are filled with the Holy Spirit.

3. *He who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men* - 14:18

"The Christian who serves Christ in this combination of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit is well-pleasing to God and, far from causing men to revile the gospel by his selfish conduct, will deserve men's approval—even though he may not always receive it" (Romans, A Shorter Commentary, C.E.B. Cranfield).

C. Pursue peace and edify one another - Romans 14:19-21

Those who are at peace with God should promote peace with others and encourage rather than criticize.

1. *Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food* - 14:20

The *work of God* may refer to the less mature Christian, to the church, or to both. Christians are to build up and not tear down what God has done, whether it be a life He has saved or the church He is building. As Paul has already stated, food is not the important thing. Eating meat or drinking wine are morally neutral things. Meat and wine are both clean and pure in God's sight. However, to insist upon eating meat or drinking wine can be evil if it causes another believer to stumble.

2. It is wrong to exercise liberty in a way that hurts others - 14:21

A more mature believer who feels free to eat meat or drink wine also has the freedom not to eat or drink. The mature believer should exercise his or her freedom in a way which will not offend or cause the weaker brother to stumble over his conscience.

D. Be fully convinced before God - Romans 14:22-23

Whether you are a new believer or more mature in the faith, never act contrary to your own conscience. Whatever you believe in regard to a particular issue, it is between you and God. Make sure that your convictions are grounded in Him. The Scriptures clearly show what things are forbidden. In all other areas, it is a matter of conscience. Whatever goes against your conscience is sin for you.

The bottom line is: when in doubt, don't. The more mature Christian is wrong to make a weaker brother or sister sin. Likewise, the weaker Christian is wrong to go against his or her own conscience.

Application

1. In our relationships with other believers, "We have to at least give the persons with whom we differ the benefit of the doubt that they are trying to do what they are doing to the honour of Christ. We have to respect their convictions and respect the fact that every brother is a person who wants to do the will of the Lord. Sometimes we don't know what the will of the Lord is, and in that situation we have to bend over backwards to accommodate differences of conviction among ourselves. The cause of benevolence must be promoted. We are reminded how little benevolence was shown our Lord when throughout His ministry He was accused of being a wine-bibber, a glutton, a friend of sinners and a Sabbath breaker. Jesus, from the strength of faith, broke with Jewish custom and man-made traditions to live a life he thought pleasing to God. Precisely because we will all have to render an account of our lives to God, we must be free from the binding constraints of others in matters which are indifferent (morally neutral in God's sight)" (The Gospel of God, Romans, R.C. Sproul). Are you more judgmental or loving of others? Are you more critical or accommodating of those with differing views? How can you be more Christlike in both of these areas?

2. Are you looking forward to giving a joyful account on the day you stand before the judgment seat of Christ?

QUESTIONS

All Questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

Day One: Read all notes and references.

1. From what you learned in Romans 14, why are Christians not to judge one another?

2. If you belong to the kingdom of God, what should be the most important issues in your life?

Day Two: Read Romans 15:1-6.

3. a. Who are Christians to concentrate on pleasing and for what purpose? Give verse.

b. Who are Christians not to concentrate on pleasing?

c. Who is our example? According to the Psalm Paul quotes, who did He concentrate on pleasing?
4. a. In verse 4, Paul explains why he quotes from Scripture. What is his reason?

b. ♥ (Heart Question) If possible, share how the study of Scripture has given you patience, comfort, and hope.
5. a. In Paul's prayer for his readers (verses 5-6), how does he refer to God?

b. What does he ask God to do?

c. Why does he want God to do this?

Day Three: Read Romans 15:7-13.

6. Why are Christians called to *receive* (accept) one another? Give two reasons.
7. a. To whom did Christ become a servant and why?

b. How does Acts 3:25-26 further explain Christ as a servant to the *circumcision*?

c. How does Mark 10:45 explain Christ as a servant to both Jews and Gentiles?

-
8. From what four Old Testament passages does Paul quote (see references in the margin of your Bible)? How does each refer to the Jews and/or the Gentiles and God's mercy toward them?
9. a. Paul closes this section of his letter with another prayer for his readers. In this prayer, how does he refer to God?
- b. What does he ask God to do?
- c. Why does he want God to do this?
- d. What is the power which will enable the answer to his prayer?

Day Four: Read Romans 15:14-21.

10. a. Of what was Paul confident?
- b. Why then had he written so *boldly*?
- c. Who and what gave Paul the authority to write?
11. a. What was Paul's ministry, given him by God?
- b. What did Paul consider to be the purpose of this ministry? Give verses.
- c. To whom did Paul give the glory for all he had accomplished in his ministry. Why?
12. a. How had the power of the Holy Spirit (*Spirit of God*) enhanced and validated Paul's ministry?
- b. From 2 Corinthians 12:12 and Hebrews 2:3-4 what was the purpose of the signs and wonders?
- c. Describe some examples of signs and wonders the Holy Spirit had performed through Paul.
- Acts 13:6-12.
- Acts 14:8-10.
- Acts 19:11-12.
- Acts 20:7-12.

13. a. Using a map, find the extent of Paul's ministry: from _____ to _____.
- b. In what specific areas did Paul feel compelled to preach the gospel and why?
- c. What Scripture does Paul use to support his stated purpose (as in 13. b. above)?

Day Five: Read Romans 15:22-27.

14. a. Why had Paul not visited Rome previously? Use also Romans 15:20-21.
- b. Why did he now feel free to go to Rome?
15. a. Where did Paul desire to go after visiting Rome?
- b. Why was he planning to go there by way of Rome?
16. a. What particular ministry did Paul want to fulfill before going to Rome?
- b. List some important things Paul says about the *contribution*.

Day Six: Read Romans 15:28-33.

17. a. Concerning his trip to Rome, of what was Paul confident?
- b. ? (Thought Question) What do you think Paul meant by this?
18. a. What did Paul ask the Roman Christians to do?
- b. What were his prayer requests?
19. Using the following Scripture passages, how were these prayers eventually answered?
Acts 21:17-20a
- Acts 21:27-36 and Acts 23:11-30
- Acts 27:1 with 28:11-16 and 30
20. What stood out to you or impressed you most about Paul in Romans 15:14-33?