

## **Romans Study**

### **Session 21 - Romans 14**

In the last session we saw how love, the Christian's defining characteristic, plays out in the life of the believer in this world, specifically through our civic obligations to our governing authorities. God has placed these governing authorities over us and our service of worship to God towards them is to submit to them and honor them as God's designated agents for leading the society in tranquility. While we are to pay our taxes and render to Caesar what is Caesar's we owe a much deeper debt to the people who live in our sphere of relationships and that debt is one of showing God's love to them. Finally, Paul gave a wake-up call for believers to lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light because there is a day coming when Jesus will return and that day is nearer than we expect.

After this discussion, Paul returns in chapter 14 to a specific manner of how love is to play out in the church. This chapter deals with the relationship between Christian brothers and again gives a practical outworking of giving our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice to God daily.

**[Read Romans 12:1-2]** - Remember this is the guiding thought throughout this passage as well. Everything we are going to discuss in this session will be a reflection of Romans 12:1-2 and how it plays out in our lives. What does living by faith as a living and holy sacrifice look like within the church in this specific instance?

This section deals with a specific problem that reared it's head in the Roman church. While Paul did not know the Roman believers in person - at least yet - he was aware of an issue that cropped up in Rome. This problem was the same problem at heart that showed itself in many of the other churches that Paul started or ministered to. This problem is one of disunity and disharmony which can lead to a church wrecking their witness and their power.

Before we get started, I want to ask some questions to you first.

Q: How many of you drink alcoholic beverages from time to time?

Q: For those of you who do drink from time to time, do you ever feel guilty about drinking alcoholic beverages?

Q: Do you ever offer alcoholic beverages to those around you when you drink, even if you know they don't drink?

Q: How many of you don't drink alcoholic beverages?

Q: Does it bother you to be around other believers who are drinking? Why?

This session isn't about alcoholic consumption but rather about two groups of people who Paul calls "strong" and "weak" and how they are to love one another in the church body. The alcohol reference is one for us as modern American Christians but there are many such issues that can be used to divide a church by the devil and that's what Paul is working against.

### [Read Romans 14:1-3]

On face value this passage resembles I Corinthians 8-10. In fact, the teaching aspect and solution to the problem are the same even though there are some differences in the passages.

### [I Corinthians 8:1-6]

Both of these passages deal with eating food or abstaining from eating food at face value.

Q: What do you see mentioned in the I Corinthians passage that isn't mentioned in the Romans passage? (*There are no idols mentioned in the Romans passage.*)

This gives a hint as to identity of the so-called "weak" believers in both passages. In the Corinthian church, most of the congregation was Gentile. Thus, they used to worship idols. Meat was often sold after it was offered to pagan idols and thus some Christians did not feel comfortable in eating this meat that had been used in a pagan worship ceremony. In Rome, there were both Gentile and Jewish believers and since we aren't told about any idols here, it is more likely that the so-called "weak" believers in Rome are those who came out of the Jewish faith and their dietary issues dealt with whether or not to continue keeping the Mosaic Law's dietary commandments. Here's the deal though. It doesn't matter who the weak and strong are. Paul is going to deal with both thoroughly so that no matter which side of the fence they fall on, they know what it means to offer themselves to God as living sacrifices when it comes to these sorts of issues.

Here in this section, Paul knows the reality of life. Diet practices differ from person to person and it can become a topic of conversation and potential disagreement. Eating won't be the only issue Paul brings up but it is the main issue he's going to use to illustrate this problem and solution.

Before moving forward, I want to give you definitions of the two groups Paul will be discussing - the strong and the weak.

The Weak - these are over-scrupulous believers. They have not come to fully perceive their liberty in Christ. The weak believer is not weak based on his or her doctrinal beliefs but rather they are plagued by doubt as to whether it is right and acceptable to engage in an activity or abstain from an activity. Their conscience would be violated if they engaged in any activity that they saw as questionable in nature. In this illustration Paul is giving, the weak person doubts whether it is right for him or her to eat certain foods. In v.2 - the weak is said to eat only vegetables, and doesn't feel free or understand their freedom to eat some other foods. Think of the probable history here. If this is referring to Jewish Christians here, then these people were having a hard time abandoning their law-obsessed life of Judaism before coming to Christ. They would condemn the strong for cavalierly dismissing God's laws. It is important to realize that the weak are not those prone to certain vices or temptations. They are not weak in their faith in Christ but rather only are not able to exercise their freedom in Christ with a clear conscience concerning a particular situation in life.

The Strong - these are the believers who fully understand their freedom in Christ. Their faith is strong enough in the liberty Christ affords to engage in any activity that isn't not sinful with a clear conscience. Thus in this illustration, the strong are those who can eat anything set

before them that they wish to eat. Their conscience is not violated by eating anything on the menu. These Christians don't understand and often look down on the weak for clinging to the regulations and rituals of the old covenant which never provided life in the first place and for many (the Gentiles) were not part of their pre-Christ experience.

Q: According to v.1, what are the strong to do for the weak? *(They are to accept them.)*

The word "acceptance" means to "take to oneself" or to "admit one to your circle of friends". The verb (present middle imperative) means to take the other to yourself literally and continue doing so on an ongoing basis as it is a command. It implies warm-hearted acceptance rather than just token acknowledgment. This is the exact same word used in Romans 15:7 to describe God's acceptance of us.

Q: What attitude does Paul describe in v.1 that makes acceptance of another impossible? *(The attitude of passing judgment upon another. As long as we are passing judgment upon others concerning disputable matters, this sort of acceptance is impossible. The word often used in theology to describe these sorts of issues is "adiaphora" it literally means "things different". It is used to describe the practices of believers where those practices and their underlying beliefs are not relevant to salvation or orthodoxy but rather not condoned or condemned in Scripture. In fact, Scripture is often silent on these issues or speaks of them only in passing while never overtly condemning or condoning the behavior. Thus the strong is not to judge the weak so that they are made to feel inferior or odd or unwanted.)*

Q: What is the warning Paul gives to the weak in v.3? (Not to judge the strong. The weak is not to look down upon the strong for his exercise of his faith in the freedoms Christ has granted to him. Looking down on a brother does not show acceptance or love.)

Q: Which group does God accept? *(v.3 - Both - the strong and the weak are used to describe born-again believers. Both groups have already been accepted by God fully and to be like God we must do likewise.)*

An important side note is that Paul does not delve into the "whys" concerning the behavior of the weak. He is solely concerned about the response or reaction of the strong towards the weak (and vice versa).

### **[Read Romans 14:4-12]**

Paul shifts to the master-slave illustration here to make his point. In the ancient world, it would be highly inappropriate for a person to inform the master of a slave of a slave's strange behavior. It would have been taken as an unwanted and uninvited intrusion on the master's family and business. It would be similar to a person pointing out one of our child's behaviors which strikes them as odd but not to the parent or family. It would be seen as an intrusion by sticking one's nose into someone else's business in a most unwanted fashion.

Q: Who is the ultimate master of all the saints? *(v.4 - God)*

Q: What is Paul telling the Roman Christians NOT to do in v.4? (*Criticize a Christian brother*)

There is a side note to this verse. The weak often think that engaging in certain behaviors that they wouldn't do is a slippery slope. What is important that verse teaches us is that the strong are not standing on a slippery slope when enjoying the freedoms they have in Christ. Just because you safely enjoy an alcoholic beverage from time to time does not mean that I get to call it a slippery slope or criticize you for drinking - as long as I'm not seeing you obsessed/relying upon alcohol or getting drunk. God is the One who gave us our freedoms and it isn't for us to take any of them away from others much.

Another reason this seems to be pointing to the weak being Jewish Christians is because now Paul shifts to another adiaphora and that is observing certain days over other days.

Q: What is the criteria laid down by Paul in v.5 as to why one day is more important or the same as all other days? (*He needs to be convinced of his practice in his own mind. We are to live our lives conscious of God's presence all the time. What must be noted here is that God's approval is more important than man's approval.*)

Q: If the weak man observes a certain day above another, who does he do it for ultimately? (*v.6 - for God*)

Q: If the strong man eats a meal consisting of all sorts of foods, who does he do it for ultimately? (*v.6 - for God*)

Notice that both the strong and the weak give thanks to God for what He has given them.

Q: If we live, who do we live for? (*v.8 - we live for the Lord*)

Q: If we die, who do we die for? (*v.8 - we die for the Lord*)

Q: What was Paul's point in stating these truths? (*That we belong to the Lord either way. He is our Master and we are His servants. He is the ultimate judge over us, not each other.*)

### **[Colossians 2:16-17]**

When Christ died, He died for us, in our place and for our sins. He was resurrected back to life and to prove that He was Lord both over the living and the dead. Since Christ is that sort of Master, there is no room for us to criticize His servants just because they behave differently than us and that difference is not sinful. The important issue is the certitude or assurance of the individual involved that his motives are pleasing to the Lord.

### **[I Corinthians 10:31-33]**

Q: Where shall everyone stand on the last day? (*v.10 - before the judgment seat of God. This is*

*the same judgment mentioned in II Corinthians 5:10. We all shall give an account of our behavior to God and when it comes to how we lived in relation to the things of this world, He's going to want to know if we lived in accordance with our conscience so that we served Him with a clear conscience. After all, that's what Christ saved us to do. We will give account of our own lives. We will not give account for each other.)*

**[Hebrews 9:14]**

Thus we shouldn't condemn anyone based on externals or anything just because it's different from us and how we'd do it. It is premature to pass judgment upon anyone is what Paul's getting to here. There is a day coming when everyone will be judged but that isn't today and you aren't the judge. It is improper for either side to judge the other one.

Here's an interesting use of a word. The word "account" is the word "logos" which is usually translated "word". It is used of Jesus as the Word of God. However, it has a secondary meaning that many miss. It was often used as an accounting term to mean the bookkeeping or ledger that keeps the balances of a matter recorded. (This use is also found in Hebrews 4:13.)

Paul moves to bring out how the strong are to live within the kingdom of God.

**[Read Romans 14: 13-18]**

The strong are to act out of love instead of a selfish insistence on doing what they feel they are free to do. By acting out of this selfishness, they are actually doing great harm to the kingdom of God.

The word "obstacle" means something you hit your foot against and causes you to stumble or fall. It's describing the strong living in a way that isn't love and causes the weaker brother to stumble or fall in regards to his conscience.

The word "stumbling block" means a trap that is mean to ensnare. Here it is a metaphor for temptation to sin. The strong can live in such a way as to create a trap or obstacle that leads a weaker brother to sin.

Q: In what way could the actions of a strong brother cause a weak brother to stumble or get ensnared in sin? *(The stronger could provide an example of behavior that violates the conscience of the weak brother in such a way as to advocate the weak brother engage in the activity that the strong brother feels fine to engage in. The weak brother's spiritual development has not reached the point of understanding or grasping his freedom in Christ yet on this issue and so his conscience is violated and so in so doing, he's not doing it for in a clear conscience or for the Lord at that point. V.13 is a strong warning not to entice a weak brother to do what for him would be sinful.)*

We need a little review here concerning God's attitude towards food since it is the topic Paul is focusing on.

**[Mark 7:14-19]**

Q: Does food make a person unclean according to Jesus? (*no*)

Q: Who was Jesus talking to when He declared all foods clean? (*the multitudes but then His disciples*)

With the disciples being present, we can assume that Peter was present with Jesus when He taught this truth. However, it took Peter quite some time before this truth sank in. Peter was in bondage to the law in regards to food until Acts 10, where Peter is told by divine vision to go to a Gentile's house and share the gospel with him and his family. He would normally not have gone, even though the Jewish Law has been fulfilled in Christ by this point, Peter was still living under submission to the law in many areas of his life. We know he continued to wrestle with this issue of socializing with Gentiles and eating food forbidden by the Law in that Paul ended up publically rebuking him in Galatians 2 for his hypocrisy on the matter. The point is that just because someone knows they are free in a certain area of their lives doesn't mean they will live freely in that same area because of their conscience and deeply rooted habits or possibly convictions based upon a certain Scripture or whatever. The strong are not to destroy the weak with their behavior. It is God's call, the brother's Master, as to when to move in a person's life so that they act out their freedom in Christ. The deal is that God may never deal with a person on a particular matter and that needs to be understood by the strong. In v.15 the strong are told not to destroy the weak with their behavior - by flaunting their freedoms in front of those who are still wrestling with those freedoms or not comfortable exercising them for whatever reason. The word "destroy" means to fully wipe something out.

Q: What is the guiding principle for the strong according to this passage? (*v. 15 - love and unity/peace v. 17*)

Q: According to v.16, what are the weak not to do? (*Not to speak evil of a freedom in Christ that a strong person is enjoying*)

The word "good" in v.16 means liberty to engage in a behavior, such as eating any food.

Q: What does the kingdom of God consist of? (*v.17 - righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*)

Q: In what ways do we devalue or degrade the kingdom of God? (*By making it about these adiaphoric issues. Any time we drag these external, disputable issues into a position where they take center stage in kingdom life, we wreck the unity of the Spirit in the body and fail to show the love which proves who we truly are. The question is whether we are loyal to Christ or loyal to our behavior based on our preferences. It is important to note that the Pharisees of Jesus' day focused their lives upon the externals of the Law only. There was no inward righteousness towards God in their hearts. It is imperative that the weak and strong do not focus on any external issue, a debatable issue, to the exclusion the true righteousness, peace and joy in the Spirit.*)

Q: In v.18 Paul says that those who serve Christ in this way are acceptable to God. What is "this

way” Paul is speaking of in this verse? *(This way is the way of living according to your own conscience while at the same time not judging or condemning another for behaving differently than you but instead loving and accepting them thus promoting unity in the body.)*

Q: Since the kingdom of God is not eating or drinking, what may the strong need to do in order to love the weak brother and maintain unity with him? *(The strong may need to forgo/abandon a specific liberty for the sake of the weak ones in the church body. This isn't forced by the weak as a form of manipulation but rather an action taken freely by the strong in order to ensure that the weak brother understands he is important in the body and loved. The strong should never broadcast this renouncing of a particular freedom as it would cause the opposite effect and become a source of pride.)*

### **[I Corinthians 8:11-13]**

### **[Read Romans 14:19-23]**

Q: In v.19, when Paul uses the word “us”, who is he referring to? *(the entire church)*

In v.20 the word “tear down” means to “demolish, dissolve or overthrow”. Don’t behave in any way that doesn’t show love to another and would overthrow the work of Christ in the life of another person. Don’t demolish the work of Christ in a brother for the sake of your self-centered attitude of demanding to exercise your freedom in a specific area. The man described in v.20 at the end is the strong who eats and offends the weak.

Q: Why is it good not to do anything that causes a brother to stumble? *(Because it shows love and respect to the brother who is weak. It builds him up and builds up the church, too.)*

V.22 sums up the entire passage. The faith mentioned here is the faith by which we live out our Christian lives. It is not referring to the doctrines of the faith. The word “happy” is the same word we studied last week in the sermon in the Beatitudes. Everyone holds different things differently in their lives based upon their backgrounds, understanding of Scripture and upbringing and maturity in Christ. Christians are happy because they don’t doubt their behavior. They are convinced that what they are doing is right for them before the Lord.

Q: Why is the weak man condemned if he eats (v.23)? *(Because he is doubting his actions. His eating is not from thanksgiving to God and thus not from faith and so he is self-condemned. God is not condemning this man. He is condemning himself which leads to a guilty conscience before God, thus a lack of peace and joy and the other things God has given him to enjoy and to be an effective witness in the world.)*

Q: If something is not of faith, what is it? *(v.23 - sin)*

That’s a pretty strong statement. If we do something against our conscience, it is sin to us because we didn’t do it out of faith but rather for some other reason but in our hearts we doubted what we did and it was sin to us. This sin separates us from the experience of the Holy Spirit’s

indwelling life - not from God Himself as nothing can separate us from Him. What's important here is that this word is ONLY for issues similar to what Paul is describing in the passage.

Q: Food isn't a big issue for us as it was for the early church. What are some adiaphoric issues that you see in the church today? (*KJV vs. other Bibles, drinking, dancing, playing card games, the clothes people wear, political attitudes, whether we should wear COVID masks at church, the music played in worship, etc.*)

Love and unity is the key to this passage. If we truly want to be a living sacrifice before the Lord, we need to be mindful of how our behaviors on these sorts of issues can impact our brothers in Christ. Liberty is great but love is greater. The health of the body of Christ is more important than our rights. No where in this passage does Paul tell the strong or the weak to change sides. Neither is superior to the other and both are present in the church.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?