

Romans

I. Living Godly In The World & Church

A. Romans 14:1-12 . . . Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. [2] One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. [3] The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. [4] Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. [5] One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. [6] He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. [7] For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; [8] for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. [9] For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. [10] But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. [11] For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." [12] So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

B. Review:

1. The larger context of Romans 12-16 deals with living godly inwardly, in your home, in the world, and in the church.
2. The smaller, more specific context leading into Romans 14 is stated in Romans 13:10, "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."
3. In Romans 14:1-15:13, Paul takes this standard of love doing no wrong and applies it to church life in relation to issues that are lawful even though not everyone in the church sees all of them as lawful.
4. And because differences can fuel conflict, and ongoing conflict can end in division, Paul instructs the church to deal with these differences according to biblical truth and the standard of love.

C. Today, we will begin by looking at two examples from Romans 14 for why we are wise to keep each part of this chapter within its context. Then

we will consider some of the history behind the reason Paul wrote Romans 14-15:13. Next, we will examine several assumptions that, when understood, help clarify the overall purpose of this section. And finally, we will look at what vs 1-3 have to say to us.

D. Prayer

II. Living godly in the church in the face of non-moral differences

A. As I have said in the past, keeping each part of Romans within its context is important to understanding the meaning of Romans. This continues to be true with this section on church life. Now it is true that this section has some statements, that when taken out of their context, make for great sermons on worthy topics. But since this is a study of Romans, to get out of this section what Paul puts into it, we need to see it within its context.

1. For example, by ignoring the context, some conclude that this chapter is condemning the act of judging one another, and they base their conclusion on such statements as:
 - a. Vs 1 – but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.
 - b. Vs 3 – The one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats.
 - c. Vs 4 – Who are you to judge the servant of another?
 - d. Vs 10 – But you, why do you judge your brother?
 - e. Vs 13 – Therefore let us not judge one another anymore.
2. However, the context makes it clear that this chapter is not forbidding all judging of other Christians.
 - a. Rather it is forbidding judging other Christians on issues that are biblically acceptable, have no effect on the integrity of the gospel, and do no harm to the godliness of the believer or the purity of the church.
 - b. However, since those who make up the church are in various stages of spiritual growth, with some being weaker in faith and some being freer in faith, not everyone in the church feels the freedom to participate in everything that is biblically acceptable. And sadly, this difference in opinion easily becomes a reason to judge other Christians – which is what Paul is forbidding.
3. Now, in relation to all the NT teaches on judging, if this chapter is forbidding Christians to judge each other in any and every way, then what Jesus said in Matthew 18:15-17, and what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 and in Galatians 6:1 either makes no sense or is wrong.
 - a. However, if Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5, and Galatians 6 are right – and I am convinced they are, and if what Paul says about

judging here in Romans 14 is right – and I am convinced it is, then it is up to us to discern the difference between those situations in which God tells us to judge each other and those situations in which He forbids it.

- b. And this is where reliance on the context leads us to the truth.
4. Another example of why we need to keep this section within its context is its use of the phrase “weak in faith” – which implies there are those who are “strong in faith.” (Though for our study, I am going to call them freer in faith.) However, Paul does not use the word “strong” in relation to faith until Romans 15:1, where he exhorts those who are strong (in faith) to bear the weaknesses of those without strength – or who are weak in faith.
 - a. Now the reason I am using this as an example of why it is wise to keep specific scriptures within their context is because the phrase “weak in faith,” apart from the context here, could easily be understood to refer to the unstable, inconsistent, or fickle faith of those who trust God on some days and in some areas, while distrusting Him in others.
 - b. However, the kind of faith that is unstable and inconsistent does not fit this context – but it was addressed by Jesus – though He calls it “little faith.”
 - (1) Matthew 6:30 . . . But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!
 - (2) Matthew 8:23-26 . . . When He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. [24] And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep. [25] And they came to Him and woke Him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing!" [26] He said to them, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm.
 - (3) Matthew 14:28-31 . . . Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." [29] And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. [30] But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" [31] Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

5. In contrast to Jesus criticism of weak or little faith, the weak in faith spoken of in Romans 14 refers to serious minded Christians who trust God whole-heartedly and who have the maturity to understand scripture truth.
 - a. However, because these weak in faith Christians are new to the Christian life, it is likely they are still under the influence of some of the beliefs, principles, and practices from their family traditions, their culture, and their prior religious experiences.
 - b. Therefore, though more established Christians were enjoying the freedoms believers have in Christ, there was a group within the church who either held the conviction that some of those freedoms were ungodly, or that some of those freedoms were so much a part of the evil life they left behind that they believed it was wrong to participate in them.
 6. So once again, my reason for going over the judging and weak faith issues is to remind you that when studying God's word – and especially the NT – it is best to keep phrases, verses, and even chapters within the context that surrounds them to gain the most accurate understanding of what they are saying.
- B. Romans 14:1 . . . Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.
1. To get the most out of this chapter, it helps to understand the history behind it. As most of us know, our family traditions, culture, and any previous religious teachings and practices can have a significant influence over our present thinking, choices, and behavior.
 2. So imagine growing up as a Jew in a religious home where there was a serious effort to keep the law and a serious effort to read the scriptures and discuss their meaning and application for everyday life. To Jews such as these, deliberately breaking the law or carelessly failing to keep the law was a sin which would bring God's judgment on the individual sinner and possibly the nation (remember Achan). Now imagine growing to adulthood with that background and then coming to faith in Jesus Christ.
 3. Or imagine coming to Christ as a Gentile who grew up in a home that participated in the beliefs and practices of a particular idol. Than add the fact that many of those practices included such evils as temple prostitutes, orgy type feasts, sacrificing your sons in the fire, divination, witchcraft, and calling up the dead. Now imagine growing to adulthood in that environment and than becoming a Christian.

It is likely you would look on your past with disgust and shame, and want nothing to do with any of it ever again.

4. Add to these two pictures the fact that both practicing Jews and idol worshiping Gentiles revered certain days and set them aside for special religious occasions.
5. The point here is that when converts from these kinds of cultural and religious backgrounds came to faith, they brought with them some strongly held beliefs about dietary practices, the evils of idol worship, and the importance of observing special days. Entering into the freedoms we have in Christ required letting go of some of those beliefs and convictions, and not all new believers felt spiritually comfortable letting go.
6. Now to prevent misunderstanding, I want to be clear that the kinds of beliefs and convictions about food, idols, and special days are totally different from the beliefs and convictions brought into the church by some Jewish converts who taught that unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved (Acts 15:1). And the difference is that the beliefs and convictions talked about here in Romans 14 posed no threat to the integrity of the gospel, salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and the spiritual health of the church.
7. Therefore, though the freedom we have in Christ sets us free to eat meat offered to idols and to treat all days alike, not all Christians feel comfortable or right about eating such meat or treating special days as if they are no more special than any other day.
 - a. Once again, it is important to keep these differences between Christians within their context. And according to the context, it is clear that these issues of conscience are the only significant differences between the freer in faith and the weak in faith. Other than that, they share the same repentance, the same faith in Jesus, the same baptism, the same Holy Spirit, the same membership in the Body of Christ, and the same commitment to live a godly life.
 - b. Therefore, Paul says that those who live in the freedom we have in Christ are to accept those whose faith is still too weak to feel spiritually comfortable taking part in all those freedoms.
 - c. Now to accept the weaker in faith is to approve of them as being fully Christian, and to embrace them as equal members of the Body of Christ – as opposed to looking down on them and treating them as second class Christians.

8. Before leaving vs 1, there are several assumptions made in these first several verses that, if we take the time to identify them, will help us better understand the truth Paul is conveying.
 - a. First, in most cases, the local church is made up of people who are at various stages of Christian growth and maturity – including their understanding of God, the ways of God, and the freedoms we have in Christ.
 - b. Second, each local gathering is to function as a family so that all – regardless of their newness to the faith or level of spiritual maturity – are treated as family members.
 - c. Third, the purpose for accepting everyone is to build and strengthen the individual believer and the unity of the church.
 - d. Fourth, those who are freer in faith are capable of discerning the difference between the right use of the freedom we have in Christ and the abuse of that freedom. Paul verifies that this discerning ability is the norm within the church in Galatians 5:13, “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”
 - e. Fifth, those who are identified as “weak in faith” have the mental capacity, maturity, and the spiritual sincerity to discern the difference between judging and condemning those who live in freedom, and respecting the sincerity of those who live in freedom – while remaining true to their “weaker in faith” convictions.

- C. Romans 14:2 . . . One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only.
 1. This single statement presents several truths that are important for Christians everywhere and in at all times, regardless of how new they are to the faith.
 - a. First, by implication, Paul says it is better to have the faith to live in all the freedom we have in Christ than to live as a weaker in faith Christian who believes he cannot, with good conscience, do what the freer Christian does.
 - b. Second, Paul neither defends the weak in faith nor makes excuses for their weaker convictions.
 - c. Third, though there is an easily identifiable difference between the two groups (one eats meat while the other eats vegetables), neither group is to think more highly of themselves than they ought, nor judge the other group as being spiritually inferior.

Rather, both groups are to think of each other as being part of the same church, filled with the same Holy Spirit, and sincere about living a godly life that is pleasing to the Lord.

2. Therefore, the only reason a conflict would arise or division take place as a result of differences between the freer and weaker Christians is because one or both sides are treating the other in ways condemned by scripture. And this leads us into vs 3.

D. Romans 14:3 . . . The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.

1. Here we see the expectation that each group has the ability to understand the commands of how to treat each other, and to discern when they are failing to live according to those commands.
 - a. In other words, the freer in faith have the ability to discern when they are showing contempt for the weaker in faith, and the weaker in faith have the ability to discern when they are judging the freer in faith.
 - b. In addition, each group has the ability, maturity, and spiritual strength to stop doing what God says they are not to do and remain faithful to what God says to do, in relation to how they see and treat those in the other group.
 - c. This is important to understand, for weaker in faith does not mean less able to live godly, either in the world or in the church.
2. To regard with contempt is to look down on someone or a particular group of people as inferior, and than treat them with disdain or scorn. In this case, it refers to the freer in faith looking down on the weaker in faith and regarding them as inferior Christians, and than treating them as unworthy members of the Body of Christ.
3. To judge is to condemn someone for doing something wrong and then applying a penalty for the wrongdoing. In this case, it refers to the weaker in faith condemning the freer in faith for doing what the weaker in faith deem unspiritual and wrong, and then treating them as ungodly Christians who need to be brought back into the way of the God in order to return to living a holy life.

III. Conclusion

- A. Without question, serious Christians can differ on which freedoms in Christ they approve or disapprove, but these differences are never to be a cause for conflict or division. Why? Because we are a family.