

Romans 14:1-12 (NKJV)

1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.

3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.

4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

1

Rom. 14:5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

6 He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.

2

Rom. 14:8 For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

9 For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

10 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

3

Rom. 14:11 For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God."

12 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

4

- In Rom. 14 *stronger* Christians are instructed to receive and accommodate *weaker* brethren out of love
- *Stronger* Christians are those who recognize they are free in Christ – not to live licentiously – but in the sense that they are not bound by the rituals of the OT law or by laws of man's devising
- *Weaker* brethren are those who still feel bound by rules in some degree

5

- Ironically, those in the modern fundamentalist *movement* think of themselves as *stronger* Christians, because they hold to so many rules
- They view all others as *weaker*
- The same was true of the Pharisees in Christ's day – but that is upside down
- However, even if we correct their erroneous view and recognize that they are the *weaker* brethren, we cannot use this text as justification for accommodating their legalism in the church of Jesus Christ

6

- Paul is NOT teaching that we should accommodate legalism in the church! (if there's any doubt, study the book of Galatians)
- The modern fundamentalist *movement* is largely characterized by *weak* Christians led by *weak* pastors
- In contrast, *historic* fundamentalism was – and still is – characterized by many *strong* Christians led by *strong* pastors

7

- If a pastor is unabashedly committed to the truths of the Bible, properly interpreted – and nothing else! – he will lead his congregation as a good shepherd into paths of truth and righteousness
- However, if a pastor is committed to legalistic separational standards, he will lead his congregation as a bad shepherd into error and frequent stumbling over matters that are not biblical

8

- In the latter case, the pastor is weak, for he is not grounded upon Scripture alone, and his congregation will also be weak
- Ironically, both pastor and church will THINK they are stronger than others, for they have what they like to call “strong convictions”
- Some pastors refer to their standards as “higher” and those of others as “lesser,” thinking they are right and everyone else is wrong

9

- Those like this often tend to condescend to and separate from others who do not hold to their convictions and standards
- In many cases, it takes the form of Baptists separating from non-Baptists
- Those who are weak THINK they are strong, because they hold to many rules – but in reality, they are weak, because the rules are not God's laws – *the law of Christ* – they are man's rules – *preferences* that they have elevated to the level of truth

10

The Pharisees were like this, and notice what Jesus said about them:

Mark 7:6 [Jesus] answered and said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.

7 And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’

8 For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men” ...

11

Mark 7:9 He said to them, “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.

13a making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down.

- The modern fundamentalist *movement* is largely guilty of the same error

12

- They have established traditions – which they call “separational standards” – and they equate these man-made “standards” with commands of God, though they are merely man’s preferential dictates – focused on matters such as clothing, music, hair styles, Bible versions, entertainment choices, etc.
- God’s Word does not speak to these matters and gives Christians liberty to make choices, keeping within biblical commands/principles
- Granted, we must make wise choices, for we are called to live in holiness

13

- But by pushing the pastor’s or the church’s convictions on everyone in the church, and implying that they are necessary for spirituality, the wrong message is sent
- Jesus makes clear, that in so doing, they are nullifying God’s Word by promoting their own commands
- They think this makes them more spiritual than others who do not hold to their standards and to whom they patronize
- In God’s eyes, this is weakness

14

- If Jesus condemned this type of legalistic behavior, then should we expect Paul to encourage first century believers to accommodate it?
- NO! That is NOT what Paul is doing in this text, which is frequently misinterpreted and misapplied
- Paul condemned legalistic living in the earlier chapters of this epistle
- He has made very clear to the Jews that continuing in the Mosaic rituals does not make one righteous

15

- Observing circumcision, dietary laws, feast days and sabbaths does not guarantee that one is righteous before God
- Christians – both Jewish and Gentile – must depend on Jesus, by faith, to live righteously
- If anyone is against legalism, Paul certainly is – there is NO WAY that he would tell modern Christians to accommodate it in the church of Jesus Christ
- Legalism DESTROYS churches! Incidentally, so does license!

16

- Thus, we cannot apply Rom. 14 to the modern fundamentalist *movement*, nor are we to accommodate their legalistic error in the church
- Paul is dealing with something quite different in the first century church at Rome
- At the time of Paul’s writing of Romans – probably around AD 58 or 59 – the church of Jesus Christ had become well-established, and Jews and Gentiles were becoming the one new man in Christ (Eph. 2:15)

17

- But there were still some bumps and snags along the way, resulting in division and disunity – and that is why Paul wrote the epistle to the Roman church
- One of the issues he takes up in ch. 14 is that the Jewish believers in particular are having a difficult time assimilating to the new environment of the church
- Now that they are Christians, are they to stop observing feast days? Are they to abandon their Jewish diets? Is the Sabbath to be ignored?

18

- Perhaps they understand from Paul's earlier chapters in Romans that these things do not make them righteous before God
- They must trust Jesus by faith to live righteously
- But are they to abandon these markers of their Jewish identity? Or are they to remain distinct in the culture by continuing to honor the Lord in this manner?
- After all, God called Israel to be His nation of priests in the culture, and Paul is writing before the nation's destruction

19

- Paul describes some of the *Jewish* believers as weak, for they are having difficulty letting go of their observance of the OT law entirely
- That means Paul considers the *Gentiles* to be strong, for they have assimilated well
- Their former lifestyle was pagan and licentious
- But they had forsaken all this to follow Christ subsequent to their initial salvation
- They have no divine connection to laws or observances in their past

20

- But the Jews have always been God's people – observing their feast days and sabbaths, which are memorials of past events and types of future events
- Their diet identifies them as Jews in the culture
- Shouldn't they keep doing these things, even if these things do not make them holy?

21

Jan Bonda, *The One Purpose of God*, adds some additional detail to the Jewish reasoning:
What value did the weak attach to these Jewish customs? We should first of all note that God himself had given the Jewish dietary laws ("kosher" food) and the Jewish festivals to Israel to keep them focused on his service. The weekly Sabbath was the most prominent among these festivals. These customs kept them separate from the nations and prevented them from falling back into paganism. Jesus himself had observed these commandments, and so had the early Jerusalem church.

22

Jan Bonda (cont'd):

But they were not obligatory for the Gentiles who accepted the gospel. For one was not saved by keeping those commandments but through faith in Jesus. But the Jews who believed in Jesus saw no reason to break with these customs. The situation was similar with regard to the proselytes, worshipers of God from the Gentiles who had accepted Judaism. They had become attached to these Jewish customs.

23

- Paul identifies the weak Jews and proselytes by their customs:
Rom 14:2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.
- Some say the Jews had become vegetarian because they weren't able to get kosher meats in the Roman marketplace; so much of that meat had been offered to idols
Bonda: Abandoning these customs under pressure from the strong might carry the danger of relapsing into paganism. Paul warns against this:

24

Rom 14:15b Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.

20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food.

- **Many Jews also kept observing special days**

5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

6a He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it.

25

Rom. 14:6b He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

- **Those Jews in the church who continue to hold to certain aspects of the law Paul considers to be weak, because they are not completely free from Judaism, in contrast to the stronger Gentile believers, who have made a clean break with their past**
- **These Jews continue to observe sabbath days and feast days**

26

- **If someone is going to do this, Paul says in v. 6, they must be fully persuaded in their own mind that this pleases the Lord, and they must observe it *as unto the Lord***

- **The same with dietary restrictions – it must be done *as unto the Lord* and not for any other reason**

- **Those who do NOT observe days or limit their diet must also carry out their beliefs *as unto the Lord***

27

- **Paul doesn't blast the Jews and tell them to get rid of all vestiges of Jewishness; because that is all they have ever known, and to do so would injure their conscience and thereby hurt their faith**

- **Not to mention, Paul recognizes that they remain God's people, distinct from the nations (Remember: Paul writes this epistle 11-12 years before Israel was destroyed by Rome)**

- **Adding to the problem within the church is that the Jews think the Gentiles are too liberal – they need to limit their behavior**

28

- **Rather, Paul urges a spirit of acceptance in the church**

Rom 14:1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

- **Paul urges the Gentiles to receive those Jewish believers who are weak in the faith, thinking they must continue to observe the hallmarks of their Jewishness**

29

Zane Hodges:

Evidently, sometimes in the Roman churches a certain pseudo-acceptance was extended to the weak. But its real intent was to convert them to the opinions of those stronger in the faith. Paul makes clear here that this is not the kind of acceptance he has in mind. Disputes over such matters revealed that true Christian acceptance had not occurred ... Paul is warning against such debates, especially at the Lord's Table.

30

Paul gives further instructions:

Rom 14:3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.

4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

31

The admonition works both directions:

- The Gentiles (those who can eat anything) are not to despise the Jews for not eating certain foods
- The Jews (those who restrict their diets) are not to judge the Gentiles for eating whatever they want – for GOD has accepted them!
- We are all God's servants, so we must let HIM be the judge of His own servants
- He decides whether they stand (i.e., are approved by Him) or fall (i.e., are disapproved by Him)

32

- Indeed, He enables men to stand and be approved, so don't underestimate your brethren
- Have mutual respect for the beliefs of one another
- Despite being Jewish and a former Pharisee, Paul himself has freedom in Christ

Rom 14:14 I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

33

Rom 14:15 Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.

Hodges:

Paul wants to make clear that what is involved here is not concurrence in some fashion with the unjustified scruples of the weak. The concern for the sensitivities of others that he urges does not involve submission to their principles. To make this point he starts with himself.

34

- Paul is free in Christ to eat whatever he pleases – thus, he identifies with the strong – and he knows “there is nothing unclean of itself”
- He is not, of course, referring to matters of morality, but matters of Jewish identity
- But he realizes that some of his believing Jewish brethren have not gotten to that same point of freedom

35

- Therefore, those who are strong must be careful not to ignore the sensitivities of the weak, for to do so would be tantamount to not walking in love
- Paul tells the Gentiles: “Don't destroy these Jewish believers – Christ died for them too!”

Rom 14:16 Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil;

- He reminds the Gentiles that the Jewish Christians are their brethren whom they must not grieve by enjoying freedoms in their presence

36

- They wouldn't want their good (their freedom in Christ) to be evil spoken of – i.e., become the subject of scorn – because they are not willing to curb it for others

Rom 14:17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Hodges: Is Paul speaking, as many commentators suggest ... of *the present experience of God's kingdom*? The kingdom is not yet. Christ is not ruling and His kingdom is not currently in effect ... His kingdom will come when He returns to earth after the Tribulation.

37

- There *will be* food in the Millennium, for it starts with the Marriage Supper of the Lamb
- You must qualify to be at that Supper; merely being a child of God is not sufficient qualification, as we learn from the parable of the man with the improper wedding garment
- In this verse Paul is emphasizing that food and dietary restrictions will not be the focus in the Millennium
- The focus will be on righteousness and peace and joy and unity – as if to say, have that focus NOW, for it honors the Lord!

38

- In the words of the songwriter, this is a “foretaste of glory divine”

Rom 14:18 For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.

19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

- Do what is necessary to keep peace with your brethren, living in righteousness and joy and peace

39

- Serve the Lord by edifying others
- Those who do will be accepted by God and even by other believers

Rom 14:20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.

21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.

22 Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

40

Rom 14:23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

- In the final analysis, Paul urges the believers not to destroy the church (e.g., cause church splits) over food
- Humble yourself, refrain from eating certain things in the presence of your Jewish brethren in order to protect them from violating their consciences and stumbling

41

- If they can't eat something in good faith toward the Lord, then they are condemning themselves, for whatever is not driven by faith is sinful

Hodges: The way in which we live the Christian life is by living out what God has impressed upon us from His Word (Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18). If our actions are not by faith, that is, if our actions contradict what we believe the Scriptures teach, then they are sinful actions, not godly ones.

42

- Why is this so important?
- Why doesn't Paul merely tell the Jews to shape up and stop clinging to their dietary restrictions and sabbaths and feast days?
- Why does he instead put pressure on the Gentiles to accept the Jews and to accommodate their customs?
- Why does he tell the Jews NOT to judge the Gentiles for living freely?
- The answer spans from vs. 7-13

43

Rom 14:7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.
8 For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

- If you are God's child, then you belong to the Lord while living; after death, you still belong to the Lord
- Death doesn't end your relationship with him

Rom 14:9 For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

44

- Christ died for all mankind, but He arose and lives again – thus, He is Lord of both the living and the dead
 - This implies that the dead are accountable to Him also
 - We will all stand before Him in judgment
- Rom 14:10 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

45

- As if to say: "Jewish believers, why do you judge your Gentile brethren for eating what they want and not celebrating certain days as special?"
- "Gentile believers, who do you look down upon your Jewish brethren for holding to a special diet that has been their hallmark for centuries and for observing feast days and sabbaths as they have done for countless generations?"

46

- "Remember: we are ALL going to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and give an account for our lives"
 - The implication (in this context): "So you'd better treat your brothers and sisters in Christ honorably!"
 - Paul then broadens the circle to include ALL MANKIND, not merely children of God
- Rom 14:11 For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, EVERY knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God."

47

- Rom. 14:11 quotes Isa. 45:23, and it refers to ALL mankind, not merely believers
- Isa 45:22 "Look to Me, and be saved, ALL you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.
23 I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me EVERY knee shall bow, EVERY tongue shall take an oath.
24b To Him men shall come, and all shall be ashamed who are incensed against Him.

48

- God is speaking to ALL mankind
- He calls ALL to Him to be saved (delivered)
- Then God predicts that EVERY knee will bow and EVERY tongue will confess that He is Lord
- This is the ultimate salvation of all mankind
- Opponents of universal reconciliation claim that this bowing of the knee and confessing with the mouth that Jesus is Lord will be forced upon all mankind, but it does not mean that all will be saved

49

Dr. Thomas Talbott writes:

[Paul] chose a verb that throughout the Septuagint implies not only confession, but the offer of praise and thanksgiving as well ... [which] can only come from the heart.

Isa. 43:24: "all shall be ashamed who are incensed against Him"

- How will they become ashamed? By spending time in the lake of fire and brimstone, which is not merely for punishment but also for remedial purposes, to bring all mankind to the point of being ashamed in God's presence

50

- ALL will confess Him as LORD (i.e., Master)
- This truth of Scripture – that EVERY knee will bow and EVERY tongue will confess – is mentioned three times in Scripture – Isa. 43; Rom. 14; Phil. 2:10-11

Phil 2:9-11 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus EVERY knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that EVERY tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

51

- Notice who will bow: those in heaven and those on earth and those under the earth
- Young's Literal translates: "of heavenlies, and earthlies, and what are under the earth"
- Those in the "heavenlies" are the supernatural realm – both good and evil
- Those in the "earthlies" are mankind
- Those "under the earth" are the dead and perhaps also the demonic realm
- EVERY knee will bow; EVERY tongue will confess

52

- Paul already confirmed this universal salvation in Jesus Christ earlier in Romans:
Rom 5:18 Through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to ALL men, resulting in justification of life.
- If words have meaning, then EVERY means EVERY and ALL means ALL!
- Those who hold to *eternal conscious torment* short-change God's love and mercy and justice – and even His Word!

53

The culmination of this glorious salvation of all men:

Rev 5:13 EVERY creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!"

- Again, EVERY means EVERY!
- Back in our text, Paul includes a warning in v. 12

54

Rom 14:12 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

- Believers will be resurrected and judged at the Judgment Seat (Bema) of Christ, before the Millennium
- Unbelievers will be resurrected and judged at the Great White Throne Judgment, after the Millennium
- A day of reckoning is coming for all mankind
- YOU will stand before God in judgment, and you will give an account for how you lived

55

- Your reward will either be positive or negative

2 Cor 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

11 Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.

- In this context, Paul is NOT saying, "Go out and convince the lost to be saved, knowing the terror of the Lord."

56

- No! He is saying, "Go out and convince believers that they need to be ready to meet Jesus in judgment and give a good account!"

- Because of the Reformation, Christians are largely being taught the erroneous doctrine that ALL children of God will be rewarded at Christ's Bema Seat, but that is not correct

- Only the GOOD and FAITHFUL will hear "well done" (see Matt. 25:21,23)

- *good* = righteous
- *faithful* = persevering in faith

57

- All others will be naked and ashamed, relegated to the darkness outside New Jerusalem (the earthly realm of the kingdom)

Therefore, Paul concludes:

Rom 14:13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

Hodges: We are neither to "trip up" our brother, nor cause him to be "ensnared."

- Let God judge them, or you will be judged!

58

- Why is it so important that the Jews and Gentiles get along in harmony in the church of Jesus Christ?

- Paul answers that, gloriously, in ch. 15:

Rom 15:10 Again he says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!"

- This is a quote from Deut. 32:43, and it is a prophetic reference to the Messianic kingdom

59

- In other words, Paul urges the Jews and Gentiles to accept each other – both weak and strong – to picture the harmonious Messianic reign, in which the Gentiles will join the Jews in rejoicing and praising the Messianic king, glorifying God for His mercy (Rom. 15:9)

- That future unity of worship should characterize Christ's church NOW!

60

- **Those who have that spirit of love toward their Christian brethren in this age will be rewarded to co-rule with Him as His bride in the next age**
- **Do you have that spirit of love toward your Christian brethren?**