Homework: Read through Romans 14 each day. Circle any words or phrases that you see frequently repeated. Mark what you think is the most important/key verse in Romans 14.

Notes

Romans 14

(ESV)

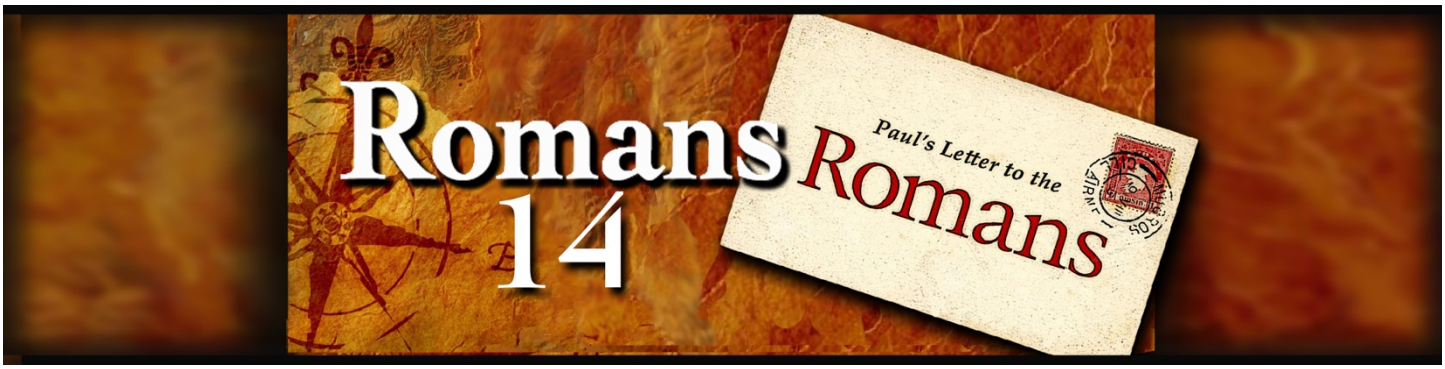
Chapter Title

1 As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over
opinions. 2 One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak
person eats only vegetables. 3 Let not the one who eats despise the one
who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one
who eats, for God has welcomed him. 4 Who are you to pass judgment on
the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls.
And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. 5 One person
esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days
alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 The one who
observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats
in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who
abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. 7 For none
of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. 8 For if we live, we live
to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or
whether we 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 Why do

you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your
brother? 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 confess to God.” [12] So then each of us will give an account of
himself to God. [13] Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any
longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in
the way of a brother. [14] I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that
nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it
unclean. [15] For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer
walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ
died. [16] So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. [17] For
the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of
righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. [18] Whoever thus serves
Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. [19] So then let us pursue
what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. [20] Do not, for the sake of
food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong
for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. [21] It is good not to
eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.

[22] The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.

[23] But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.



REVIEW

As we have often stated, the first 11 chapters of Romans contain Paul's detailed instructions concerning the doctrines of the Christian faith. Romans 12 begins a rather large section (continuing through chapter 15) describing practical applications of those doctrines in a believer's life—how to daily live out their faith in all manner of relationships in a secular world which was/is nearly always in conflict with their faith. Paul uses these relationships and situations to demonstrate how God's righteousness, imputed to believers by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, transforming their *"inner man,"* should be expressed outwardly in their behavior towards others.

Romans 12:1-2 state Paul's purpose and foundation for these next few chapters with his appeal to the Romans (and us) *"to **present your bodies as a living sacrifice**, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. **Do not be conformed to this world**, but **be transformed by the renewal of your mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, **what is good and acceptable and perfect**."* **(ESV)** Romans 12 defines the close connection between believers, as members of the Body of Christ, and how to use their spiritual gifts to encourage and build up other members and the greater Body of Christ, followed by a number of exhortations to consistently characterize the Spirit-filled Christian life as believers relate to the rest of the world, including even those considered to be enemies of believers and Christ Himself.

Romans 13 addresses the Christians' responsibility to respect and submit to authorities since God has ordained and placed each authority in the position He intends, including all the levels of the civil government. The latter half of Romans 13 is devoted to the only debt that we are to owe others—**to love each other**. We are to love not only other believers but all people. Paul goes so far to say that those who love others are fulfilling the law. (13:9-10)

Read Romans 14:1-6

Paul continues in Romans 14 to describe the kind of life Christians should live in order to please and glorify God, which is the only reasonable way we can live. (Romans 12:1-2) Because we have the **privilege** to know Christ personally, every Christian has a **responsibility** to **live** like a Christian in everyday life as we interact with other people. Every local church is comprised of dissimilar people brought together to be one Body in genuine unity. Here Paul tackles an issue that greatly influences the climate of a church. Satan delights in disrupting or destroying the unity which God intended in His Body by stirring up division between dissimilar people. **(CB, JMSB)** The specific point Paul raises is the understanding and application of faith and conscience concerning **"questionable matters which are not expressly forbidden in Scripture,"** causing a conflict between mature and immature brothers and sisters in Christ which leads to fault finding and doubt. **(Dr. J. Vernon McGee in BH–1)**

When we think of a *"strong"* person, we might envision someone who is strong in his opinions, convictions, personality, character or spirituality. The one who is *"weak"* is weaker in one or more of

those same areas. Paul used the word *"weak"* here, but he doesn't use the word *"strong,"* although it is "strongly" implied. However, these are not the qualities that Paul is referring to here. The one who is *"strong in faith"* has confidence that he/she may eat anything; the "*weak in faith*" lacks that confidence. *"Strong"* and "*weak*" are **not value judgments** by any means; that misunderstanding was the source of Paul's admonition to the believers! **In all fairness, it is quite possible to be strong and wrong!** A person could be weak in character or weak in terms of their Bible knowledge and still be "strong" in the sense that Paul used here. **(BH-1)** **Mature, strong Christians**, both Jew and Gentile, **understood the freedom they had in Christ**, that they were **no longer bound** by ceremonial requirements of the Law or former pagan practices, while **immature, weaker believers' consciences were unsettled, tempting them to violate their consciences**. **(JMSB)**

1. To whom is Paul generally addressing most of his instructions in this section? (Romans 15:1, 1 Corinthians 9:22)

The "*weak in faith*" Paul addresses here were probably Jewish believers living in Rome who had continued to hold onto their Jewish identity following salvation by following dietary restrictions, observing the Sabbath, and other tenets of the Mosaic law. **(NIVSB)**

> The weak Jewish believer had difficulty abandoning the rites and prohibitions of the old covenant....
> Weak Gentile believers had been steeped in pagan idolatry and its rituals; they felt that any contact with anything remotely related to their past, including eating meat that had been offered to a pagan deity and then sold in the marketplace, tainted them with sin. Both had very sensitive consciences in these areas, and were not yet mature enough to be free of those convictions. **(JMSB)**

2. What are Paul's instructions regarding those who are "*weak in faith*?" (1) (Romans 15:1, 7, 1 Corinthians 12:25, Jude 22)

Paul specifically commanded believers to not quarrel and bicker over **opinions**—"a view or judgment formed about something, **not necessarily based on fact or knowledge**." **Facts** are "known or **proved to be objectively true**, as opposed to interpretation." A reasonably intelligent and educated person would assume that the **difference between fact and opinion** would be crystal clear; there is a distinct difference between the two. However, in our "modern" world/culture, the common perception of "facts" has been turned upside down in ways that we could never have imagined just a few years ago. We live in a world in active rebellion against God, and many have succumbed to deception and **moral inversion**—embracing an incredibly skewed definition of "truth" and "morality;" they proudly and publicly call evil "good" and good "evil," (Isaiah 5:20) as they promote behaviors that the Bible specifically calls sinful. (Romans 1:18-32) **(GQ-EGGE)**

Key Instructions for the Church when Encountering Issues of Questionable Matters

1. Weak Brothers (and Sisters) are to be completely accepted as believers. (CB)

Obviously in Romans 14, Paul is referring to **BELIEVERS** (the "strong in faith" and the "weak in faith"), **NOT** those who call evil "good" and good "evil." (Romans 6:17-19) As in the early church, believers today are saved **out of** the kingdom of darkness **into** the kingdom of light, of which they formerly knew nothing. (Colossians 1:12-13, Ephesians 5:8, Acts 26:15-18) All are born again as spiritual infants into a life that is the polar opposite of what they have always known. They are the "weak in faith," who need the training of *"pure spiritual milk"* to grow in faith, knowledge of Scripture, understanding of doctrine, etc.—the process of sanctification. (1 Peter 2:2, Hebrews 5:12, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3) That process of

sanctification takes a lifetime, so the Body of believers is comprised of people in diverse, constantly changing stages of growth. We all tend to believe that our own views are the standard of truth, convinced of certain things which, to others, are uncertain, so Paul calls on the "strong in faith" to welcome the "weak in faith" and not judge where they are in the process.

> **We need to recognize that there will be differences among church members.... When love is strong, differences and disagreements will not divide or destroy the church. There are various kinds of differences. There are doctrinal differences. There are different ways to worship, some formal and some informal. In this chapter the problem concerned matters of individual consciences. These are matters that have no direct commandments from God to give direction. (CB)**

3. In 14:2, Paul begins to describe the "strong in faith." How does he describe them? (14:2, 5, 6)

4. How does he describe the "weak in faith?" (14:2, 5, 6)

"Faith" here refers to a sense of assurance or confidence; their understanding of the Gospel and the freedom that the "strong" in Christ have allows them to recognize that what they eat has no spiritual significance. **(NIVSB)** (**Acts 11:8-9, Romans 14:14, 1 Timothy 4:1-5**)

"One day" (6) is interpreted by some to mean specifically the Sabbath, but it more likely also included special days connected to Judaism; likewise, Gentiles had also celebrated special days of festivities associated with pagan holidays involving immorality and idolatry. Those "strong in faith" knew that these were set aside by Christ's coming, so they were no longer obligated to participate in the festivals/rituals of the Jews or the pagans. **(JMSB, MHC)** (**Galatians 4:9-10**)

2. Brothers (and Sisters) are not qualified to judge other believers. (CB)

5. What instructions does he give the "strong in faith" in this section? Why? (14:3, 5)

6. What instructions does he give "weak in faith" in this section? Why? (14:3, 5)

"Despise" means to consider someone as worthless, and to *"pass judgment"* means to strongly condemn; Paul uses them in these verses to identify whom he is addressing. ***"The one who eats"*** refers to the "strong," those who have a better grasp of the Gospel and its implications for the new life they had received. The "strong" have a tendency to hold the weak in contempt (despise) as being legalistic or self-righteous. On the other hand, ***"the one who abstains"*** indicates the "weak," who are prone to judge the strong for behavior that seems lawless or even immoral. Both positions can be seriously mistaken (remember we are NOT talking about SIN, but those "questionable matters" not clearly commanded or prohibited in Scripture). God has graciously accepted both the "weak" and "strong." **(JMSB, RSB)** (**Colossians 2:16, Matthew 7:1, Romans 2:1**)

In the middle of these descriptions and instructions, in verse 4, Paul gives a rather strong rebuke. It is somewhat reminiscent of the **Antagonist/Answer/Argument Technique** he used in Romans 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 11. [An **"Antagonist Question"**—an accusatory, provocative question, an **"Answer"** to the question, sometimes equally provocative, followed by the **"Argument"**—explanation of the issue.]

7. What is the **"Antagonist Question?"** (14:4)

8. What is the **"Answer?"** (14:4)

9. What is the **"Argument"** (explanation)? (14:4)

Although the **"Answer?"** is not spoken/written, we can almost hear Paul's retort, "Certainly not YOU!" (similar to *"By no means!"*) Who is the YOU? Most certainly both the weak and strong believers (US); no one is exempt from this tendency to compare others. **No one** is qualified to criticize or condemn another believer; instead, we must love other believers and leave the judgment to God. **(CB)** (**Romans 8:33-34, 1 Corinthians 4:3-5, James 4:12**)

> Differences of opinion prevailed even among the immediate followers of Christ and their disciples. Nor did Paul attempt to end them. Compelled assent to any doctrine, or conformity to outward observances without being convinced, would be hypocritical and of no avail. Attempts for producing absolute oneness of mind among Christians would be useless. Let not Christian fellowship be disturbed with strifes of words.... Let not the scrupulous believer find fault with his brother, for God accepted him.... We usurp the place of God, when we take upon us thus to judge the thoughts and intentions of others, which are out of our view. **(MHC)**

"The Lord is able to make him stand;" our God is supremely powerful! "We don't need to fear that our legalist brothers or those who live out their freedom in Christ will fall away." **(JM–ROA-2)** He is intimately involved in the sanctification of each believer—supporting, teaching, correcting, encouraging, and rebuking. Our criticism and condemnation only serve to interfere and obstruct God's own process. (**John 10:28-29, Romans 8:35, Romans 8:29, John 6:37, Jude 24-25, 1 Peter 1:5**)

3. Personal convictions are to be developed and held in one's relationship to God. (CB)

Paul concludes this issue in the last sentence of verse 5 and continuing into verse 6, emphasizing that each person, whether strong or weak, should be *"fully convinced in his own mind"* of these things. A word of caution here—being convinced in our own mind is not a matter of our individual personal autonomy—"Well, YOU might think this is wrong, but I think...." Rather a believer must be convinced first by Scripture, then a gentle regard for others, and a refusal to judge those who disagree. **(GPL)** God has given each person a built-in warning system—a conscience—informed by their relationship with Christ (**Romans 2:14-15**). We should not train our own conscience, nor teach others, to ignore it. As we mature and learn more, our minds will not be as hyper-sensitive to those things which are non-essential. **(JMSB)**

> It is spiritually perilous to act contrary to one's conscience even if the conscience is weak and forbids what God Himself permits. **(RSB)**
>
> But it is not enough that our consciences consent to what we do; it is necessary that it be certified from the word of God. Take heed of acting against a doubting conscience. **(MHC)**
>
> Paul is saying to do whatever you think you ought to do. Why? Because the veneration of days is not a moral issue.... Paul is not concerned with Sabbaths and feast days, but he is concerned that people not train themselves to violate their conscience. If conscience tells you to keep a certain day, then you ought to keep it. If you train yourself to ignore your conscience, you will have problems because the Spirit of God leads subjectively through a person's conscience. **(JM–ROA-2)**

10. How would you explain the Christian conscience? (5-6) (**1 Corinthians 10:30-31, 1 Timothy 4:4-5, Romans 14:23**)

In Romans 14, Paul specifically discusses eating certain foods and acknowledging special days, but certainly those are not the only things which could be considered "questionable matters."

11. What are some other matters you can think of that could fit into this category?

12. How can a believer determine whether these situations/actions are acceptable?

13. What should a believer do if they are unsure?

Read Romans 14:7-12

The first word of verse 7 is *"for"* (**γάρ**–gar), indicating the reason or explanation for the previous information, making 7-10 also part of our **"Argument"** above.

14. What does it mean to "live to oneself?"

This passage is undoubtedly addressed to Christians; though some are weak and others strong, yet each believer must individually assent to living not for themselves (their own ideas, interests and desires), and instead making Christ preeminent, striving to please only Him who has called and rescued them. Though "Christians are of different strength, capacities, and practices in lesser things, yet they are all the Lord's; all are looking and serving, and approving themselves to Christ." **(MHC)** The one who is a self-seeker and predominantly self-focused is, in reality, against Christianity—having never been delivered from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. (**2 Corinthians 4:4, John 12:46, Matthew 7:21-23**)

> **Honor and glory given to God should be a major determining factor in the convictions and opinions held by each person. No believer should do anything for his own honor and glory, whether it is eating meat or not eating meat. Whether the believer is considered weak or strong, the thing that counts is the motive—is it to bring honor and attention to self or to God? (CB)**

15. What is Paul's conclusion about the Christian's life and death? (8) (**1 Peter 4:1-2, 2 Corinthians 4:14-15, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 1:20-24**)

16. What is the purpose for Christ's death and resurrection *("For to this end")*?

God had a definite purpose for predetermining that Jesus would suffer the horror of the crucifixion and the triumph of the resurrection; they were the necessary and crowning events of His redemptive plan. Through these, Jesus was revealed as not just the Savior, but the righteous Lord and Master over **all** of mankind and **all** of creation (including the realm of death)—everything ever created rightfully belongs

to Christ alone! **(BH-3)** Jesus is the Lord over those that are living, in order to rule them, and of those that are dead, in order to raise them to new life. **(MHC)** (**Philippians 2:9-11, Acts 10:42, Revelation 1:17-18, Revelation 20:12, 15**)

In verse 10 we see two more reprimands in the form of questions that fit the **Antagonist/Answer/ Argument** form seen above, although the **"Answer"** is not stated, it's implied.

17. Who is "you" in the first question? Looking back at verse 3, we can identify the "yous" in verse 10 according to the parallel use of the same verbs. In the first question, *"you pass judgment on your brother."* Who is he addressing?

18. Who is "you" in the second question? These are the ones who *"despise your brother."*

19. What is the **Antagonist (accusation)** question? (10)

20. Again, the **"Answer"** is not written, but it is certainly implied! What do you think his answer is?

21. What are Paul's **Arguments**? (10c-12)

Paul is using strong words to unsettle the believers and suggest that they find some common ground, even under contrasting opinions and beliefs. We need to remember that conflict can alert us to the fact that some things in life are more important than our own ideas, even our interpretations of the Bible. In the end, all of us will answer for how we have loved and honored one another, even our enemies. The unity within the Body and our unity with Christ are supremely important.

Paul states in verse 10 that, *"We will ALL will stand before the judgment seat of God."* You may recall from John 5:24 that Jesus said, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."* Since we have already determined that Paul is addressing believers, how do we reconcile these 2 passages? **CONTEXT!**

"The judgment seat of God" (10) speaks generally about judgment; however, there are 2 separate judgments, so we need to distinguish between them—**The Judgment Seat of Christ** where the saints will be judged, and **The Great White Throne** where sinners will be judged. All Christians, both the weak and the strong, will have to give an account of him- or herself.

Two Judgments Compared	
Judgment Seat of Christ	Great White Throne Judgment
Only Believers	Only Unbelievers
After the Rapture Before the Millenium	After the 1,000-year reign of the Messiah Before the New Heaven and the New Earth
Determines Rewards for Service	Determines the Amount of Eternal Judgment
2 Corinthians 5:9-10	Revelation 20:11-15

(BH-4)

The Judgment Seat of Christ has nothing to do with our sins because He has already paid for all of them, and they can never again be held against us. (Romans 8:1) He will judge each person based on

their works—their thoughts, the decisions that they have made and the things they have done, including **those decisions concerning matters of conscience**. It makes no difference what a stronger brother thinks, what a weaker brother thinks, or even what you yourself think; Christ's verdict is the only thing that matters. **(NIVSB, JMSB, BH-4)** (**Matthew 25:31-33, 1 Corinthians 3:12-13, 2 Corinthians 5:10, 1 John 4:16-17**)

Also remember that there is a difference between judging and exercising discernment. The former is to be avoided at all cost, but the latter is be exercised by believers who are filled with the Word of Truth and guided by the Spirit of Truth! Paul reminds us all that we will stand before the Righteous Judge and give an account of our right and wrong judging of others (thoughts, words and deeds). **(BH-4)**

> **Let every man search his own heart and life; he that is strict in judging and humbling himself, will not be apt to judge and despise his brother. (MHC)**

The OT quotation in verse 11 is combined from **Isaiah 45:23** and **Isaiah 49:18**. Isaiah 45:23 says *"By Myself I have sworn,"* but Paul here substitutes *"As I live,"* from Isaiah 49:18—this phrase is an idiom which signifies "the giving of an irrevocable oath," and is used 26 times in 26 different verses in the Old Testament. Professor F. Godet, a late 19th century Swiss theologian, offers this more nuanced wording, ***"As truly as I am the eternally living One, so truly shall this come to pass."*** **(BH-4)**

"Every knee and every tongue" will acknowledge and submit to the Lord Jesus Christ! All accounts will be settled; then we will each receive the praise and reward that Christ has prepared for us since *"the foundation of the world."* (**Matthew 25:34, Hebrews 4:1-3**)

Read Romans 14:13-15

22. We meet our old friend "therefore" again—what is it there for?

The Strong Christian's Influence on Other Believers

The following passages are directed to the strong believers in the church. Verses 12-13 are directly connected as Paul continues to give instruction, but also a warning. More mature believers in a church have a dynamic influence over their brothers and sisters. Influence is important and can be very powerful, causing some brothers (and sisters) to stand and others to fall.

1. The strong Christian is not to use his freedom to cause a weaker Christian to stumble. (14:13-16) (CB)

"Pass judgment" and *"decide"* are the same Greek word ***krinō***. The Greek carries the idea that the act of judging/condemnation was already taking place. Our English translator has made that point more apparent by adding *"any longer."* **(CB, BH-5)**

A *"stumbling block"* means a barrier, hindrance, road-block, a snare or a trap, something that a person could trip over. It is the image of the roots of a tree partially hidden under a leaf-covered path. What Paul is getting at is something that causes a **soul** to stumble or falter—a kind of bait or enticement which causes someone to doubt, sin, backslide, or even apostatize. **(BH-5)**

Believers must be aware that things they say or do could cause another believer to stumble or fall. This doesn't mean that we have to **excessively** scrutinize every aspect of our lives or that we are responsible

to know how each person around us thinks about certain things in life. What it does mean is, we need to **be aware and sensitive to the conscience of our brothers and sisters**, staying in tune with the Holy Spirit as we go about our lives. (**1 Corinthians 8:9, 12-13, 1 John 2:10**) Charles Brock, who wrote *Romans: The Road to Righteousness,* the study guide to which we have often made reference, summarized this well:

> It is sin to cause another to stumble in the faith. Paul said the question is not to be decided on the basis that meat is clean or not clean. The unclean meat spoken of here was meat that had been offered to idols. In the eyes of the new, weaker believer, it was wrong to eat this meat. The stronger believer did not see anything wrong with eating it. Paul advised the strong believer: *Do not let the food that you eat ruin the man for whom Christ died!* (14:15b) This means every habit must be analyzed to see if it is causing a brother to stumble. There may be something which in itself is not wrong, but if it causes a brother to stumble, it becomes wrong to do it. It is the duty of every believer to think of everything not as it affects ourselves only, but also as it affects others. We have no right to cause another person to stumble by doing things that are not really important. A Christian cannot escape responsibility for his influence. **(CB)**

Paul states, *"I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself...."* These thoughts are not the result of his own opinion, his own thought processes or reasoning, or even the teaching of other brothers; they are the result of divine revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ. (**Galatians 1:11-12, 1 Corinthians 2:16**) *"Unclean"* (***koinos***) refers to something that is ordinary or common to everyone, in the sense of secular or non-religious. *"Unclean"* here is not intended as a moral judgment (good or bad). It does **NOT** mean **UN**-holy, but only that it is not connected to the service and worship of God (set apart for the service of God). Jesus taught (**Mark 7:14-23**) that the food one eats cannot make a person ceremonially unclean—defiled (***koinoō***), even if eaten with ceremonially unwashed hands. He made it exceedingly clear what **DID** make someone unclean—*"what comes OUT of a man."* Jesus was referring to the extra-biblical teachings (traditions) of the Pharisees which they often regarded as equal to the Word of God—*"your disciples do not walk according to the tradition of the elders."* (Mark 7:5) **(Kenneth Wuest in BH-5)**

> Jesus replaced the normal Jewish understandings of defilement with the truth that defilement comes from an impure heart, not the violation of external rules. Fellowship with God is not interrupted by unclean hands or food but by sin. **(NIVSB)**
>
> Jesus' idea of religion and that of the scribes and Pharisees had nothing in common at all. **(William Barclay in BH-5)**

In 1 Timothy 4:4-5 Paul tells Timothy, *"... everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer."*

23. What is Paul contrasting in Romans 14:14?

New believers or immature believers are not always able to sort out what is right in a given situation. They are ignorant/uninformed in these areas and need to be taught by godly and competent teachers. (**2 Timothy 2:2**) "*Thinks*" (***logizomai***) describes a process of detailed and careful study and logical reasoning which results in a rational, intelligent conclusion. **(BH-5)**

Although he is specifically addressing the more mature believers, this letter was intended to be read aloud to the entire church, so he is also indirectly challenging the weaker brothers to mature in their faith, to grow in their understanding of the freedom they have in Christ, and to be mindful of their own thoughts and judgments. **(JMSB, RSB)**

Paul brings us to the heart of the matter in 14:15—walking in the way of love! (1 Corinthians 13:13) Christian liberty, which has been given to us through Christ, is not a measure or standard of Christian maturity. Drawing attention to one's freedoms does not prove that they are strong, and certainly, no believer should be urged or coerced into exercising Christian freedom in order to prove that he is strong when he is not. In reality, walking in the way of love means that the weaker brother should abstain out of his unbelief, and the stronger brother should abstain out of love. **(JM–BUO-1)** (1 Corinthians 9:22, 1 Corinthians 12:25, 1 Corinthians 10:28, Jude 22)

> The worth of even the poorest and weakest brother cannot be more emphatically expressed than by the words, "for whom Christ died." **(JFB)**

"I liken this to crossing a swinging bridge over a mountain stream. There are people who can run across a bridge like that, even though it does not have any handrails. They are not alarmed by it, they can keep their balance well. They are not concerned about the swaying of the bridge, or the danger of falling into the torrent below. That is fine; some people can do that. But others cannot. You watch them go out on a bridge like that, and they are very uncertain. They shake and tremble; they inch along. They may even get down on their hands and knees and crawl across. But they will make it if you just give them time, if you let them set their own speed. After a few crossings, they begin to pick up courage, and eventually they are able to run right across.

"It is like that with these moral questions. Some people just cannot see themselves moving in a certain area that they have been brought up to think is wrong; they have difficulty doing so. As in the case of the swinging bridge, it would be cruel for someone who had the freedom to cross boldly to take the arm of someone who was timid and drag them across, to force them to run across. They might even lose their balance and fall off the bridge and suffer injury. This is what Paul is warning about." **(SR)**

Read Romans 14:16-21

The Strong Christian's Influence on Other Believers

2. **The Kingdom of God must have first place in the life of the believer.** (14:17-20) **(CB)**

In verse 16, the *"good"* that Paul mentions is our rightful freedom in Christ, everything that our salvation has provided, the ability to enjoy every good thing that God has given to His children. **(JM–BUO-2)** When unbelievers see someone that they know is a strong Christian "abusing" his freedom in Christ and harming a weaker brother, they might easily conclude that Christianity is filled with hypocritical, unloving people, which reflects badly on the reputation of that Christian but also on God's reputation. We can't stop the wagging tongues of unbelievers around us, but we must not give them any **legitimate** occasion to speak evil about us or the Lord Jesus. **(JMSB, MHC)** (Romans 2:24, Romans 12:17)

Jesus often preached on the Kingdom of God (Kingdom of Heaven); it was central to His teachings. This Kingdom is "the **establishment** of God's rule in the hearts and lives of his people, the **overcoming** of all the forces of evil, the **removal** from the world of all the consequences of sin—including death and all that diminishes life—and the **creation** of a new order of righteousness and peace." **(NIVSB)** Every believer belongs to the Kingdom of God when they are saved. Paul wants us to understand that eating and drinking are NON-essentials in the Kingdom. (1 Corinthians 8:8, Ephesians 4:1-3)

> The Kingdom is not a matter of rules and regulations established by man. The Kingdom is not something external or ceremonial. When a Jew became a Christian, he found that all the insignificant rules and regulations were done away with. **(CB)**
> I believe fighting over non-essentials has become widespread Christian recreation, and is probably a key reason that many people reject the gospel. That's sad because believers who fight over those things have missed the point of the kingdom. **(JM–BUO-2)**

The Essential Elements of the Kingdom of God:

- **Righteous Living**—(regarding our relationship with God)—holiness, obedience; the moral and ethical dimension of the Christian life stands out in all of Paul's letters.
- **Peace with God**—(regarding our relationship with our neighbors)—tranquility produced by the Spirit characterizes our relationship with God and others
- **Joy**—(with respect to ourselves)—an abiding attitude of praise and thanksgiving given by the Holy Spirit regardless of circumstances, which flows from one's confidence in God's sovereignty. **(NIVSB, JMSB, JFB)** (**Galatians 5:22-24, Colossians 3:12-15, Matthew 6:33**)

24. What is necessary for a believer to do to be *"acceptable to God and approved by men*?" (What does "*thus"* refer to?) (18)

Christians are constantly under the microscope of a disbelieving and suspicious world, watching our every word and action to assess how we live and treat others. Indeed, God is our only judge, but the impact of our actions and words can affect how others view the Gospel when we seek to share with them.

> Those are most pleasing to God that are best pleased with him; and they abound most in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. They are approved by wise and good men; and the opinion of others is not to be regarded. **(MHC)**

"So"—conclusion, commands to follow!

25. What are the commands in 19-20?

"Pursue" means to eagerly seek after something. **(LW)**

26. What types of things should we "*pursue*" (make it practical)?

Believers have a responsibility to pursue, and practice, the things that build up other believers and the church. A humble heart and attitude produce a greater possibility for peace with others because a humble person doesn't care about his/her own rights; he cares about the rights and needs of others around him. (**1 Thessalonians 5:11**)

27. What is *"the work of God"* in 14:20?

Paul has been teaching around the symbol of "food," specifically offending a Jew with food that wasn't kosher or offending a Gentile with food that had been offered to idols. However, we know that food isn't the important issue here; it is symbolic of *any* discretionary/optional thing we very well might have a right to do. Nothing that we believe we are allowed to do should cause the man or woman whom God has redeemed to offend their conscience or fall into sin. *"By no means!"* Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit in each believers' heart, is working in every Christian, whether weak, strong, tall, short, American, or Chinese, etc. It is His work, not ours! **(JM–BUO-2)** (**Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, 1 Corinthians 1:7-8, Ephesians 2:10**)

The Strong Christian's Influence on Other Believers

3. The Believer is to practice self-denial if it will help others. (14:20-23) (CB)

Rabbinical (Jewish) laws inflicted many unnecessary regulations on Jews, such as the use of cups, plates, and many other utensils/tools, producing many ridiculous "rules" that supposedly rendered someone "ceremonially clean." A person could even become unclean by standing in the shadow of an unclean object! Anyone even touching something "unclean" was barred from entering the Temple or synagogue. These absurd "laws" had nothing to do with God's definition of cleanness. **(Gary Hill in BH-6)** (Matthew 15:10-11, Acts 10:15, Titus 1:15)

"Everything" (***pas***) in verse 20b means that ALL food, **without exception**, is considered to be clean (***katharos***) or pure in a ceremonial sense. This "*clean*" means free from anything that spoils or corrupts, free from the contaminating influence of sin. Knowing that everything is clean, the strong believer must view other believers with love before exercising their own freedom. **(BH-6)** If they are truly free in Christ, they will be able use their freedom to say "No" to some things that they *could* rightfully enjoy. A person who cannot say "No" is not free but is a slave to himself and things. A genuine Christian can willingly deny himself many things for the welfare of others. **(CB)**

"All meat is clean, but not all eating." **(James Denney in BH-6)**

This is a wonderful illustration of walking in love with our brothers and sisters:

During the war when vessels had to be convoyed across the Atlantic because of the U-boats, all ships had to proceed at the speed of the slowest. This is something of what Paul has in mind here. The strong brother could stride ahead, but his love will not permit it. The shepherd must pace the flock to accommodate the weakest lamb. The Christian must regulate his freedom to take into account the feeble conscience of a weaker brother or sister. We must actively pursue those things that make for peace and mutual building up of one another. This is never easy, but it is the way of love. **(BH-6)**

Read Romans 14:22-23

These final verses in Romans 14 take us back to Paul's statement in 14:5—*"Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind."* Each believer must "work out" their own convictions regarding freedom in disputable things; this "working out" comes through the long process of sanctification—in reading, study, and instruction in the Word, as well as fellowship with other believers, and a growing relationship with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (Philippians 2:12-13)

Romans 14:22 provides **A Word for the Strong in Faith,** a concluding command and exhortation.

28. What is the command?

Paul encourages the strong believer to recognize the liberty that comes through Christ, enjoy it, and then keep it between God and himself; don't flaunt those freedoms because it is a private matter. **(JMSB, RSB)** Private does not mean hidden, as in keeping secret sins, because that is not freedom. Paul is not talking about sins, and not even just a private opinion, but a true conviction concerning the truth and will of God, a conviction realized through study and communion with God. This conviction (faith) should be maintained, instead of being easily tossed aside, because it was founded on truth. **(BH-6)** (Galatians 5:1, Romans 15:1-2, Acts 24:16)

29. Does this mean that it is wrong to discuss these things with our weaker brothers and sisters? Explain.

By no means! What Paul is condemning is zeal for insignificant matters which can jeopardize our love and fellowship with others. **(JFB)**

The second half of verse 22 might be somewhat confusing, so let's compare some other translations (and a paraphrase).

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

LSB—*"The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Blessed is he who does not judge himself in what he approves."*

NLT—*"You may have the faith to believe that there is nothing wrong with what you are doing, but keep it between yourself and God. Blessed are those who do not condemn themselves by doing something they know is not right."*

Amplified **(Paraphrase)**: *"Your personal convictions* [on such matters]—*exercise* [them] *as in God's presence, keeping them to yourself* [striving only to know the truth and obey His will]. *Blessed* (happy, to be envied) *is he who has no reason to judge himself for what he approves* [who does not convict himself by what he chooses to do]."

30. Write your own paraphrase for Romans 13:22? How would you explain it to someone else?

> **No Christian can "borrow" another Christian's convictions and be honest in his Christian life.... Conscience is strengthened by knowledge. But knowledge must be balanced by love; otherwise, it tears down instead of building up. (Warren Wiersbe in BH-6)**

Romans 14:23 completes our chapter with **A Word for the Weak in Faith,** not a command, but a warning and statement of fact. It's interesting to note that *"pass judgment," "doubt,"* and *"condemned"* all have the same Greek root **(*krinō*)** meaning to decide, determine, decree. *"Pass judgment" is* **(*krinō*)**, *"doubt"* is **(*diakrinō*)** [to be divided in one's mind], and *"condemned" is* **(*katakrinō*)** [to give judgment against]. **(LW)**

Although the word "conscience" does not appear in verse 23, it is certainly understood *(*i.e. *"not from faith."*) Our conscience is a God-given "balancing scale" which helps us determine what is right and what is wrong. Conscience is certainly not infallible, yet it is clearly wrong to violate one's own conscience. Neither the strong in faith, nor the weak in faith should ever sin against their conscience, regardless what another person says or does. **(BH-6)** The general principle from Romans 14:5 is the same for both the strong and weak Christian—*"Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind."* A weak one shouldn't try to imitate or follow the strong in these areas until he believes it is right. Otherwise, he will be condemned by his conscience. Paul is extremely clear that to violate one's conscience is sin. **(JM–BUO-2)** (**Romans 10:17, 2 Corinthians 5:7, Hebrews 11:1, 6**)

> **Do nothing about which you have need to ask a question. Be quite sure about it, or leave it alone. Whatsoever you cannot do with the confidence that you are doing right is sin to you. Though the deed may be right to other people, if you have any doubt about it yourself, it is evil to you. (Charles Spurgeon in BH-6)**

31. What did you select as the Key Verse(s) in Romans 14? Why?

32. Create a basic outline for Romans 14.

33. Write a summary of Romans 14.

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