

# PURSUING THE THINGS THAT MAKE FOR PEACE

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**Text:** Rom. 14

## **Introduction:**

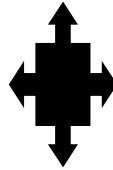
- I. Paul in Romans 14 is dealing with proper conduct of people who have been saved by faith.
  - A. Chapters 1-11 develop this theme; chapters 12-16 tell of proper conduct growing out of this salvation.
  - B. The theme outlined

### **Salvation By Law**

### **Salvation by faith**

#### **Sinner**

Perfection required  
No forgiveness  
Boasting allowed  
Earn salvation  
Nobody can



Active, obedient faith required  
Forgiveness for imperfection  
No boasting  
By grace  
Everyone can

#### **Salvation**

“Works”  
One’s own righteousness

“Believes”  
Righteousness of God

- C. Chapter 13 emphasizes that one who is saved by faith loves his neighbor (v.9) and therefore “does no harm to a neighbor” (v.10). Chapter 14 discusses one area where this person does no harm to his neighbor by carefully avoiding placing a stumblingblock in his way.
- II. Controversy has arisen over proper application of Romans, chapter 14, so our purpose is:
  - A. To see the general teaching of the passage.
  - B. To see the proper application of the passage to disagreements that arise in our day.

## **Body**

- I. **The writer urges mutual respect where differences exist - vs. 1-12.**
  - A. Two differences specified.
    1. One eats all things; another eats only vegetables - v.2. Can we understand him? “After all,” he might be saying, “I don’t know how that animal was killed, and I’m not supposed to eat anything strangled. Besides, that meat could have been tainted with idolatry. The safe course to take is to refrain from meats altogether.” Or, certain Jewish scruples could have been involved.
    2. One esteems every day alike; another esteems one day above another - v.5. Can we understand a Jew, recently converted, never having worked on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, feeling uncomfortable with the idea of working on the Sabbath?

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- B. The first brother is the “strong” - 15:1. The second is “weak in the faith”, not faith in Christ, but “faith in the rightfulness of one’s own conduct” (Grubbs as quoted by Hamilton). See v. 23. This “weak” brother may be one of the strongest Christians in the church, but he is “weak” in reference to the scruples to which he holds.
  - C. Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, states clearly the truth concerning the difference - v.14 – “There is nothing unclean of itself.” The scruple is based on the conscience of the weak brother rather than on any teaching from the word of God.
  - D. Instructions to the strong.
    - 1. Receive the one who is weak - v. . “Welcome him” (RSV); “accept him” (NASV). ... “but not to dispute over doubtful things” (NKJV), or “passing judgment on his opinions” (NASV). “He is to be welcomed openly without any indication or inward belief that there is something wrong with him, separating him from the Lord” (Hamilton).
    - 2. Do not despise him - v.3. Do not show contempt for him. – v. 10. One must never look scornfully on a good conscientious brother, no matter how strange his scruples seem to be.
    - 3. Remember, it is to the Lord that he holds those scruples; he does not live to himself, he lives to the Lord - vs. 6-12.
  - E. Instructions to the weak.
    - 1. Do not judge the one who eats - v.3.
      - a. Judge: “To form and express a judgment, opinion, as to any person or thing, more commonly unfavorable” (Robinson).
      - b. “The weak brother is not to enter a condemnatory sentence against the strong brother” (Hamilton).
    - 2. Remember, God has received the brother who does not hold to your scruples - v. 3.
    - 3. Remember, he is another’s servant. He will be judged by his Master; in fact, we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ - vs. 4, 10-12.
  - F. Instructions to both weak and strong.
    - 1. “Let each be fully convinced in his own mind” - v. 5.
    - 2. The application of this passage involves activities concerning which one can determine his own course and still stand favorably before God.

## II. **The writer urges the strong not to place a stumblingblock before the weak - vs. 13-23.**

- A. A principle must be understood if one is to understand this chapter.
  - 1. It is a sin to do anything that you believe to be wrong, no matter how innocent the activity may be generally - vs. 14, 20, 23.
  - 2. “You can be wrong and follow your conscience, but you can never be right when you go against your conscience” (Colly Caldwell).
- B. If I do that which would lead my brother to do what he believes to be wrong, I have caused him to sin. I have placed a stumblingblock before my brother, causing him to fall.
- C. Illustration: I invite several people to my house for dinner, including my vegetarian brother. I wait till everyone is seated before serving. I then place a good, juicy steak on everyone’s plate, serving my vegetarian brother last. As I place his steak on his plate I say to him,

“Now eat that steak and quit holding to your silly opinion about meats.” I am tempting him to do what he cannot conscientiously do. I am placing an occasion to fall before my brother.

- D. When one so places a stumblingblock in his brother’s way:
  - 1. He is no longer walking in love - v. 15.
  - 2. He is destroying one for whom Christ died - v. 15.
  - 3. He is allowing his good (his freedom as a right or privilege) to be spoken of as evil - v. 16.
  - 4. He is destroying the work of God for the sake of food - v. 20. Compare with Eph. 2:10.
- E. It is important to remember that the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit - v. 17. Consequently, our goal is to pursue things that make for peace and edification - v. 19.
- F. This passage is not teaching that one must give up a liberty in Christ just because someone somewhere cannot conscientiously exercise that liberty. An important word in verse 13 is the word “resolve” (NKJV), “judge” (ASV), “determine” (NASV). It is the same word translated “judge” in vs. 3, 4, 10. One must make a judgment to determine when his exercise of a liberty would prove to be a stumblingblock to a weak brother and when it would not. He should forego the exercise of his liberty if there is no reason to believe that it would cause his brother to stumble. In the words of Grubbs as quoted by Hamilton, “We can not waive a duty; we can waive what we deem a privilege.”
- G. We repeat that behind all this instruction is love for one another: “Love does no harm to a neighbor” (13:10). Who is this person with whom we are dealing? He is God’s servant (v. 4), your brother (v. 10), one for whom Christ died (v. 15), the work of God (v. 20). See also Matthew 18:6-14 concerning the seriousness of causing a “little one” to stumble.

**III. Present day application: Three possibilities to be considered.**

- A. Some would use Romans 14 to justify fellowship with those who are in adultery, who lead people astray through false teaching, or who cause division.
  - 1. A principle to remember: you never interpret a passage in such a way as to contradict other passages.
  - 2. Romans 14 tells us to “receive” the weak brother, but other scriptures tell us not to receive false teachers (2 John 9-11); those in adultery (1 Cor. 5:9-11); or those who create division (Rom. 16:17).
  - 3. Besides, if the teaching applies to adulterers, who is to be viewed as “the weak” and as “the strong”? In the context of Romans 14, one would get the impression that it is the person who commits adultery with no problems with his conscience who is the strong, while the brother who has scruples concerning adultery is the one who is weak. This of course cannot be true.
  - 4. We must reject this first possibility.
- B. Some would say that Romans 14 applies to matters of “indifference” such as whether a woman should wear a covering, or whether one should partake of the Lord’s supper on Sunday evening, or whether a woman should speak in a Bible class.
  - 1. These may be matters of indifference to some, but to those who hold to any of these as a matter of personal conviction, they are not matters of indifference.

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2. Consider the person who believes a woman should not answer questions or speak in a class of men and women. I do not agree with this person. I call on women to answer questions unless I know that she cannot conscientiously do so. Can Romans 14 apply? Part of the instructions can apply. I certainly do not despise or hold with contempt the person who cannot speak in class. But the other instruction is that this person cannot judge me. Surely we can see the problem. Is Paul teaching that such a person cannot come to me and say “I believe you are wrong in calling on women to answer questions”? Would I reply to such a person, “You are not to judge me; we receive you, but not to disputes over doubtful things”?
  3. These are issues involving scriptural teaching. Differences should be discussed. Those who believe I am wrong should approach me. We should be able to discuss such matters in a spirit of love and meekness.
  4. Something to think about: When I read Romans 14, I do not see two men who have been Christians for 40 years disputing over something the apostles have either said or written. When I read Romans 14, I see people who have come out of Judaism and out of idolatry who are struggling with the liberties that they have in Christ which they are not emotionally ready to accept and apply to themselves.
  5. We must reject this second possibility.
- C. Romans 14 applies to liberties in Christ which the newly converted person recognizes intellectually, but is not emotionally ready to accept and apply to himself.
1. Such conflict between what one accepts intellectually and what he accepts emotionally is not unusual.
  2. Any person in the church at Rome who accepted Paul’s authority as an apostle would know after reading Romans 14 the truth concerning eating meats. He would know that it is right to eat meats. Paul said so in verses 14 and 20. This does not mean that he could immediately go home and eat a T-bone steak with all good conscience.
  3. I see the application of Romans 14 in:
    - a. The newly converted Baptist who understands that Sunday is not the “Christian Sabbath”, but who still cannot bring himself to mow grass, fish, or play ball on Sunday.
    - b. The newly converted Amish who does not judge the lifestyle of his brethren, but whose conscience brings him to maintain a simple lifestyle.
    - c. The newly converted Catholic who understands that celebration of religious holidays is without New Testament authority, but still chooses to give up something during Lent season.
    - d. Those of us in my generation who grew up on strict teaching against movie going, card playing, etc. who are still not comfortable in participating in such activities.
    - e. The people who do not judge others who send their children to public schools, but cannot conscientiously do so themselves and choose to home school.
  4. In all of these areas, each can “be fully convinced in his own mind” and be received both by the Lord and his brethren.
- IV. **A question remains: How do we handle differences involving personal convictions, such as women’s coverings, serving of the Lord’s supper on Sunday night, etc.?**
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- A. Since these are matters of personal conviction and individual application, the peace of the local church should not be affected.
  - B. We must not think that someone will come up with some “magical” statement that will bring everyone to the same conclusion overnight. Changes in thinking usually come about slowly.
  - C. Let us exercise patience, longsuffering, and mutual respect in regards to such differences, never being afraid to discuss them, but doing so in a spirit of love and gentleness.
  - D. How long should we be patient with one another? As long as a desire for truth is demonstrated, and that might be for a lifetime.
  - E. One thing we know. The Lord does not want local churches to “splinter” over every difference that might arise. He does want us to search constantly for truth, “with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2, 3).
- V. **Something needs to be said concerning the similarity of teaching in Romans, chapter 14 and 1 Corinthians, chapters 8-10.**
- A. The Corinthians were eating meats that had been sacrificed to idols, and were doing so sitting in an idol’s temple (8:1, 10). They were seeking to justify themselves on the basis of their knowledge that there is only one God. They had written Paul concerning the appropriateness of their action (7:1).
  - B. Paul uses the occasion to teach the same principle as is taught in Romans 14, that one must not place a stumblingblock before a weaker brother (8:9-13).
  - C. He later rebukes them, however, for their overconfidence (9:24 - 10:13); then tells them to flee idolatry (10:14), and that they “cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons” (10:21).
  - D. In 1 Corinthians, chapters 8-10, Paul is dealing with right and wrong; with activities that were bringing the Corinthians into fellowship with demons. In Romans, chapter 14, he is dealing with activities that were right in and of themselves, activities in which each was free to “be fully convinced in his own mind” (Rom. 14:5).

**Conclusion:**

- I. We must be careful in our application of Romans 14. Its application is not to immorality or false teaching; nor is its application to matters of personal conviction based upon scripture. Its application is to liberties in Christ which one may not be able emotionally to accept and apply to his own life.
- II. We must not only make proper application of this chapter, but we must carry out its teaching in our own lives, pursuing “the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another”.

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