

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

September 6, 2023

Series - The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul

The Letter to the Romans

The Righteousness of God

The Duty Section (Chapters 12 – 16)

Christian Liberty and Our Relationship with Other Believers

Text – Romans 14

Introduction

Chapter 13 ended with an admonition to love the people around us and not make provision for the flesh because time is running out. In chapter 14, Paul will now explain how we are to apply that principle in a practical way in our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul will deal with the subject of Christian liberty here. There are some things regarding our conduct that are not clearly and specifically revealed in the Scripture. You might call these gray areas or questionable things. Is it OK to do them? This is the area of Christian standards, preferences, and even convictions. My standards, preferences, and convictions are probably a little different from yours. How am I to treat others who may believe a little differently than me in these areas? Again, we are not talking here about things that are crystal clear in the Scripture.

Paul will give us three principles that will help us determine whether these things are right for us or not:

- 1 Conviction (v. 5) – In other words can you be fully enthusiastic about the thing that you want to do. Everything you allow yourself to do in life ought to be something that you can do without any reservation.
- 2 Conscience (v. 22) – Is there any doubt about what you want to do? Is there any question as to whether it is right?
- 3 Consideration for Others (v. 13) – Will the thing that you want to do send the wrong message to other people? Will my brother be offended? Will it cause him to stumble?

Paul also dealt with this subject in 1 Corinthians 8.

- I. Receive One Another (vs. 1 – 12)
 - A. Don't Argue (vs. 1 – 3)

"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations." (Romans 14:1)

We are to receive those whom God receives. The early church had a problem with this. The Gentiles were just as saved and accepted by God as were the Jews, but some of the Jews would not fellowship with the Gentiles because they were different in areas that no longer mattered.

"doubtful disputations" means arguing about these areas of disagreement. We are not to receive someone so that we can debate with him about our differences.

"But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain." (Titus 3:9)

Someone once said, "In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

"For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs." (Romans 14:2)

You will notice here that the weaker brother was the one who placed more restrictions on his diet. He was weak in the faith and was placing himself back under the law.

"Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him." (Romans 14:3)

There is a myriad of areas where we might have higher or lower standards, preferences, or convictions than another brother or sister. I can have fellowship on a personal level with other believers that may not believe the same way that I do.

On an ecclesiastical level, however, before I will allow a fellow believer to minister to our people, there must be a higher level of agreement.

B. Don't Judge (vs. 4 – 12)

"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand." (Romans 14:4)

Each individual believer will ultimately only have to answer to his own Master - Christ.

"One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." (Romans 14:5)

In the early church particularly, there were differences in the observance of the Sabbath day, Sunday, and certain Jewish holidays. Today, we could apply this verse to many different areas. Some Christians think it is OK to watch television, others do not; etc. This is where conviction comes in. Each believer must be fully persuaded that what he is doing is right for him, or not.

"He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks." (Romans 14:6)

If I am fully persuaded in my own mind, then I believe that the thing that I allow or do not allow is right within my relationship with God.

"For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's." (Romans 14:7 - 8)

This verse, in context, is not saying that each of our lives affects the people around us, though that is how it is commonly used. It is stating that everything that we do in life is tied into our relationship with God. Someone once said that you bring Christ with you wherever you go, and if you can go to a place and it does not displease the Lord, then it is OK for you to go there.

Dr. McGee gives this illustration:

Questionable amusements are wrong for the believer if they are questionable to him. If he can participate in them and maintain a close relationship to Christ, they are not wrong for him. Let me tell you a little story in this connection. Many years ago, in Tennessee a young lady went to her pastor with the question, "Do you think it is wrong for a Christian to dance?" He said to her, "Anywhere you can take Jesus Christ with you is all right to go." That made her angry. She said, "Well, I can take Him to the dance." The pastor said, "Then go ahead." So she went to the dance. A boy whom she had not met before cut in on her and danced with her. She had determined to take Jesus Christ with her, so she asked him, "Are you a Christian?" He said, "No." Wanting to make conversation with her, he asked, "Are you a Christian?" She said, "Yes." And this is what the unbeliever said, "Then what are you doing *here*?" After she got home that night, she decided that maybe she couldn't take the Lord Jesus Christ there after all.¹

"For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living." (Romans 14:9)

This verse is parenthetical referring to the last statement in v. 8. The bottom line is that we are purchased possessions of Christ. We belong to Him. Christ death and resurrection give Him the right to exercise Lordship over the individual.

¹ McGee, J. V. (1991). *Thru the Bible commentary: The Epistles (Romans 9-16)* (electronic ed., Vol. 43, pp. 101-102). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

"But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." (Romans 14:10)

Paul now concludes the argument. We are not to judge our brother, or "set at nought" our brother, which means to despise or hold in low esteem.

"For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." (Romans 14:12)

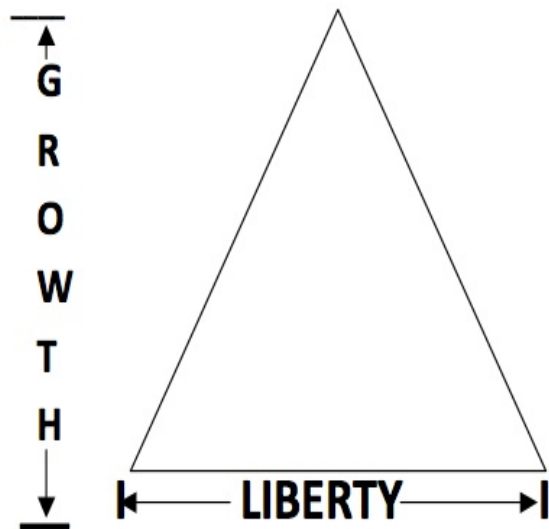
We will all have to answer to God individually. I won't have to give an account for you, and you won't have to give an account for me. Even as a pastor, I will not have to answer for the decisions that the people in my church make. I will only have to answer for what I taught them, and the example that I lead.

II. Remember One Another (vs. 13 – 23)

"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:" (Hebrews 10:24)

Since we are ambassadors for Christ our job is to send the right message to the people around us. We are to point people toward God, not away from God. This applies to both believers and unbelievers. My liberty should not at all hurt my brother or cause him to stumble spiritually.

The more I grow spiritually, the less liberty I will take because I want to send the right message to my brothers and sisters.



"Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way." (Romans 14:13)

My actions must take into consideration my brother. As a leader, I know that many people are watching me, and I do not want to send the wrong message, particularly to the people that I lead.

"I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean." (Romans 14:14)

There are certain things that may be perfectly acceptable to my own convictions and conscience, but those same things may be harmful to a weaker brother. Something may be sin for me, but not sin for someone else.

"But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died." (Romans 14:15)

The word "charitably" means love. If I love my brothers and sisters in Christ, I will be very careful how I conduct myself in front of them.

"Let not then your good be evil spoken of:" (Romans 14:16)

"In other words, liberty does not mean license. The believer is to *use* his liberty, not *abuse* it. We are always to keep in mind how our conduct will affect weaker Christians." (Dr. McGee)²

"For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Romans 14:17)

The Pharisees had a problem with majoring on the minors. They made mountains out of molehills, and everything was a test of fellowship:

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess."

(Matthew 23:23-25)

The Pharisee elevated his preferences and standards over more important things. However, the Christian must be careful that he does not place his liberty above the things that really matter, either.

"For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men." (Romans 14:18)

The "these things" here are the righteousness, peace, and joy of the Holy Ghost mentioned in the previous verse, and these are the things that we must give priority to in our lives.

"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." (Romans 14:19)

² McGee, J. V. (1991). *Thru the Bible commentary: The Epistles (Romans 9-16)* (electronic ed., Vol. 43, p. 104). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Notice here that we are not to look for division, but rather *“follow after things which make for peace”*. We should not be looking for trouble, and much of what we fight about is not all that important.

The word, “edify” means to strengthen. Everything we do or say should work to edify our brothers and sisters in Christ:

“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.” (Ephesians 4:29)

“For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.” (Romans 14:20)

It should not be all that big a deal for the Christian to give up something in order to not offend and send the right message to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

“It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.” (Romans 14:21)

Everything that we do in life should help strengthen our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Warren Wiersbe says this:

Both the strong believer and the weak believer need to grow. The strong believer needs to grow in *love*; the weak believer needs to grow in *knowledge*. So long as a brother is weak in the faith, we must lovingly deal with him in his immaturity. But if we really love him, we will help him to grow. It is wrong for a Christian to remain immature, having a weak conscience.

An illustration from the home might help us better understand what is involved. When a child comes into a home, everything has to change. Mother and Father are careful not to leave the scissors on the chair or anything dangerous within reach. But as the child matures, it is possible for the parents to adjust the rules of the house and deal with him in a more adult fashion. It is natural for a child to stumble when he is learning to walk. But if an adult constantly stumbles, we know something is wrong.

Young Christians need the kind of fellowship that will protect them and encourage them to grow. But we cannot treat them like “babies” all their lives! The older Christians must exercise love and patience and be careful not to cause them to stumble. But the younger Christians must “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). As they mature in the faith, they can help other believers to grow. To gear the ministry of a Sunday School class or local church only to the baby Christians is to hinder

their growth as well as the ministry of the more mature saints. The weak must learn from the strong, and the strong must love the weak. The result will be peace and maturity to the glory of God.³

"Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth." (Romans 14:22)

This refers to the conscience. If your faith tells you that you can participate in a certain activity, and it doesn't hurt your brother, then "have at it", but don't try to influence other believers to believe like you do. Enjoy your liberty, but don't parade it in front of others.

"And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (Romans 14:23)

If you are not convinced that something is right to do than you cannot do it "in faith", and if you do something that violates your faith than it is sin.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says this:

Concerning personal convictions in areas where different views exist, Paul concluded, So whatever you believe about these things (lit., "The faith that you have," or "Do you have faith?") keep between yourself and God. A Christian must not insist on influencing a believer with tighter scruples to change his ways. It should be something "in his own mind" (v. 5), for he lives "to the Lord" (v. 8). Paul considered a Christian like himself who had a clear conscience on such matters blessed (lit., "happy"). On the other hand, a Christian who has doubts is condemned (perf. pass. verb, "stands condemned") if he eats. If a Christian eats food or does anything when he has doubts in his own mind as to whether it is right or wrong before God (one who is "weak" in faith, vv. 1–2), his action does not spring from (*ek*, "out of") his faith or trust in God and is therefore wrong. As Paul generalized, everything that does not come from (*ek*, "out of") faith is sin. The principle is, "When in doubt, don't." The "strong" Christian (15:1) is wrong if he causes a weak brother to sin (by doing something while doubting, 14:20), and a weak brother (vv. 1–2) who goes against what he doubts also sins (v. 23).⁴

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 561). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴ Witmer, J. A. (1985). Romans. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 494). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.