

## **Romans 14: 01- 23**

In many ways, the Christian is a stranger  
and a pilgrim on the earth.

Like the patriarch Abraham, this world is  
not our home, and we are looking for a  
city which hath foundations, whose  
builder and maker is God.

Yes, we are citizens of heaven.

But at the same time, we are citizens of the  
country we live in.

And as such, our actions and reactions  
concerning government and the  
neighbourhood we live in must be  
appropriate for a child of God.

That's what Romans Chapter 13 is all about.

First of all, even though we need to be  
salt, we must be law-abiding citizens.

As, Romans 13:1-2 admonishes us, **"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.**

**<sup>2</sup> Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God."**

And then, for the love of Christ, we should have a good testimony in our neighbourhood.

V 10 **"Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."**

So then, Chapter 13 was all about our interaction with the world around us. On the other hand, Chapter 14, which we will be studying today, is all about our interaction with our fellow believers.

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In this particular case, Paul was dealing with the local assembly at Rome which was going through a transitional period in church history.

The believers were pretty much equally divided between Jews and Gentiles, and, consequently, had come from some very different backgrounds, which, of course, would generate some very different opinions.

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Actually, this chapter doesn't give any specifics concerning the exact nature of the problem apart from the fact that it involved holy days and food.

However, considering the diverse nature of the congregation, I think we can safely assume that it would involve sacrifices

made to pagan gods, and Jewish observances.

We will be looking at the Gentile ramifications of this problem in next week's lesson, but, for the moment, we will be dealing exclusively with the Jewish issue.

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It would seem reasonable to assume that some of the Jewish Christians were still clinging to the old ways.

Oh, they were true believers, all right, but their Old Testament observances were deeply rooted in their culture.

So, what should the church's reaction be?

Well, Paul left no doubt as to what it should be.

His instructions are recorded in Romans Chapter 14.

V 1-3 "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.

<sup>2</sup> for one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.

<sup>3</sup> 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."

Now, Paul wasn't advocating the theory that everything is relative.

Today there are those who are convinced that there's no absolute right or wrong.

Everyone should be allowed to live according to his own ideas, and we shouldn't interfere.

I think the decaying society that we now find ourselves in should convince even

the most casual observer that this worldly theory simply doesn't work. There must be rules and standards of conduct to govern our actions and reactions. For the Christian, the Word of God is that absolute standard.

And yet, even within the Church of Jesus Christ, there are some things that are relative.

In the case of the church in Rome, it was personal convictions.

And even today there will be Christians with personal convictions which do not necessarily reflect our own.

However, unless their beliefs conflict with fundamental doctrines, we should leave it up to God to judge His servants.

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So then, some of the Jewish Christians probably felt duty-bound to continue the observance of certain holy days such as Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles, etc.

And some who were weak in the faith, still felt it necessary to observe a kosher diet.

Apparently some of them were so troubled by this issue that they were now eating herbs.

However, there were others who realized these observances were no longer valid, and had no such inhibitions.

Of course, Paul would belong to this latter group, but his instructions were not quite as predictable as some might imagine.

Did he tell the weaker Jewish Christians to  
shape up, and not cause this confusion?

Did he say, "*You must get up to date*"?

No, he didn't.

And why didn't he?

Wasn't this old carry-over kind of silly?

Well, no, it really wasn't, at least not in  
that particular time in church history.

For instance, just look at Peter's beliefs  
at that time.

He was a mature believer, but he still hung  
onto the old ways.

We can see that in Acts. 10:9-16: **"On the  
morrow, as they went on their journey,  
and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went  
up upon the housetop to pray about the  
sixth hour:**

<sup>10</sup> **And he became very hungry, and  
would have eaten: but while they made**

ready, he fell into a trance,

<sup>11</sup> And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending upon him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:

<sup>12</sup> Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

<sup>13</sup> And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

<sup>14</sup> But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. (So at that point in time, Peter, who was definitely a believer, still held onto the old dietary laws.)

<sup>15</sup> And the voice spake unto him again

the second time, What God hath  
cleansed, that call not thou common.

<sup>16</sup> This was done thrice: and the  
vessel was received up again into  
heaven."

Why was this repeated three times?

Probably because Peter didn't give in to  
dropping his dietary laws right away.  
We don't even know if he gave in the third  
time.

Even though God Himself had been speaking to  
him, he had said, "**Not so, Lord.**"

That's how ingrained these dietary laws were  
in his life, and he had not been a  
rabbi either. No, he had just been a  
fisherman.

So, even in this Jewish fisherman's life,  
these laws had been firmly embedded,

and they should have been. They were  
God's laws.

Now, of course, God changed Peter's mind,  
but only because He was teaching him  
that the Gospel was also for the  
Gentiles.

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On the other hand, Paul, even though he had  
been a Pharisee in the past, now  
accepted the fact that the old ways  
were past.

And also some enlightened Jewish Christians  
knew that they no longer were bound by  
the Old Testament ordinances.

However, at the same time, other believers,  
just like Peter, felt conscience-bound  
to keep these laws.

So what should the church do?

Let's look at Romans 14:1-3 again **"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.**

**2 For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.**

**3 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."**

So Paul was faced with two very different groups in the Roman church.

Did Paul favour the one and condemn the other?

No, he did not take sides.

What then were his instructions?

His instructions were that the enlightened Christians should not despise the abstainers.

And likewise, those that held to the old ways were not to judge those that felt free to eat.

So there was to be tolerance for personal religious convictions.

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Let's stop for a moment to examine these Jewish dietary laws that were causing so many problems.

Turn with me to Leviticus 11:1-3 --- **"And the LORD spake unto Moses and to Aaron, saying unto them,**

**<sup>2</sup> Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, These are the beasts which ye shall eat among all the beasts that are on the earth.**

**<sup>3</sup> Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, and cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat."**

All these conditions must apply in order  
that the animal could be eaten.

For instance, they could not eat the camel,  
the badger, or the swine because they  
did not fulfill all these conditions.

V 9-10 **"These shall ye eat of all that are  
in the waters: whatsoever hath fins and  
scales in the waters, in the seas, and  
in the rivers, them shall ye eat.**

<sup>10</sup> **And all that have not fins and scales in  
the seas, and in the rivers, of all  
that move in the waters, and of any  
living thing which is in the waters,  
they shall be an abomination unto you:"**

So they could not eat things like shellfish,  
or eels, or squid.

Personally, I wouldn't have too much problem  
with that part of the dietary laws.

V 13-16 "And these are they which ye shall have in abomination among the fowls; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, and the ossifrage, and the ospray,  
14 And the vulture, and the kite after his kind;  
15 Every raven after his kind;  
16 And the owl, and the night hawk, and the cuckow, and the hawk after his kind,"--- and the list goes on.

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Also, some of the holy days that they were still hanging onto were Passover, Pentecost, New Moons, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

By the way, these feasts were valid in Old Testament times, and were types of

Christ, and the birth of the church,  
etc.

However, now the type had been fulfilled by  
the anti-type, and so they were no  
longer needed.

Also, in Old Testament times, the dietary  
laws served a very useful purpose.

They were to keep God's Chosen People  
separated from the Gentile nations  
around them, and so prevent the  
temptation of idol worship, etc.

But now, in the church of Jesus Christ, it  
was necessary that they be one, not  
separated.

And so these laws had served their purpose.

Of course, some enlightened believers  
realized this, at least to some extent,  
and so with a good conscience, they ate  
whatever foods they wanted.

Also, they felt that they should only observe the Lord's Day, or Sunday, as we now call it.

So, I am sure the remedy seemed quite straightforward to them:

*Just instruct the weaker brothers,  
and bring them up to date.*

*Tell them to shape up, and the  
problem would be solved.*

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But it was not actually that easy.

You see, meats and holy days were not the real problem here.

Remember the instructions in chapter 13, concerning our brothers and sisters?

The bottom line was love.

So, in love, the weaker brothers must be given time to be convinced in their own

consciences that these old ordinances were not necessary.

They should not be forced to go against their beliefs.

After all, their convictions were not causing doctrinal heresy.

For, as V 20 says, **"For meat destroy not the work of God."**

No, food and holy days would not destroy the work of God, but, on the other hand, fighting among the brethren would.

So Paul's instructions to the strong were that they not despise the weak, and that the weak were not to judge the strong.

Actually, what Paul was asking for was an application of the Royal Law --- **"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."**

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Now today, the problem of meats and Jewish holy days are no longer a concern in the church.

However, Paul's instructions about love is right up to date.

So many church assemblies have been destroyed because of disagreements concerning personal convictions.

And these personal convictions were not really a threat to the essential framework of doctrinal truth.

So, even though we do not all have the same personal convictions, we don't have to shun our fellow believers on that basis.

We have much more to draw us together than to drive us apart.

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And there is also the matter of judging.

V 4 **"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."**

We all know it is improper to meddle with other people's servants or employees.

If you are invited to a rich man's house for dinner and his servant makes a bad job of serving the meal, you can roll your eyes at your wife, but you don't tell the servant to shape up.

It's not your place to do so.

In like manner, our fellow believer is not our servant.

No, he is God's servant, and **"to his own master he standeth or falleth."**

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A couple of lessons back, we learned that personal vengeance is an area that doesn't belong to us, right?

Well, this is another area where we do not belong.

It is true that we should judge areas of doctrine and sin.

Open sin should not be tolerated in the church of God.

However, when it comes to the area of a believer's personal service to his Master, we should not interfere.

That is God's job.

And the Lord is well able to judge His servants in a just manner, because **"the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart."**

Not only does God have the right to judge,  
He is also uniquely equipped to do so  
because He can see His servant's heart.  
We can't, so we do not have the  
qualifications for the job.

V 5-7 **"One man esteemeth one day above  
another: another esteemeth every day  
alike. Let every man be fully persuaded  
in his own mind.**

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> For none of us liveth to himself,  
and no man dieth to himself."

The answer then in this area of questionable things is not necessarily complete agreement or oneness.

Yes, it should be oneness in the area of doctrinal matters, but the bottom line here is, **"Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."**

That sounds a little different than **"Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."** (We see that, over in Philippians 2:2)

Well, it should sound a little different because these verses refer to a different area completely.

Philippians 2:2 refers to fundamental doctrine, whereas **"Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind"** refers to personal convictions.

I think many of our problems today, and the problems in the Roman church, were caused by mixing up these areas.

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Let me give you a modern-day example of this.

I remember hearing about one of Trans World Radio's staff members who ran into problems while on furlough in the States.

His supporting churches were mainly Southern Baptist.

When he came home from the field, he had to be very careful not to wear a coloured shirt in meetings, as it was considered worldly.

He also got into trouble because of his moustache.

I don't know if that was the situation in all Southern Baptist churches, but in his area, it was.

We can smile a bit about that, but for him, it was a real problem.

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I would like to look more closely at Paul's method of dealing with this problem in the Roman church, because he did not always act in this way.

Concerning the Jewish Christians, he was content to let the ceremonial Law die out slowly, and so have an honourable burial.

He was not willing to force the issue.

However, in the church at Galatia, the same type of thing was happening.

That is, the Gentile believers had been convinced by Judaizing teachers that they should practice the old ordinances as part of the means of salvation.

That was a much different story, and Paul would not tolerate it for a minute.

Listen to his statement: Galatians 4:8-11--

**"Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.**

**<sup>9</sup> But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?**

**<sup>10</sup> Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.**

**<sup>11</sup> I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain."**

Where foundational truths were at stake,  
where the finished work of Christ was  
being added to, Paul struck out against  
heresy.

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So Paul's actions clearly state that there  
is a big difference between fundamental  
truth and personal convictions.

We should be careful to discern the  
difference also.

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However, even personal convictions will be  
judged someday.

There will be a time when we will all give  
an account to our Lord Jesus Christ  
concerning our actions.

Back to Chapter 14:7-12 **"For none of us  
liveth to himself, and no man dieth to  
himself.**

8 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.

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

10 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.

11 For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

At the Judgment Seat of Christ, our true motives will be judged, and our reward, or lack of reward, determined.

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In verse 20, it says, "**For meat destroy not the work of God.**"

This problem in the Roman church did not threaten Gospel truth, but it could have destroyed believers.

And V15 says, "**Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.**"

You might say, "*I know it's all right to eat all kinds of meat. There's absolutely nothing wrong with it. How can I destroy my brother with that practice?*"

Well, you could destroy his conscience, because even though it is all right for you, it is a sin for him.

That seems like a double standard, doesn't it?

Well, in fact, it is, and that's OK.

V 13-16 "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.

<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.

<sup>16</sup> Let not then your good be evil spoken of."

If your brother believes something is sin,  
and he does it because of your example,  
he has gone against the dictates of his  
conscience.

In his heart he has willingly disobeyed God.  
And that disobedience will be brought out at  
the Judgment Seat of Christ.

So, **"Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom  
Christ died.**

**<sup>16</sup> Let not then your good be evil  
spoken of."**

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Let me give you an example. Granted, it  
might not fit these verses exactly, but  
it will give you an idea.

Suppose a Mennonite girl who believes in her  
heart that she should dress in black is  
persuaded by a Christian to sneak out

to a gathering dressed as we would ordinarily dress.

Now, we do not believe that you need to dress in black, but if we persuaded her to do otherwise, even while she holds those convictions, then we have caused her to do wrong.

It would be wrong for her because in her heart, she is disobeying God.

And it would be wrong for us to persuade her to do so.

V 20 **"For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence."**

V 23 **"And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin."**

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So, what are the important things in the  
Christian's life?

V 17-22 **"For the kingdom of God is not meat  
and drink; but righteousness, and  
peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.**

18 **For he that in these things  
serveth Christ is acceptable to God,  
and approved of men.**

19 **Let us therefore follow after the  
things which make for peace, and things  
wherewith one may edify another.**

20 **For meat destroy not the work of  
God. All things indeed are pure; but it  
is evil for that man who eateth with  
offence.**

21 **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.**

22     **Hast thou faith? have it to  
thyself before God. Happy is he that  
condemneth not himself in that thing  
which he alloweth.**

--- V18 **"For he that in these things serveth  
Christ is acceptable to God, and  
approved of men."**

Righteousness, and peace and joy---these are  
the things that we should be concerned  
about.

At the Judgment Seat of Christ, it will not  
be asked who ate flesh and who ate  
herbs.

It will not be asked who kept the holy days  
and who did not.

It will not even be asked who wore coloured  
shirts and who wore white ones.

But it will be asked, *Who feared God and  
worked righteousness, and who did not?*

"For the kingdom of God is not meat and  
drink; but righteousness, and peace,  
and joy in the Holy Ghost."