

The Epistle of Paul to the *Romans*

Application: The Behavior of God's Righteousness (12:1 - 15:13)

In the first half of this chapter ^{v.1-12}, Paul encouraged believers with a strong (confident) faith to not do anything to intimidate or judge any believer with a weaker (insecure) faith. After spending a significant part of his letter addressing his fellow Jews and discussing some contrasts with the Gentiles, Paul turned to some of the adjustments both groups would have in transitioning from their former lives to becoming dedicated followers of Jesus Christ. The comments Paul conveyed mainly involved the ceremonial requirements of the Mosaic Law.

14:1-4 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Paul's use of "weak" (immature) faith and indirect use of "strong" (mature) faith were meant to signify the level of assurance each group had in their consciences as each person adjusted to their level of Christian faith. Paul exhorted the confident Christians to be patient with the "weak" believers as they learned to accept all of the freedoms that come with a belief in Jesus Christ ^{Galatians 5:1}. He reminded the strong not to "judge" the weak on "disputable matters", because it is not so much about what Christians do as what they believe. The belief (faith) in the freedom is what is important, and not in how that freedom is expressed. In fact, the strong probably saw the weak as legalistic and self-righteous, while the weak undoubtedly saw the strong as irresponsible. Paul used the terms "master" and "servant" to mean "Christ" and "Christian", respectively. He pointed out that it is how Jesus judges each believer that matters, and His judgement is not based on tradition or personal preference, but on the individual's heart ^{1 Corinthians 4:3-5}.

At that time, weak Jewish believers had trouble embracing the freedom from old covenant prohibitions, such as the dietary laws, and the weak Gentile believers struggled with breaking away from pagan idolatry and rituals. For example, they had difficulty accepting that eating meat offered to a pagan deity and sold in the market place was no longer a sin ^{1 Corinthians 8:1-13}.

14:5-9 One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. Paul continued by

identifying two examples of controversial issues: (1) "special" days and (2) eating habits.

He then summarized the actual critical issue by contrasting a person's enslavement to special days ^{Galatians 4:9-10} and eating habits ^{Colossians 2:16-17} with their freedom in Christ to follow their conscience, as long as everything is carried out "to the Lord [while giving] thanks to God".

Christian living is accomplished when the life's focus is off self and on God ^{1 Corinthians 6:20, 10:31}.

Christ died and rose to change the slavery of man from sin to Him ^{Romans 6:22} and to establish Him as the eternal Sovereign "Lord of lords and King of kings" ^{Philippians 2:9-11, Revelation 17:14}.

The Jewish believers felt obligated to observe the Sabbath and other Jewish special days, and the Gentiles struggled with the immorality/idolatry associated with pagan festival days.

While Jesus honored the Sabbath Day in worship ^{Mark 1:21, Luke 4:16} and it appears to have importance in the Millennium ^{Ezekiel 46:1-4}, Jesus also made it clear that a legalistic adherence to a Sabbath Day ^{Exodus 20:8} was no longer required ^{Mark 2:27-28}. However, the pattern of man resting from normal labors one day in seven has been in place since his creation ^{Genesis 2:2-3}.

14:10-12 You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: " 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.' " So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Paul asked why any believer should "judge"

another believer (a "brother") about their behavior relative to their freedom in Jesus Christ.

The judgement of condemnation ^{Revelation 20:11-15} belongs exclusively to Jesus ^{Luke 6:37, John 5:22}, as does the judgement of all believers at the "judgement seat of Christ" ^{2 Corinthians 5:9-10}.

Each and every person will "give an account of himself to God" in one of these judgements.

The Isaiah quote ^{Isaiah 45:23} reiterated the sovereignty of the Lord (Jesus Christ ^{Philippians 2:9-11}).

The only verdict important to a Christian with a clear conscience is from God ^{1 Corinthians 4:1-5}.

At this point, Paul shifted the direction of his teaching from the 'attitudes' of the strong toward the weak ^{v.1-12} to the 'actions' of the strong while in the presence of the weak ^{v.13-23}.

14:13-18 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Paul had earlier stated: a person with strong faith should not "[pass] judgement" on a person of weak faith if they were not fully expressing their freedom in Christ ^{v.1-2}. Here, he also pointed out the person of strong faith should not do something they normally would consider fine in the eyes of the Lord in front of an immature Christian, if that act would be harmful (become a "stumbling block" ^{2 Corinthians 6:3}) to the weak faith of their "brother" ^{1 Corinthians 8:9-13}. In writing "As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced...", Paul proclaimed those conclusions were not from his own mind or the teaching of others, but he received "it by revelation from Jesus" ^{Galatians 1:12}. Even though in the freedom of Christ "no food is unclean in itself" ^{Acts 10:15}, a strong Christian should not eat what will create spiritual stress in a brother of weaker faith, when they are together. Paul considered these behaviors a way of "acting in love"; because genuine Christian love ^{1 Corinthians 13} will always promote sensitivity in life decisions. When someone of the world sees a strong Christian doing damage to a weaker Christian, they will speak "evil" of what they have observed. And as a result, the non-believer will be drawn away from the "kingdom of God", because of issues of little importance to the kingdom.

The Greek word *krinō* is used four times in this chapter. It is twice translated "judge" ^{v.4,10} and once as "judgement" ^{v.13} using the meaning "condemnation"; however, here it is also used with an equally literal meaning ("wise decision") by the translation "make up [your] mind" ^{v.13}.

A Christian's "judgment" of other saints should always be preceded by an honest evaluation of their own actions ^{Luke 6:42}. This approach will produce the best perspective on treating others.

14:19-21 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. As he began to conclude his discussion of these issues, Paul urged saints to live in peace ^{Romans 12:18, Hebrews 12:14} and to support/teach ^{Ephesians 4:11-13} other believers in ways that will be a great benefit in everyone's Christian walk ^{2 John 1:4, 3 John 1:3-4}.

In writing to his protégé Timothy, Paul reminded him (and all Christians): "For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving." ^{1 Timothy 4:4}

14:22-23 So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin. Throughout this chapter, Paul taught that what Christians do must (1) always be done to the glory of God, (2) not be an impediment to anyone else's faith and (3) always be edifying to others. In saying "whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God", Paul was not denying that Christians should continually work to learn about the truth of God's Word, both through self-study and group study ^{2 Timothy 3:14-17}. His final thought is that a Christian's life should be governed by faith, and not doubt ^{James 1:5-8}, because faith leads to confidence and doubt is counter to confidence, resulting in sin ^{James 4:17}.

Two serious mistakes many Christians (and pseudo-Christians) make concerning Christian liberty are (1) disrespecting the freedom God has granted ^{Psalms 119:45} and (2) carelessly misusing the freedom without regard for how that might affect others ^{1 Corinthians 10:23-33}.

In conclusion, Paul earlier warned the Galatians: "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But don't use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another in love." ^{Galatians 5:13} Then later, realizing the church in Corinth had been abusing their freedom, Paul wrote to them the following: "Everything is permissible for me - but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me - but I will not be mastered by anything." ^{1 Corinthians 6:12}