

“Romans: Great News from Rome to the Ends of the Earth”

Romans 14 New relationships: the Weak and the Strong – how can we get along?

1.1-15 Intro: Paul and the Gospel

1.16-17 Theme: The Gospel

1.18-8.39 Our Relationship with God

9-11 The People of God

12.1-15.13 Our Relationships in Christ

15.14-16.27 End: Paul and the Gospel

14:1-3 The basic principle

v. 1a Welcome: “As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him...”

v. 1b Don’t condemn over neutral matters: “but not to quarrel over opinions”

v. 2-3 God accepts you Both: “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.”

14:4-13a- Criticism of the weak

v. 4 Don’t judge: “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.”

v. 5 Be convinced in your own mind: “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.”

v. 6-8 We’re Responsible to God:

“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.”

v. 9-12 Jesus only Lord of conscience: 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."

14:13b-21 Criticism of the strong

v. 13 Don't lead someone to stumble: "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."

v. 14 Even if your position is Right: "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."

v. 15 Live in Love: "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."

v. 16 Don't let your liberty do Evil: "So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil."

v. 17-18 Focus on the Kingdom of God: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men."

14:22-23 Summary - Educate, Not Violate, the Conscience:

"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. 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.

Differences of opinion: 'strong' / weak'?

v. 2 Eating. "One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables."

v. 5 Days. "One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike as holy."

v. 21 Wine: "It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble."

"let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ."
Colossians 2.16,17

v. 14 and 20 Foods were “unclean” –

OT ceremonial laws, foods “clean” and “unclean” (Leviticus 11, Deuteronomy 14) - dietary laws of kosher, etc.

The “weak” are following OT “clean- unclean” laws (14:2,3, 14,20), and feel polluted when unclean meats are eaten or OT regulations are broken.

Paul avoids saying Jewish Christians are weak! Why? Many Gentiles, called “God-fearers” were part of synagogues before converting to Christianity. They too could have been “weak”

Paul is not saying “weak” Christians aren’t saved, nor even that they don’t trust Christ. In fact, the “weak” are people who generally are the most fervent and diligent in trying to please Christ. Where they are “weak” is that there are remnants of a legalistic spirit still clinging to them. They have not worked out the implications of the gospel. If you are saved by grace alone, there is no need to feel you can somehow keep God’s favor through rules and regulations. Tim Keller

v. 3 Attitudes of strong toward weak?

v. 3 “ Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains ...”

Strong must not to feel superior to the weak; more mature, advanced, wise and “spiritually sophisticated.”

v. 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.”

Strong must not distress - “grieve” - the weaker brother.

Weak toward the strong?

v. 3 “and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats...”

Weak tends to condemn (lit. “judge”) the strong - denounce and warn the strong they’re in spiritual danger, displeasing to God.

Summary: Strong tend to take the weak too lightly — Weak tend to take the strong too seriously

“Charges” to both strong and weak?

Where the strong are wrong. More criticism than the weak, even though their position is more Biblical (v.14)! He tells them:

1. They are not being loving. v.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.

2. Unloving behavior destroys the work of God. - go to hell? — very unlikely.

v. 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.”

Hinder maturation of Christ-like wisdom and character in believer and church.

3. Causes the brother to fall.

v.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”

v. 21 “anything that causes your brother to stumble cause your brother to fall”

a) Harshness, a condemning spirit, breaking off fellowship, unkind, ungracious spirit.

b) Lead the weak to begin to do things that are against their conscience.

v. 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.”

“I once knew a high school girl who had been raised in a strict church background that taught that it was a sin for women to wear makeup. But the peer pressure at school (from other Christian girls raised in other churches) led her to begin putting on makeup after leaving home in the morning (and wiping it off before coming home.) Now, though the Bible nowhere forbids makeup, the girl was violating her conscience as she did this. She was not “convinced.” Spiritually, within herself, she was just choosing popularity over faithfulness to God. As a result, she soon found herself much more open to real violations of God’s will in the area of sexuality. She had “stumbled” because of her Christian friends who mocked her scruples, even though they were wrong.

Tim Keller

Where the weak are wrong:

1. Simply wrong about food and drink! v.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.” (Mark 7:14ff, Acts 10:15,28, I Timothy 4:1ff.)

2. Cannot distinguish between matters of basic principle and of individual preference.

v.1b “but not to quarrel over opinions”

A matter of conscience is a practice about which God has not specifically spoken in his word. He has not clearly forbidden it nor clearly commanded it.

What important theological/Biblical truths are they forgetting?

What the strong are forgetting:

1. Because of Jesus' death, the weak are "precious." v.15 is a strong statement — "do not destroy the one for whom Christ died"
2. Their concern to serve God, they must be respected. v. 4 "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls..."

What the weak are forgetting:

1. God is the only judge. vv. 4-12 are mainly a criticism of the weak. Don't dump on people with whom you disagree.
2. We are all justified by faith. v. 3 "for God has welcomed him"

What positive advice does he give?

To the weak:

1. Keep your views to yourself. v. 22 "The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God."
2. Get a more mature view of the kingdom of God. v. 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."
3. Think thru and get convinced about the rightness or wrongness of any practice. v. 5 "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind."

"Alongside this explicit instruction not to violate the conscience, there is an implicit requirement to educate it."

John Stott

4. Until you are convinced something is right, avoid it. v.14b "it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean" v. 23 "whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin"

To the strong:

1. Welcome the weak brethren. v. 1 “As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him”

v. 19 “So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.”

2. Seek to respectfully convince him. v. 5 “Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.”

People need to carefully think through, Biblically and personally, their practice as Christians.

3. Refrain from a practice if weaker brethren are possibly stumbling. v. 21 “It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble”