

Romans 14:1-12
September 13, 2015

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Today, Paul deals with the problem of questionable practices in the Christian life and what to do when sincere Christians disagree about them. To kick this off, what are some personal practices of other Christians you have observed that caused you to say, “I’m not sure a Christian should be doing that? Or maybe another way to get at this question is “Have you ever been judged by another believer for personal practice “x,” and you walked away thinking, “Who are you to judge me!”

[Dry Erase Board – List topics that Christians still judge (pick topics that lean toward legalism)]

- The clothes people wear; low-cut blouses, short shorts
- Drinking alcohol, smoking
- How often believers attend church
- How to spend Sabbath
- The version of Scripture you read
- Working on Sabbath

Transition: Paul gives us guidance when we find ourselves dealing with the problem of questionable things in the Christian life. Sincere Christians disagree about personal practices. Today’s text concerns Jewish practices such as dietary regulations, Sabbath keeping, and feasts—“disputable matters” (v. 1)—that troubled many new (especially Jewish) Christians. Some believed they should remain kosher, while others thought differently. Paul recognizes that in each local church there are mature believers as well as immature, and that these two groups may disagree on how the Christian is to live. This message is just as relevant to us today. Every Christian CAN accept other believers in questionable areas of conduct BY embracing the REASONS Paul gives as to why we shouldn’t judge others. As we go through today’s lesson, let’s look for these REASONS. Let’s begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Romans 14:1-12]

V.1:

- Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

V.2:

- One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.

V.3:

- 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.**

V.4:

- 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.** [Even if a believer despises the scruples of another Christian, God can defend the second person.]

V.5:

- 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. [examine his heart to be sure he is doing what he feels the Lord would have him do.]

V.6:

- 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.

V.7:

- For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone.

V.8:

- 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. [Paul emphasized the believer's union with Christ.]

V.9:

- For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be **the Lord of both the dead and the living**. [Jesus Christ is Lord!]

V.10:

- 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**. [Jesus Christ is Judge]

V.11:

- It is written: “ ‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; ‘every knee will bow before me;

V.12:

- So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Process Observations/Questions:

Observation: This whole chapter presupposes that we have freedom in Christ. Freedom is counted in Scripture as one of the greatest privileges we have as the child of God. In our study of Romans, we have seen the freedom from sin (chp 6), freedom from the law (chp 7), and freedom from the law of sin (chp 8). So being “free” expresses the notion that nothing hinders me from being what I want to be and ought to be. “Free” is being able to do what I desire. So here's my question:

Q v.1: How are we to walk in this freedom, especially when we are among believers with a weaker faith? [Accept them without passing judgment on them]

Q: What does it mean to have a “weaker faith?” [I think it means a faith that is “less developed.” Just think of when you were a brand new Christian. You didn't know the Bible very well. You probably didn't have a prayer life developed yet.

Q: Why is it important to “not judge” the disputable matters? [We don't want to hinder the growth of someone's faith. Each person has to develop their own convictions based on the Word God, so trying to impose our own thoughts is not helpful. We want to foster “growth.”]

Q v.3: So what's the **first REASON** Paul gives us as to why we shouldn't judge someone with a weaker or less developed faith? [GOD has accepted him! God has received both the weak and the strong; therefore, we should receive one another.]

Q v.4: What is the **second REASON** Paul gives us to quit judging other believers? ["The Lord will make him stand." Who are we to judge? God is able to defend the weaker brother.]

Q v.5: When we decide on personal practices among our brethren, what level of confidence does Paul say we should have? ["fully convinced"]

Q v.9-10: What is the **third REASON** Paul gives us to quit judging other believers? [The Lord is the Lord over the living and the dead. Jesus Christ is Lord, which means Jesus is the judge!]

LOOK:

Paul gives us strong reasons why we should quit judging believers who are at different places in their spiritual journey. Whether a believer is weaker in faith, i.e. has a less developed faith, or whether one is a mature believer, Paul reminds us that God has accepted both the weak and the strong in faith. He reminds us that the Lord is able to defend the weaker brother who is only accountable to the Lord. He reminds us that Jesus is not only the Lord, but only HE is our judge.

Let's make it our goal to simply meet people where they are, without imposing our views on non-moral matters. Let the Holy Spirit do the work in each of us.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 558–559). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Receive One Another (Rom. 14:1–12)

You will note that this section begins and ends with this admonition (Rom. 15:7). Paul was addressing those who were “strong in the faith,” that is, those who understood their spiritual liberty in Christ and were not enslaved to diets or holy days. The “weak in faith” were immature believers who felt obligated to obey legalistic rules concerning what they ate and when they worshiped. Many people have the idea that the Christians who follow strict rules are the most mature, but this is not necessarily the case. In the Roman assemblies, the weak Christians were those who clung to the Law and did not enjoy their freedom in the Lord. The weak Christians were judging and condemning the strong Christians, and the strong Christians were despising the weak Christians.

“Welcome one another!” was Paul’s first admonition; and he gave four REASONS why they should.

God has received us (vv. 1–3). It is not our responsibility to decide the requirements for Christian fellowship in a church; only the Lord can do this. To set up man-made restrictions on the basis of personal prejudices (or even convictions) is to go beyond the Word of God. Because God has received us, we must receive one another. We must not argue over these matters, nor must we judge or despise one another. Perhaps St. Augustine put the matter best: “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”

When God sent Peter to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, the church criticized Peter because he ate with these new Christians (Acts 11:1–3). But God had clearly revealed His acceptance of the Gentiles by giving them the same Holy Spirit that He bestowed on the Jewish believers at Pentecost (Acts 10:44–48; 11:15–18). Peter did not obey this truth consistently, for later on he refused to fellowship with the Gentile Christians in Antioch, and Paul had to rebuke him (Gal. 2:11–13). God showed both Peter and Paul that Christian fellowship was not to be based on food or religious calendars.

In every church there are weak and strong believers. The strong understand spiritual truth and practice it, but the weak have not yet grown into that level of maturity and liberty. The weak must not condemn the strong and call them unspiritual. The strong must not despise the weak and call them immature. God has received both the weak and the strong; therefore, they should receive one another.

God sustains His own (v. 4). The strong Christian was judged by the weak Christian, and this Paul condemned because it was wrong for the weak Christian to take the place of God in the life of the strong Christian. God is the Master; the Christian is the servant. It is wrong for anyone to interfere with this relationship.

It is encouraging to know that our success in the Christian life does not depend on the opinions or attitudes of other Christians. God is the Judge, and He is able to make us stand. The word “servant” here suggests that Christians ought to be busy working for the Lord; then they will not have the time or inclination to judge or condemn other Christians. People who are busy winning souls to Christ have more important things to do than to investigate the lives of the saints!

Jesus Christ is Lord (vv. 5–9). The word “Lord” is found eight times in these verses. No Christian has the right to “play God” in another Christian’s life. We can pray, advise, and even

admonish, but we cannot take the place of God. What is it that makes a dish of food “holy” or a day “holy”? It is the fact that we relate it to the Lord. The person who treats a special day as “holy” does so “unto the Lord.” The person who treats every day as sacred, does so “unto the Lord.” The Christian who eats meat gives thanks to the Lord, and the Christian who abstains from meat abstains “unto the Lord.” To be “fully persuaded—or assured—in his own mind” (Rom. 14:5) means: Let every man see to it that he is really doing what he does for the Lord’s sake, and not merely on the basis of some prejudice or whim.

Some standards and practices in our local churches are traditional but not necessarily scriptural. Some of us can remember when dedicated Christians opposed Christian radio “because Satan was the prince of the power of the air!” Some people even make Bible translations a test of orthodoxy. The church is divided and weakened because Christians will not allow Jesus Christ to be Lord.

An interesting illustration of this truth is given in John 21:15–25. Jesus had restored Peter to his place as an apostle, and once again He told him, “Follow Me.” Peter began to follow Christ, but then he heard someone walking behind him. It was the Apostle John.

Then Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, what shall this man do?”

Notice the Lord’s reply: “What is that to thee? Follow thou Me!” In other words, “Peter, you make sure you have made Me Lord of your life. Let Me worry about John.” Whenever I hear believers condemning other Christians because of something they disagree with, something that is not essential or forbidden in the Word, I feel like saying, “What is that to thee? Follow Christ! Let Him be the Lord!”

Paul emphasized the believer’s union with Christ: “Whether we live, therefore, or whether we die, we are the Lord’s” (Rom. 14:8). Our first responsibility is to the Lord. If Christians would go to the Lord in prayer instead of going to their brother with criticism, there would be stronger fellowship in our churches.

Jesus Christ is Judge (vv. 10–12). Paul asked the weak Christian, “Why are you judging your brother?” Then he asked the strong Christian, “Why are you despising your brother?” Both strong and weak must stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and they will not judge each other—they will be judged by the Lord.

The Judgment Seat of Christ is that place where Christians will have their works judged by the Lord. It has nothing to do with our sins, since Christ has paid for them and they can be held against us no more (Rom. 8:1). The word for “judgment seat” in the Greek is *bema*, meaning the place where the judges stood at the athletic games. If during the games they saw an athlete break the rules, they immediately disqualified him. At the end of the contests, the judges gave out the rewards (see 1 Cor. 9:24–27). First Corinthians 3:10–15 gives another picture of the Judgment Seat of Christ. Paul compared our ministries with the building of a temple. If we build with cheap materials, the fire will burn them up. If we use precious, lasting materials, our works will last. If our works pass the test, we receive a reward. If they are burned up, we lose the reward, but we are still saved “yet so as by fire.”

How does the Christian prepare for the Judgment Seat of Christ? By making Jesus Lord of his life and faithfully obeying Him. Instead of judging other Christians, we had better judge our own lives and make sure we are ready to meet Christ at the bema (see Luke 12:41–48; Heb. 13:17; and 1 John 2:28).

The fact that our sins will never be brought up against us should not encourage us to disobey God. Sin in our lives keeps us from serving Christ as we should, and this means loss of reward. Lot is a good example of this truth (Gen. 18–19). Lot was not walking with the Lord as was his

uncle, Abraham, and as a result, he lost his testimony even with his own family. When the judgment finally came, Lot was spared the fire and brimstone, but everything he lived for was burned up. He was saved “yet so as by fire.”

Paul explained that they did not have to give an account for anyone else but themselves. So they were to make sure that their account would be a good one. He was stressing the principle of lordship—make Jesus Christ the Lord of your life, and let Him be the Lord in the lives of other Christians as well.

Two of the most famous Christians in the Victorian Era in England were Charles Spurgeon and Joseph Parker, both of them mighty preachers of the Gospel. Early in their ministries they fellowshiped and even exchanged pulpits. Then they had a disagreement, and the reports even got into the newspapers. Spurgeon accused Parker of being unspiritual because he attended the theater. Interestingly enough, Spurgeon smoked cigars, a practice many believers would condemn. Who was right? Who was wrong? Perhaps *both* of them were wrong! When it comes to questionable matters in the Christian life, cannot dedicated believers disagree without being disagreeable? “I have learned that God blesses people I disagree with!” a friend of mine told me one day, and I have learned the same thing. When Jesus Christ is Lord, we permit Him to deal with His own servants as He wishes.

Witmer, J. A. (1985). Romans. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 492–493). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Paul had discussed various aspects of a Christian’s responsibilities in interpersonal relationships (12:9–21; 13:8–10), but relationships with other believers loom large and involve special problems that require discussion. Harmonious relationships within the family of God are important.

1. WITHOUT JUDGING (14:1–12)

Christians are at different levels of spiritual maturity. They also have diverse backgrounds that color their attitudes and practices. The first lesson to learn in living harmoniously with other Christians, therefore, is to stop judging others.

14:1–4. The focus in these verses is on **him whose faith is weak** (lit., “the one being weak in faith”), which appears in the emphatic first position in the sentence. Paul commanded believers to **accept** (pres. middle imper., “keep on taking to yourselves”; cf. 15:7) such a person, **without passing judgment on disputable matters** (lit., “but not unto quarrels about opinions”). A believer with certain scruples is not to be welcomed into the fellowship with the intent of changing his views or opinions by quarreling with him about them.

One area of differing scruples pertains to food, in particular the eating of meat. **One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables** (lit., “but the one being weak eats vegetables”). The reason some Christians then were vegetarians is not stated. Since the issue is related to their Christian faith, it could be to insure against eating meat offered to idols (cf. 1 Cor. 8; 10:23–30). The reason for a believer’s scruple is not the point, however; its existence alongside a differing opinion was Paul’s concern.

In such a situation neither believer should judge the other. **Look down on** (*exoutheneitō*; also used in Rom. 14:10) should be translated “despise” or “reject with contempt” (cf. “treat ... with contempt,” Gal. 4:14; 1 Thes. 5:20). The reason a “strong” Christian (cf. Rom. 15:1) should not despise a “weak” one, and the reason that a weak Christian should **not condemn** (*krinetō*) the

strong one is that **God has accepted** (same verb as in 14:1) both of them. (Another reason for not downgrading others is given later in v. 10.) As a believer, he is a servant of God and he is accountable to God, his Judge. Any Christian tempted to judge another believer must face Paul's question, **Who are you to judge** (lit., "the one judging") **someone else's servant?** (*Oiketēn*, "domestic servant," is not the usual word *doulos*, "slave.") The present participle, "the one judging," suggests that Paul sensed some judging of others was occurring among the Christians at Rome. But such criticizing is wrong because a domestic servant should be evaluated by **his ... master**, not by fellow believers. Therefore, Paul concluded, **And he will stand** (lit., "he shall be made to stand"), **for the Lord is able to make him stand**. Even if a believer despises the scruples of another Christian, God can defend the second person.

14:5–8. A second area of differing opinions was the significance of special days. **One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike** (cf. Col. 2:16). Which position a person held meant nothing to the apostle. His concern was that **each one should be fully convinced in his own mind** (cf. Rom. 14:14, 22), examining his heart to be sure he is doing what he feels the Lord would have him do. And he should hold his opinion **to the Lord**. This is true for any issue where an honest difference of opinion among Christians exists, whether in keeping or not keeping **special** days or eating or abstaining from **meat**, or in other matters not prohibited by Scripture. All belongs **to the Lord** and is sanctioned by Him (1 Cor. 10:25–27; 1 Tim. 4:3–5). A believer's individual accountability to the Lord in every area and experience of life is paramount. Each Christian in both life and death is seen by the Lord, and is accountable to Him, not to other Christians. **So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord**.

14:9–12. In these verses Paul stated the theological basis for his exhortation for Christians to desist from and to resist judging one another. One of the reasons for the Lord Jesus' redemptive death and resurrection is to be **the Lord of both the dead and the living**. Since Jesus is the Lord, Christians should not **judge** (*krineis*) or ... **look down on** (*exoutheneis*, "despise" or "reject with contempt"; cf. v. 3) one another, their brothers, in such matters. One Christian is not above another as his judge; all are equally under Christ, the Judge.

As Lord, Jesus will one day review and evaluate the ministry of His servants at His **judgment seat** (*bēma*; see comments on 2 Cor. 5:10). Paul affirmed the certainty of this event by quoting Isaiah 49:18 and 45:23, pertaining to everyone standing **before** Christ and confessing Him as Lord (cf. Phil. 2:10–11). At that event **each** believer **will give an account** (lit., "a word") **of himself to God**. Since Paul was writing to the Christians in Rome (Rom. 1:7) and included himself with them in the first personal plural pronoun and verb ("we will all stand," 14:10), "God's judgment seat" is only for believers in the Lord. What is here called *God's* judgment seat is the judgment seat of Christ in 2 Corinthians 5:10. Because God judges through His Son (John 5:22, 27), this judgment seat can be said to belong to both the Father and the Son. The issue of the believer's eternal destiny will not be at stake; that was settled by his faith in Christ (cf. Rom. 8:1). Each believer's life of service will be under review in which some loss will be experienced (cf. 1 Cor. 3:12–15), but he will be rewarded for what endures (cf. 1 Cor. 4:4–5). This judgment of believers climactically demonstrates God's lordship.