

Abounding Grace Christian Church

A Study through the Epistle to the Romans – Part 38

I. Exposition of Chapter Fourteen.

A. Attitudes toward Weaker Believers.

1. **Verse 1** – **“Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.”** – We must first start off by understanding who the **“weak in the faith”** is referring to. In this context, it seems that this is referring to some Jewish believers who are still holding onto aspects of the law. In the next verse, however, we will conclude that it wasn’t solely Jewish believers, however. It would apply to any believer who is caught up with any form of legalism.

“In view of what Paul wrote about the weak they appear to have been mainly Jewish Christians who refrained from certain foods and observed certain days because they remained loyal to the Mosaic Law.”¹

“Denney describes the weak saint as follows: ‘The weakness is weakness in respect of faith. The weak man is one who does not fully appreciate what his Christianity means; in particular, he does not see that the soul which has committed itself to Christ for salvation is emancipated from all law but that which is involved in its responsibility to Him.’”²

- a. It seems apparent that these differences concerning certain practices was causing dissension amongst the believers.

“Evidently, the disagreement between the weak and the strong threatened the harmony of the church. So Paul addresses some serious words to both sides.”³

- b. **“Receive...”** – **“to take beside”; “to draw to oneself”; “to lend a hand.”⁴**

- c. **“...but not to disputes over doubtful things.”** – The word **“disputes”** means; **“to dispute with someone on the basis of different judgments—‘to dispute, to debate about, contention, dispute.’⁵**

2. **Verse 2** – **“For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.”** – It’s clear here that one of the **“disputes over doubtful things”** was that one side felt free to eat all foods while the other side had the conviction to be vegetarians. Of course, we know that most Jews weren’t vegetarians but only restricted certain meats like pork. This probably included certain believers, Jews (the few) and some Gentiles who held this conviction for whatever reason. **(NOTE: This may have been different than the problem in Corinth where the issue was meat offered to idols. Cf. I Corinthians 8-10). Also see I Timothy 4:1-4.**

3. **Verse 3** – **“Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.”**

- a. The **“stronger one”** who eats all things is not to **“despise”** him who doesn’t. The word **“despise”** means, **“to treat with contempt”** or **“to scorn”**.
- b. The **“weaker one”** who does not eat is not to **“judge”** him who does. The word **“judge”** means, **“to judge a person to be guilty and liable to punishment”⁶**
- c. These two commands to both parties suggests that they probably felt their positions made them more spiritual than the other.

“Paul specifies that the one who is weak in faith eats vegetables only (14:2), apparently for religious reasons, not for health reasons. He thinks that eating meat somehow would damage his relationship to God. He has not yet understood the full ramifications of faith in Christ that frees us from the law (Rom. 7:1-6). The strong brother (Paul puts himself in that camp, 15:1) knows that eating or not eating meat has no effect on one’s relationship with God, so it doesn’t bother his conscience to eat a good steak or, for that matter, a slice of ham or bacon.”

Steven J. Cole, <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-92-getting-along-spite-our-differences-romans-141-4>

- d. **“...for God has received him.”** – This is the same word we saw in verse 1 where we’re commanded to **“receive”** those we differ with.

¹Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Romans*, (<http://www.soniclight.com>: Sonic Light Publication, 2013), 160.

²Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader*, vol. 2, 230.

³Robert E. Picirilli, *Romans*. (Nashville, TN: Randall House Publications, 1975), 280.

⁴Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 15.

⁵Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 437.

⁶*Ibid.*, 555.

“AS FOR the man who is a weak believer, welcome him [into your fellowship], but not to criticize his opinions or pass judgment on his scruples or perplex him with discussions. One [man's faith permits him to] believe he may eat anything, while a weaker one [limits his] eating to vegetables. Let not him who eats look down on or despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains criticize and pass judgment on him who eats; for God has accepted and welcomed him.” – Romans 14:1-3 – Amplified Bible

4. Verse 4 – **“Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.”** – This seems to be addressed to the “weaker” believer because of the word “judge” corresponding to verse 3.

“The weaker brother needs to remember to whom the stronger brother is responsible and leave his judgment to God. Paul assured the weaker brother that the stronger brother would stand approved by God because God approves his liberty. God's grace provides both the possibility and the power for standing.”⁷

5. Is it always wrong to judge?

- a. Jesus' words (**Matthew 7:1**), **“Do not judge so that you will not be judged,”** are often misapplied. Jesus never tells us it's always wrong to judge but He tells us how to judge.
- b. If people would keep reading **Matthew 7**, they would see that in **verse 6** Jesus tells us not to give what is holy to dogs and not to cast our pearls before swine. He isn't talking about animals, but about people who are dogs and swine. Obviously, we have to make some judgments to obey that command! And in **verse 15** Jesus warns about false prophets, who come to us as wolves in sheep's clothing. Again, to spot a wolf in sheep's clothing, you have to make some careful judgments.
- c. So Jesus was not telling us that we should not make any judgments. Rather, we should judge ourselves by taking the log out of our own eye before we help our brother with his speck. The Bible repeatedly teaches that we must be discerning in terms of judging other people's character so that we can either avoid their company (**I Cor. 15:33; II Cor. 6:14-18; II Tim. 3:5; 4:14-15**) or try to help them grow in the Lord (**II Tim. 2:24-26**). And we must be discerning of true and false doctrine so that we are not deceived by it (**Matt. 7:15; II Tim. 4:3; Titus 1:9**).

6. Verse 5 – **“One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.”**

- a. Here Paul gives another area of **“disputes over doubtful things”** which is the keeping of **“Sabbath days”** or other special days.
- b. The Jewish believers tended to observe these because they were part of their Jewish heritage, but the Gentile believers did not. Today the idea that by observing a certain day we please God more than we would if we did not is quite common. Some Christians believe that we should behave differently on Sunday, during Lent, or on some other "religious" day.
- c. Regarding the Sabbath, the Bible teaches us that Jesus is our Sabbath rest (**cf. Matthew 11:28-30; Hebrews 4**). The Christian serves God every day of the week. He also realizes the need for a day of rest each week. **“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath...”** (**Mark 2:27-28**).
- d. After the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the church began meeting on the **“first day of the week”** which we know as Sunday. This is not to be a legalistic thing, however, whereby we think Sunday is more “holy” than any other day. (**cf. Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 16:1-2**).

7. You may wonder why in Romans Paul urges tolerance and acceptance of those who have differences over food and observing certain days, but in Galatians and Colossians, he denounces in no uncertain terms those who do such things. The difference is that in Galatians, those who urged observing certain days (**Galatians 4:10**) were saying that in addition to trusting in Christ as Savior, you must keep the Law of Moses to be saved. They were perverting the Gospel of salvation by God's grace through faith alone. In Colossians, the heresy seems to have been a form of Gnostic asceticism, where the false teachers said that by abstaining from certain foods or by keeping certain holy days, you could be more godly. But they were not holding fast to Christ and our position in Him. But in Romans, the weaker believers who did not eat meat and who observed certain days did not hold to these heretical views that undermined the gospel.

⁷Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Romans*, (<http://www.soniclight.com>: Sonic Light Publication, 2013), 161.