

The Christian Manual: Study 18, Romans 14

Romans Studies for Teens by Mike Apodaca, MA



Begin with prayer for wisdom from God and for the presence of the Spirit.

Note: In a Bible Study, as much as possible ask the questions and let the students answer. Where they cannot, you supply the answer and keep everything flowing.

Introduction: What is the proper Christian culture?

Accept What God Accepts

Section 1: Romans 14:1-3 Accept the Weak

Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ²One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.

We all have cultural understandings that we are brought up with. These become deeply entrenched within us. They become part of us

to where they are not logical, but just are the way we understand things. In Paul's day, meat had a very special meaning to some. Meat was used for sacrifices to the Roman gods and then sold in the market. Because of this, some who came to Christ saw eating meat as an act of participating in the worship of these Roman gods. It is how they were raised, what they did before they came to Christ. It was the association made deep in their hearts.

Now Paul knew there was nothing to this. He had no trouble eating the meat from the marketplace. After all, the gods they were offered to didn't even exist. And the meat was given by God for food. He had no problem with it.

But others did. The associations were still far too deep for them to get past. They could not eat meat with a clear conscience. To them it would be betraying God.

So Paul gives this advice: Firstly, don't fight about it. Who cares who is right? Fighting will only hurt your relationships. After all, this is not a logical problem that can be solved by showing someone the truth. Secondly, treat each other well. The person who has faith to eat anything should not look down on his brother who is weak in this area. And the person who is weak should not condemn the person who is strong, as if he is doing something wrong. Thirdly, the truth is that God has accepted both of you knuckleheads. And when God accepts someone, who are we to criticize them?

Section 2: Romans 14:4 He's Not Your Slave

⁴Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

Paul cuts to the heart of the matter—this brother does not belong to you, nor do you belong to them. Paul lived in a time when people owned slaves. They were property. Think of how it would be if someone told you how to treat your phone. Not that they were giving you constructive advice on how to make your phone perform better, but telling you what you must do with your phone acting like it was theirs.

Each Christian is owned by God. He is their only master and judge. Each Christian will stand or fall by His examination alone, not ours.

This last phrase is most encouraging. The Lord is able to make them stand. This means that Christ is capable of growing us, teaching us, and keeping us with Him all the way to the end. You see, our path with Christ is a very personal one. We know we are not perfect and have much repenting and changing to do. We need encouragement, not criticism or judgment. The best thing we can do for our brothers is admit that they belong to God and not to us.

Section 3: Romans 14:5-9 Do All To the Lord

⁵One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind.⁶Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. ⁸If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.⁹For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

Paul now extends his arguments to all cultural matters. We have many of these situations in Christ's church. There are those who do not believe in sending their kids to public schools and others who do. There are those who believe that dancing is unchristian. There are those who don't think we should ever drink alcohol. There are those who are against all tattoos or piercings. There are some who even feel that it is against God to have zippers on our clothing.

I once pastored a church. One day we had a couple visit. They were from the Church of Christ. These people believed that anything not

explicitly mentioned in the Bible should not be in the church. When they sat down I greeted them. The man noticed that we had an organ in the church and said that if the girl played it, they would leave. When the music began, the couple quietly exited.

Now, I don't share that story to point to their weakness, but to illustrate what Paul is saying. These saints were worshipping unto the Lord in a way that they believed was pleasing to Him. I do not doubt that they were saved and genuine lovers of God. I do wish that they had had the ability to accept us as co-lovers of God and people who also sought to please Him.

There will always be differences of opinion between Christians. As long as each is standing before God and doing all for God's glory, then we simply need to accept and love each other as we are.

Section 4: Romans 14:10-23 Stop Judging and Do All in Faith

¹⁰You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹It is written:

“As surely as I live,’ says the Lord,
‘every knee will bow before me;
every tongue will acknowledge God.’”

¹²So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. ¹³Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. ¹⁴I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. ¹⁵If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died. ¹⁶Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. ¹⁷For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, ¹⁸because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval. ¹⁹Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. ²⁰Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. ²¹It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.

²²So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves. ²³But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

There is a direct relationship here—between the way we think about others and how we treat them. When we believe others are doing the wrong thing, we tend to devalue them. We think of them as inferior, as lesser Christians. It is in our fallen nature to create false hierarchies, exalting those we like (those like us) and depreciating those who are different or have other views.

Paul uses himself as an example here. He says that he would rather go without meat than offend a brother or cause him to stumble. We cause others to stumble when we encourage them to do things that their conscience cannot handle. This can lead to feelings of guilt and distance between them and God. Paul is not going to do this. After all, Christ's kingdom is not about these things. It's about righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The righteousness is His righteousness which is ours by faith (see chapter 4 of Romans) and the peace and joy are the Spirit's fruit within us. What Paul is saying is that he lives a kingdom life and helps others to do the same. Nothing else really matters.

Paul calls us to make every effort to live with others in peace. Peace means wholeness or oneness. When a wall was completed, brick by brick, it was said to be at peace. We are the body of Christ, built by Him. We need to do everything in our power to maintain our unity. Secondly, we need to build up others, this is the meaning of edification. We build up others, and ourselves, when we join together in worship and prayer and the study of the Word. These things put us in contact with God and His presence transforms us all into the image of His Son.

Paul gives us one last bit of advice. If someone's doing something in the church that is not to your liking, keep your mouth shut. Keep it between yourself and God. In the end, all is to be done in faith. All is to be done believing it is what God wants us to do for Him.



WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Rome was a multi-cultural church. There were Jews and Gentiles of many different persuasions. They were very different in background experience and culture. It was invariable that they would bring into their fellowship some of these deeply held patterns of life and belief. The problem came when these differences became a source of argument and looking down on others.

Paul deals with the problem by reminding the Christians in Rome that their brothers and sisters do not belong to them. They are the slaves of God, even as we are. They answer to God alone, as do we. Their behavior, even if it is not completely consistent with the freedom we now have in Christ, is His to correct, not ours.

Everyone should be allowed to worship and serve God in a way that they believe is right. This means we might have many different churches with different cultural flavors. This is not wrong. It is okay to have a church that uses an organ and sings hymns and another fellowship that uses electric guitars and drum sets. Neither is right, nor is either wrong. They are all attempting to worship God and to have Him meet them with His manifest presence. The problem comes when the hymn singers say that the electric guitars are not spiritual, or when the electric guitars look down on the hymns as old fashion. This is the source of spiritual pride and division—not love.



CONNECT

Tonight we are going to do a simulation, a skit. Some of you are going to assume different characters. You will have a discussion about how to make this church work.

Characters:

Elderly Christian Woman: Very conservative with blue-gray hair. She's played the organ at this church for the last forty years. She loves the hymns and considers them to be the highest poetic expression of worship.

Christian Rock Worship Leader: You have been playing in a Christian worship band for the last two years. You experience the presence of God when you play. You love God with all you are. You have not been allowed to lead worship here.

Christian Pastor: You're new to this church. You want everyone to get along, but they're not. The young people do not respect their elders and the elders have no desire to be with the young people that they do not understand.

Church Elder: You've been in the church for a long time. You have seen it grow large and dwindle over the years. You want God's church to grow and many to enter into the kingdom.

Youth Minister: You've been working for the church for a year. You have gathered some youth around you, but they don't really see themselves as part of the church.



WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Section 1 Romans 14:1-3

The key to this section is that we cannot reject what God has accepted. Peter learned this in Acts chapter 10. He was told to not call unclean what God had called clean—good advice. God accepts all kinds of people. He accepts those who, out of a weaker conscience, do not fully exercise their freedom in Christ, but who serve Him in all they do. The issue here is eating meat offered to idols. Paul knows the meat is just meat, but a weaker brother might not be comfortable with it. Paul had to deal with the same issue with the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians chapter 8.

Section 2 Romans 14:4

Paul has us remember that our brother belongs to Jesus and not us. He is Jesus' property and Jesus alone will deal with him about his weaknesses. If we don't mess things up, Jesus is fully capable to bring them into the fullness of His kingdom.

Section 3 Romans 14:5-9

Here Paul widens the argument to apply to all cultural considerations. Some people celebrate birthdays, others think it is unspiritual or lifting the self above God. Such preferences should not be a big deal to us, because they are not a big deal to God.

Section 4 Romans 14:10-23

What is a big deal is that everyone receives the righteousness of Christ through faith and peace and joy from the Spirit.



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Section 1 Read Romans 14:1-3

1. How would you feel if your parents made you attend a church where the worship was different than what you are used to (e.g. everyone sang hymns to organ music)?
2. Do you think you would have a hard time not thinking you are better than the people who go to this church?

Section 2 Read Romans 14:4

1. How does the fact that every Christian is owned by God affect the way we treat them and think about them?
2. Whose responsibility is the growth of other Christians? Is He capable of performing this task? What should our response be then, when we see weakness in our brother or sister?

Section 3 Read Romans 14:5-9

1. What are some of the ways Christians can be different? How do you feel about these? To what extent is your discomfort a matter of your cultural conditioning and to what extent is it from Christ?

Section 4 Read Romans 14:10-23

1. What should be our two main goals when it comes to others in the church?
2. How could our behavior get in the way of these two goals?
3. What can we do to ensure that we help build unity in the church and that we edify our brothers in Christ?



HOW DOES IT APPLY?

Many churches have been ruined by people who thought the church was there's and that their way of doing things was the right way. Many have tried to shape the church of Jesus into something that they are comfortable with. And then, when the culture changes, or when young people begin coming to the church, there's friction and discord.

I need to remember that this is God's church, not mine. I need to understand that I'm not the one on the throne, He is. This is His kingdom that He so graciously made me a part of through His death and resurrection. I am a slave among other slaves. No one else belongs to me in the church and I do not have a right to dictate the taste of others. I don't have the right to look down on others who are offended by things I know do not matter to God. In fact, I must do all in my power—even if it means I lose my comfort—in order to make them feel comfortable and to build them up in Christ.

I have to be accepting and have two goals: 1) to see the church unified. You see, this is the power of the church. The world can't get people together. Countries fall apart at the seams where the cultural and ethnic lines are drawn. But in Christ, where there is neither Jew nor Greek, where all bow their knees to a common Lord, here, for once, there can be true unity. 2) I need to admit that cultural things don't matter to God. What does matter is peace and joy in His Spirit. I need to achieve this for myself and help others to achieve it also. I need to be far more worried about living my life in God's presence and having Christ seen in me, than in whether or not my brothers and sisters in Christ use the correct table fork.