

## **Romans 14:1-23 & 15:1-13**

### **Righteousness among the Weak and Strong**

In Chapter 13, we learned that love must be submissive, especially to the authorities, to the state, and the powers that be, because they are put there by God. And in the latter part of that chapter, Paul tells us that love must be universal and that we owe love to everyone without exception.

All of chapter 14 and part of chapter 15 on which my preaching this morning is going to be based deal with relationships in the Body of Christ as they deal with having differing opinions on liberties we have in Christ. And by liberties I mean those areas of life which the Lord gives freedom to pursue; areas which do not violate the clear teaching of the scripture. In other words the chapters deal with those areas of our life on which the Scripture is open or quiet on; it did not specify an answer and about which we as Christians have many questions. For example

Are Christians supposed to dress in a particular way?

Is it ok for a Christian to drink wine?

Is it a sin to work on Sabbath or for that matter Sunday?

What music should a Christian brother or sister listen or dance to?

Should Christians abstain from eating certain types of food?

What about Christmas? Is it a must for every Christian to celebrate it?

There are no clear cut Yes and No answers to these questions, as these kind of areas do not in and of themselves, have any good or evil, but they could be used in away which could produce evil.

In these doubtful areas we are at liberty to have a view point based our individual convictions and consciences

We are however not allowed to extend these liberties to those areas where the Scripture speaks very plainly and precisely about. For example killing is wrong, to lie is a sin and drunkenness is always wrong. There cannot be any question about those things, because the Scripture says so. I would like to make the distinction very clear from the onset so that we don't get confused.

In Romans 14: 1-3, we can see a clear division in the early Roman Church in which those Weak in faith would only eat vegetables whilst the more matured or those Strong in faith ate meat as well. The problem arose when both groups felt their position was better and began to pass judgement on each other over the issue

**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. {Rom 14:1-3 RSV}**

Let's see what Paul's position was in this matter when it was brought before him

Paul said and I quote "As for the man who is weak in faith welcome or receive him".

**Can someone tell me why Paul says we should Accept him?**

**Answer - Because God has accepted him**

This is the principle that governs our relationship to the man weak in faith

We are advised not have arguments over opinions in this doubtful areas where individual conscience rules

We are to avoid all types of exclusions in the Church of Christ

We are not to reject anybody because they don't think exactly like us.

Paul cautions the Weak Christian in Verses 4 -12 with these words

**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.**

**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. Rom 14:4-7 RSV}**

Weak Christians who are worried about what other people do in those doubtful areas are advised NOT to pass judgement.

Paul is not for once suggesting that Christians are not to judge one another in the areas why the Scripture clearly speaks. Indeed it is our Christian duty to point out acts that go against the Word of God

I am making this distinction here because a lot of people misconstrue the Scripture "Judge Not" applies to everything. It does not. It only applies to the doubtful areas.

There are two reasons why we are not to judge in these areas

1. Because this is an area reserved for the Lord's Judgement
2. It is of no help to you to judge in this area. The latter part of this verse says " And he will stand, for the Master is able to stand"

God is saying he alone is able to pass judgement and correct if there is need to. We are always too quick and too willing to judge other people but we forget it's taken us years to learn the same things. What it took the Lord years to teach us, we want somebody else to learn in minutes. And as soon as we master the things we learn, we expect everybody else to conform to our standards. Paul says this is wrong.

There are some Christians who object strongly to the celebration of Christmas because they think it is wrong and displeasing to God. To those Paul says it is ok, don't do it because you do it unto the Lord.

Other Christians on the other hand think celebrating Christmas is a wonderful thing. They also do unto the Lord. Paul says fine, do it because

there is no advantage or disadvantage in observing Christmas. The observation of a special day does not add to or subtract anything from you. It does not make you any holier; it is rather what the Heart says to the Lord that is important.

**Verse 7-9 says and I quote**

**“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**

**{Rom 14:7-9 RSV}”**

Many Christians think the Lordship of Jesus Christ only begins when we are dead or when we are in heaven. This passage says no, his Lordship starts right here right now. Jesus Christ long won the right to be Lord, both over the dead and the living.

It is also true that we all have relationship with Him, and whatever we do affects this relationship. It is because of this relationship that we are enjoined not live to ourselves and according to our desires.

**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.**

Another reason why we cannot judge each other in these grey areas is found in this passage. The Scripture tells us that the day is coming when the Lord shall come and judge the secrets of men's hearts, all hidden motives will then be revealed.

Only God and God knows our motives for doing or not doing these things and so able to pass judgement.

**Rom 14:13-15 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.**

This message is for those Strong in faith who think they have all the liberties to do these things and are not to be questioned by the Weak ones, Paul says this liberty should be exercised within the bounds of Love. Christians are advised not to insist on exercising their liberties when this will cause a Brother or Sister to stumble. The greatest right that we have as Christians is the Right to give up our Rights

Each one of us should be fully convinced in our minds that whatever we do before God is acceptable and not out of accord with His Word. In those areas where we have Liberty in Christ and we choose to exercise that Liberty we should be convinced that what we do does not affect our relationship with God adversely.

Paul is not necessarily asking us to give up those things that will make our brother stumble; it means discretion should be used when exercising those rights. **Verse 16-21 reads**

**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.**

**Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to 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.{Romans:16-21}**

Here we are reminded not to lose sight of the bigger picture by thinking our liberties are the most important things and when someone does not agree with that then, they are just baby Christians who need to be stepped on once in a while to get their attention. Paul is saying that the Kingdom of God is not about

those liberties; is about Righteousness, Peace and Joy in the Holy Spirit.

If we can keep these three things in Mind and practice them then we would find we are practising the love of Christ in all things. The Kingdom of God is about Righteousness. With Righteousness comes a sense dealing righteously with each other, which means considering one another as more important than ourselves

In other words, not a “me first” attitude.

Paul also said he would rather not eat meat at all if it's going to cause such a devastation in the life of another person for whom Christ loved enough to die. For me, there is no deeper expression of love than this statement.

The question is, as Christians, how much of these liberties are we prepared to give up, for the sake of others? Verse 22-23 says

**No matter what you think about those things, keep it between yourself and God. Blessed are those who do not have to feel guilty for what they allow. But those who have doubts are guilty if they eat. Their eating is not based on faith. Everything that is not based on faith is sin {Rom14:22-23}**

We are being told not to hinder in view of the nature of sin. Sin as we learnt from the previous chapters is lack of faith and having faith is to be dependent on someone or something. To us Christians, depending upon the indwelling Lordship of Jesus Christ to provide all our needs for any occasion is what Faith is about. Sin begins as soon as we stop trusting in Him.

As has been pointed earlier, it is not the nature of our action that makes it wrong, it is the origin of it. If an action is not pleasing to God, it is a sin. If what we do does not proceed from faith it is sin. It is also sin if you force someone to act beyond his belief or lead them on by our example into doing something that they feel conscience stricken about.

The watch word here for the Strong in Faith is, Hinder not, do not cause another to stumble firstly because of love, secondly because of the nature of truth and lastly because of the nature of sin.

Chapter 15:1-13 is about the importance of Unity for hope.

The Christian Life is not about being “right”. It is not about pleasing ourselves. It is about tolerance and bearing with the weakness of others (15:1-6). Our goal is not to flaunt the freedoms we have in Christ. The goal is to please and edify our neighbour (15:2). Jesus Christ had the freedom and power to do whatever he wanted. But he did not come to please himself, but to bear our guilt (15:3). Paul’s prayer was that the Romans and present day Christians would have the same attitude as Christ (15:5), so that believers together, regardless of their ethnic and religious backgrounds might in unity come together and glorify God with one voice (15:6)

This verse fits in perfectly with CJs vision of intentionally building a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic church. This is also Paul’s vision.

Chapter 15:7-15 was a call on Jews and the Gentiles to accept each other, just as they accept Christ (15:7). To accept Christ is to accept all those who are in the body of Christ. Indeed the sole purpose of Christ coming to the Jews is so that the Gentiles might be saved (15:8). Paul quoted several Old Testament prophets to show that the inclusion of the Gentiles had been part of God’s plan all along

The unity of the Church is of paramount importance to Paul, and only when the Church gets over its petty differences will God’s hope and joy and peace fill us, through the power of the Holy Spirit (15:13)



