

Christian Liberty Romans 14:1-4

We are starting a section regarding Christian liberty (14:1-15:13)

- **1 Cor. 10:29** "...For why should my **liberty** be determined by someone else's conscience?"

Question: In the kinds of situations addressed in Romans 14, what do verses 1-4 teach are to be our concerns?

Question: How do verses 1-4 relate to what has been taught earlier in Romans?

Welcome the one who is weak in faith (1)

This section on Christian liberty speaks of two kinds of Christians

1. Those who are weak in faith (this verse)

2. Those who are strong in faith (**15:1**)

A Christian may be weak in faith in some areas, but strong in faith in other areas

“the one who is weak in faith”

1. Not faith in Christ

2. Faith to exercise Christian liberty (verses 2, 22-23)

3. While other Christians rightly have a clear conscience about certain uses of Christian liberty, this Christian does not

“welcome him”

1. **NASB** “accept”
2. **NET** “receive”

3. 15:7

4. The most similar use of this word outside this section:

Philem. 15–17 “For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. So if you consider me your partner, **receive** him as you would **receive** me.”

5. An instruction to accept the weaker brother with warmth into full fellowship
6. The weaker brother is not to be made to feel that he is barely tolerated and seen as a second-class member

“but not to quarrel over opinions”

1. **NASB95** “not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions”
2. Not to argue with him about the liberties which he does not have faith to exercise

An example of being weak in faith (2)

verse 2

The strong in faith recognize the truth that God has given them freedom to eat anything. But the weak in faith have a conviction against eating meat.

The NT speaks of two examples of this:

1. Under the Mosaic Law, the Jews were prohibited from eating the unclean animals, but Christ fulfilled the Law and declared all foods clean
 - **Mark 7:18–19** “...Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?’ (Thus he declared all foods clean.)”
 - Inevitably some Jewish believers would have a conviction against eating the foods prohibited by the Law of Moses (cf. Peter in Acts 10)
2. Some Christians who had been saved out of idolatry had a conviction against eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols, even though it was not wrong in God’s sight
 - **1 Corinthians 8:4-13**

In this section, the apostle Paul does not have only one situation in mind, but writes in general terms that apply to an unlimited number of cases of Christian liberty.

However, Paul gives two more examples in this section:

1. Observing special days (**verse 5**)
2. Drinking wine (**verse 21**)

The situations Paul has in mind in this section are very different from the issues of Mosaic Law observance in Galatians and Colossians

1. **Gal. 4:10–11** “You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.”
2. In Galatians, it was a matter of Gentiles observing the Mosaic Law in order to be saved
3. In Colossians, it was a matter of denying the pre-eminence and sufficiency of Christ
4. But here in Romans, it was a matter of personal convictions. It was conscience issues.

Reasons to welcome one another rather than judge one another (3-4)

Prohibits two fleshly responses to which we are especially prone

The strong are instructed not to “despise” the weak

1. **NASB** “regard with contempt”
2. **CSB** “look down on”
3. The strong are prone to despise them for their weakness
4. It may be expressed in looking down on them as “legalists”

The weak are instructed not to “pass judgment” on the strong

1. The weak are prone to judge their use of Christian liberty as sin
2. It may be expressed in judging them as “worldly”

So we need to be on guard against despising or judging others in the church over different convictions.

This section does not concern responding to true sin in our brother.

In matters of Christian liberty, we are to pursue the opposite of contempt and judgmentalism (**verse 19**)

“for God has welcomed him.”

1. Relates to both commands in this verse
2. Refers back to justification by grace through faith apart from works
 - **3:24, 26, 28, 30; 4:5**
3. Because God has welcomed our brother on the basis of His grace, we are to welcome him on the basis of God’s grace rather than despising or judging him

verse 4

Addressed to both the weak and the strong.

“master”

1. Greek *kurios* is most often translated “Lord” in the NT
2. **Rom. 10:9** “because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is **Lord** and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

When we judge our brother over issues of Christian liberty, we are not acting on Christ’s behalf, but are usurping His position as our brother’s Master.

“It is before his own master that he stands or falls”

- Speaks of receiving approval or disapproval¹

“And he will be upheld”

1. Looks forward to the time we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (verse 10), just as verse 3 looked back to our justification
2. **2 Tim. 4:8** “Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”

“for the Lord is able to make him stand.”

- The Lord in His sovereign grace has purposed to do so

So the question is not only, “Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?,” but also, “Who are you to pass judgment on a servant whom the Lord will make to stand?”

Conclusion

Do you have good fellowship with brethren in our church who have different convictions from you?

If not, you need to...

1. prayerfully examine yourself to see if you have been despising or judging your brethren
2. seek to welcome/accept your brethren as God has welcomed/accepted them

¹ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 841.