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Romans

Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. Romans 13:13

Paul uses the common idiom "walk" to describe the way to conduct one's life. When he says, "Let us walk properly" he is saying then that we should conduct our lives properly. When we walk about, we interact with others, we converse with others, we set our paths on certain goals, etc. Therefore, as we walk about, doing any of these or a myriad of other things, we should remember our conduct and select honorable destinations.

To describe this proper walking, Paul says that it should be "as in the day." When one walks at night, they can't see clearly where they are heading. It's also harder to see where one's foot is going to step. Tripping becomes easier, falling into a pit may happen, or even bumping into a nice hard wall is a possibility. The spiritual symbolism of walking at night is one of improper and unhealthy conduct.

And as examples of such conduct, he says we should not walk "in revelry and drunkenness." Excessive alcohol leads to belligerence and fighting. Someone who is already a loud-mouth will only increase in that manner when in a stupor. The natural result of hanging out at bars all night is trouble. Paul asks us to consider who we belong to and the name that we bear and not to allow ourselves to diminish others' perceptions of Christ through this type of behavior.

He next mentions "lewdness and lust." This was a common attitude in the Roman and Greek areas of Paul's time and it is ever-increasing in the world again today. Young TV stars grow up, and along with their fame comes a desire to continue to be noticed. And so they will stretch what is morally acceptable to see how far they can go. As they do, young eyes notice and they emulate what they see. Quickly society has been reduced to doing anything in order to grab attention, no matter how profane. With the advent of the internet, someone can demonstrate the most vile perversions to millions of people, and then others then want to join in. It is a cycle of depravity which we are asked to refrain from. We are to conduct ourselves in a circumspect manner, remembering that the Lord is not pleased with sexually immoral behavior.

Finally in this verse, "strife and envy" are noted. Strife is the constant argumentative attitude which many possess. It doesn't matter what they believe, they will always take a contrary side to an issue, simply to cause division and argument. Strife could also include having a litigious attitude. When someone sues another for minor or dubious reasons, they are causing harm to others. Suits should be used only in circumstances where actual harm has resulted. And that harm must have been by the truly negligent conduct of another. Spilling hot coffee on oneself is not a just an honorable reason for suing the maker of the coffee; it is perverse.

"Envy" is from the word zelo (zeal). It is a fervid passion, but it is misdirected passion. In Galatians 4:18, Paul says, "But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always..." The reciprocal is true too though. Misdirected zeal is always a bad thing. We must use the Bible as our standard for the things we are zealous for. If the Bible is silent on an issue, then our zeal is acceptable as long as it doesn't turn into an idol. For example, it is wonderful to be zealous for hard work, and the Bible commends hard work. But we can make hard work an end in and of itself. It can become an over-riding passion and thus replace our devotion to God. Setting aside a day of rest in one's work week is a wonderful thing as it helps us to redirect our thoughts away from what otherwise consumes our time.

Life application: Paul tells us to walk "as in the day." Our life should be plainly and evidently seen by those around us. Our conduct should be honorable and glorifying of Christ. If we act in a manner which belies our calling, then He will be diminished in the eyes of those who see us.

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. Romans 13:14

We've come to the end of chapter 13 with a most beautiful prescription. Paul begins with "but." This is to contrast what was stated in verse 12 where we are to, "cast off the works of darkness." Instead of being clothed in such deeds, we are admonished to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." An exchange is to be made in our lives when we call on Christ. Salvation isn't the end of the story, but the beginning of a new, beautiful one.

It may seem odd that we are to "put on" a person, but this was an idiom of Greek literature. To "put on" another means to take on his qualities, follow his principles, imitate his life and mannerisms, and walk in the same spirit as that person. It is an idiom of complete emulation of that person. And this is what Paul is asking of us; to adorn ourselves with the likeness of Christ. In so doing, we are to "make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."

The flesh, or the earthly human nature, is contrary to life in Christ. Instead of gratifying our old Adam, we are to be emulators of, and pleasing to, our new Master, Jesus. The manner in which He walked, we are to walk. The attitudes He displayed are to be displayed by us. He was meek, gentle, loving, and caring of those who were ignorantly lost in sin. At the same time, He was strong and aggressive against those who looked at their own self-righteousness and who denied that they were in need of God's grace and mercy.

Those who see a weak and overly-tolerant Jesus completely miss how he handled the arrogant, proud, and boastful. Putting on Christ then is to put on the complete Christ. We are to be loving to those who need love, caring to those who

are down and out, and meek with those who are humble. We are also to be stern and strong as we stand against those who promote perversion, divisiveness, arrogance, and a haughty, self-righteous attitude.

Life application: We are to put on Christ in all of His glory, standing firm against the deeds of darkness and the lusts of the flesh. In order to fulfill this, we must know how He acted and when He took action; we must know our Bible. Be sure to have a complete picture of who Jesus is.

Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

Romans 14:1

In chapter 14, Paul now turns to the concepts of liberty and license. In particular, he will use food and drink along with days of rest/worship to show how we can easily err in our liberty, not in exercising it, but by lording it over others with less knowledge than we may have. What is for us freedom from sin for the individual can easily turn into the cause of sin for ourselves or others. We do not have license to sin or to cause others to do so. And so he begins with, "Receive one who is weak in faith."

A person who is weak in the faith is not someone who lacks faith in Christ. Either a person has faith and is saved or they lack faith and they are not saved. To be "weak in the faith" is to be saved and yet unsure of what is allowed and what is not allowed within the context of the faith. Jews coming to faith do so from the lens of the law where many foods are prohibited. They also come from those rules concerning Sabbath observance (the Sabbath is Saturday, not Sunday. It is not a term which is appropriate for Christianity except as is concerned with training on what the law taught; it is not a concept which is to be applied to a particular observance within the faith.)

Others may come into the faith with preconceptions about music, types of clothing, the drinking of alcohol, holiday celebrations, and on and on. Many come into the faith with all types of baggage that they carried from their previous lives.

Without proper knowledge concerning these issues, they are therefore "weak in the faith."

Paul says we are to "receive" such individuals as fellow believers and to do so without "disputes over doubtful things." The term here for "doubtful things" is literally "judgments of thoughts." We are asked to not argue over such judgments. Having said that, this was written at a time when the principles of the faith were not yet written and categorized into what we now call the New Testament. Therefore, there is a more definite understanding now of those things.

Knowing this, we should receive fellow Christians without disputes, but we also need to be ready to defend our freedoms in Christ and also be ready to instruct the weak in the faith as to what is right and proper. Eventually, a person "weak" in the faith may become someone who is belligerent or obstinate in the faith.

When shown that certain types of foods can in fact be eaten, they may balk and actually accuse the brother who is stronger in the faith. Thus the weaker actually presumes to be the stronger through their lack of proper understanding of what is acceptable. This becomes perverse dissension and it is very common. When someone willfully rejects what is clearly presented and shows a defiant attitude, they should no longer be received.

The key to all of this is Christian love. When it is demonstrated, by the knowing or by the one lacking knowledge, a harmonious relationship will more likely continue

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You have ham and that'll be ok with me

But I will abstain; it's really not my thing

I know that either way, we have been set free

And so between us, let peace and harmony ring

If such an attitude is demonstrated, then the weak and the strong will exercise their liberties without animosity or dissension. Paul will continue to explain these things as chapter 14 progresses.

Life application: Don't set out to ruin another's faith over what is acceptable. Receive one another without lording your knowledge over those you disagree with. Rather, stand ready to demonstrate what is right directly from Scripture without fighting or accusation.

For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.

Romans 14:2

Concerning matters of conscience (doubtful things) Paul now begins with food. He says that "one believes he may eat all things." This refers to a person well-grounded in Scripture. He understands the dispensational model and what God has ordained. After the flood, God told Noah that, "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs."
(Genesis 9:3)

This has never been revoked for non-Israelites. After this, at the time of the giving of the law, God gave dietary restrictions to the nation of Israel. These restrictions applied to them, and to them alone. These fell under the law and the law is now obsolete in Christ (Hebrews 7:18, 8:13, 10:9 - among many other passages). There are now NO dietary restrictions because the only change to what was ordained at Noah's time (the Law of Moses) is set aside in Christ. This is confirmed, explicitly, in Acts 15:18-21 and it is testified to by Paul time and time again in his writings. The Christian is at liberty to "eat all things."

However, Paul goes on. "But" is given to show a contrast to this thought. This is concerning "he who is weak." This individual, weak in the faith and in the understanding of the freedom found in Christ "eats only vegetables." Such a person may have a conscience about the slaughtering of animals for food (not understanding what God has ordained). Or they may have a conscience about the

use of slaughtered animals which are killed and dedicated to an idol (see 1 Corinthians 8 which discusses this issue in detail). Finally, they may have come out of Judaism and be weak in their ability to overcome the dietary restrictions of the law they left behind to receive Christ.

People who fit into this "weak" category are those who have a conscience that is not developed enough to understand these freedoms properly. What they need is sound instruction, not a belligerent attitude. Knowing your Bible and being able to explain the passages above will set them on a course of proper understanding and into the freedom of the faith.

However, and having noted this admonition from Paul, it is to be understood that the Bible is now complete; at Paul's time, it was still being written. It is also set, fixed, and understandable. If an individual receives this instruction properly and remains defiant and hostile towards those who exercise their freedom, they are usurping God's rule and what God has ordained. If they don't eat meat for personal reasons, they need to remain quiet about it and not be arrogant or antagonistic towards those who do. If their attitude is improper towards meat eaters, they are to be wholly rejected as unsound teachers, even heretics. Paul could not be clearer that reinserting precepts from the law is "another gospel" and is to be condemned (see Galatians 1:8).

The issue comes down to:

- 1) Knowledge
- 2) Sensitivity
- 3) The introduction of heresy

The sound Christian is to carefully weigh the source and the attitude of the individual to determine these precepts. Although jumping ahead in the context of Romans 14, it is a good time to look at this issue from outside a myopic viewpoint on the matter of food. If Paul says, "one believes he may eat all things" and he doesn't later correct this during his discussion (which he will not), then it shows definitively that a believer can, in fact, eat all things. There is complete freedom in

Christ to eat anything that has been given by God for the people of the world.
Stand fast in this and do not be led astray through aberrant teachings.

Life application: Pass the ham, please.