

Romans 14:1-15:20 Answers
Days & Diets: Destruction or Devotion?

Teacher's Note: Although most of these lessons are designed for a 45 minute session, this one will take two sessions. I taught 14:1-19 the first week and 14:20-15:13 the second week.

Context: The last section of Romans is generally about Service (Ro 12-16). In Romans 12-13, Paul detailed our service in relation to God (12:1-2), other believers (12:3-16), our enemies (12:17-21) and the government (13:1-14). Romans 1-11 is the "what". Romans 12-16 is the "so what". If you really believe Romans 1-11, then *this* (Ro 12-16) will be true in your life. Romans 1-11 is the foundation and Romans 12-16 the superstructure.

Key Text: The driving text for this whole section is **Romans 12:1-2**. In the rest of Romans we are studying what it looks like to present our bodies as living sacrifices that are transformed through renewed minds.

Introduction: Today we deal with how to face a family feud — what to do when strong brothers and weak brothers disagree. Among the believers in Rome there was disagreement over diets and days. It appears that a few genuine Jewish believers had a hard time letting go of the trappings of Judaism (special diets, Sabbath observances, feast days, etc). They had weak consciences. The Gentile believers had no such inhibitions and enjoyed their freedom in Christ. This created tension in the church.

The Issue: The issue here is personal liberty. You want to do something perfectly permitted under the new covenant, but a weak Christian thinks it is a sinful activity. What should you do? (Rhetorical). Most of Paul's words are directed to the strong in the faith. Somebody has to be the adult in the room and it is the strong who are most able to fulfill that role.

******Why should we not pass judgment on another believer in areas of conscience (14:1-4)?**

The reason none of us should not judge another believer in areas of conscience is because he is the Lord's servant, not ours, and the Lord is able to uphold him, 14:4.

What two categories of Christian are evident in 14:1-2? Paul speaks to those who are weak in faith (14:1-2) and to those who are, by contrast, strong in faith.

1. In what way were the weak, weak (14:1)? Those weak in faith could not yet fully appreciate the liberty they had in Christ. They were still in bondage to their old ways. They were weak in the assurance that one's faith permits one to do certain things (Cranfield, p. 700).

2. According to 14:1, what responsibility do strong believers have toward the weak? It may be annoying or inconvenient, but strong believers are to sincerely welcome a weak brother with no hidden motive of quarreling with him over his weak opinions.

ESV Romans 14:22 The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God.

What is an opinion (14:1)? The Greek is *dialogismo*, which in this context would seem to mean scruples (Cranfield, p. 701). The strong were not to strain their welcome of weak brothers by passing judgment on their scruples.

What strong/weak example did Paul give in 14:2? Some believed they could eat anything but the weak ate only vegetables.

3. What background might have led the weak to eat only vegetables (14:2)? The Jews were very careful to follow the ceremonial diet prescribed by Moses. Under this diet, many types of meat were off-limits (pork, rabbit, shell fish, etc.). However, any vegetable was allowed. Since there evidently was doubt about the origin of many locally available meat products (the mystery meat may have been pork or rabbit or even strangled beef), rather than risk violating the Moses they simply did not eat meat.

4. What teaching of Scripture would have emboldened the strong to eat anything, even things prohibited by the Law of Moses (14:2)? Jesus and the apostles clearly taught that under the new covenant there are no more ceremonial dietary restrictions.

ESV 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.)

Based on 14:3, what tension was there in the church at Rome? The strong despised the weak for not eating meat, and the weak passed judgment on the strong for eating the meat.

Beware of Christian cannibalism:

ESV Galatians 5:15 . . . if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

Joke: Did you hear about the charismatic cannibal? He kept throwing up his hands.

Word Study: "Despise" (14:3) is from a Greek word that means to make of no account. Maybe the strong were tempted to blow off the concerns of the weak as of no account, a tempest in a teapot. In the Greek, for the strong to "despise" the weak meant they saw the weak people's views as not worth taking seriously (Cranfield, p. 702).

Double Edged Sword: Paul admonished both the strong and the weak in 14:3.

What weekly event gave occasion for each to see what the other was eating (14:3)? The church ate the Lord's Supper as an actual meal each Lord's Day. Image the angst weak Jewish believers must have felt when they arrived for the Lord's Supper and saw a Gentile family had brought an entire barbequed pig, complete with an apple in its mouth!

5. What would cause a strong meat eater despise a weak vegetarian (14:3)? The strong were so secure in the freedom that they simply blew off the concerns of the weak. They did not take their scruples seriously.

What reason is given in 14:3 to neither despise nor pass judgment? The reason given is because God had welcomed each of them. Neither side is to condemn or despise the other. Each is to respect the other and live in peace.

6. Based on 14:4, why are we in no position to pass judgment on someone else? The other person is not our servant, he is the Lord's servant and it is to God that he is accountable, not us.

Which side was passing judgment (14:4)? It was the weak in faith that ate only vegetables (14:1) who were passing judgment on the strong who ate meat (14:3). Weak believers tend to be judgmental.

ESV **Colossians 2:16-17** . . . let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

******7. What perspectives will help us bear with one another on disputable issues (14:5-9)?** It is helpful if **1)** each is fully convinced in his own mind (14:5b), **2)** whatever we do is to done to honor the Lord (14:6-8a), **3)** we remember that each of us belong to the Lord (14:8b) and **4)** realize Christ died to be Lord of both the living and the dead (14:9).

What disputable issue did Paul raise in 14:5? Holy days are in the realm of a disputable issue. Clearly in the Old Testament there were holy days, such as the weekly Saturday Sabbath, Passover and Yom Kippur. It is easy to see how Jewish believers would still want to keep these holy days. On the other hand, Gentiles converts would have no background of observing Jewish holy days and would have no qualms about working on the Sabbath.

So to today some believers feel compelled to observe Sunday as a Sabbath day and others do not. We also see this same controversy play out over observing Christmas or not. Many believers are convinced it is honoring to the Lord to celebrate Christmas, while others see it as totally unbiblical and possibly even pagan in origin.

What did Paul mean when he wrote that each was to be full convinced in his own mind (14:5)? The issues should be studied calmly and carefully and each is to humbly act upon his convictions, one way or the other, in honor of the Lord (14:6) and without condemning those who differ.

Spurgeon & Smoking: The famous Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon was a cigar smoker (remember that was in the days when some doctors actually told patients to smoke for its calming benefits). There is an apocryphal story circulating that one day he came upon one of his seminary study smoking. Spurgeon asked the young man in a serious voice if he could honestly stand there and smoke to God's glory. He seminarian ashamedly said no sir and put out his cigarette. Spurgeon looked at him, reached into his coat, pulled out a cigar, lit it and said, "I can!" The problem is that the student was not convinced in his own mind; Spurgeon was.

Clear Sin: There is no room for compromise with clear sin. Sin is always wrong. The difference here is that we are not dealing with sin, but rather religious practices arising from a weak faith or a strong faith (sacred diets, religious holidays, abstinence from alcohol, etc.).

According to 14:6, what should characterize whatever we do? Every action we take should be in honor to the Lord.

Application: Generally speaking, as long as what you do in disputable matters is out of sincere devotion to the Lord, it is okay.

Paul wrote about living and dying in 14:7, 8, 9. What was his point? The fundamental reality is that our lives are not our own. Both in life and in death, we belong to the Lord. Jesus Himself lived and died and lived again, and is Lord of both the living and the dead.

******8. What new reason is given as to why we should neither pass judgment on nor despise other believers (14:10-12)?** God is the only qualified judge and we will all stand before Him and give an account for our actions. (When did God die and leave you in charge?).

ESV Philippians 2:9-10 . . . God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

We ought to be together on the Lordship of Christ (14:11). All else is secondary. We should agree on being devoted to the Lord.

Teacher's Note: The quotation in 14:11 is from Isaiah 45:23 & 49:18.

Based on 14:12, what date with destiny do you have? Even though we are saved by grace, we will still be held accountable for what we did in and with our lives. (The issue here is service, not salvation.)

ESV 2 Corinthians 5:10 . . . we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 . . . each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done . . . If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Account: Are you read to give an account (14:12)? May we live in view of that great and awesome Day.

******9. How can you serve Christ, be acceptable to God and get approved by men (14:13-19)?**

The key to serving Christ, being acceptable to God and being approved by men is never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother (14:13).

What are we told not to do in 14:13? We are not to pass judgment on one another in disputable matters. Just don't do it! Convictions based on unbiblical opinions/scruples tend to make a weak person judgmental.

"Faults in others I can see, but praise the Lord there's none in me"

Examples:

- Some teetotaler Baptists condemn Presbyterians because they "drink like fish".
- Many Pentecostals condemn Charismatic women for wearing make-up ("painted women").
- Strict Reformed people judge as Sabbath-breakers those who play games, eat out, take a Sunday stroll or buy a newspaper on Sunday ("There are ten commandments, not nine!").
- Those who don't go to movies condemn those who do as virtual heathens.
- Them that don't dance judge them that do.
- Some feel is it dishonoring to God to sing any praise song set to Rock music or with a jazzy beat (the musical equivalent to meat sacrificed to idols).
- Some scandalized if a church uses any other version of the Bible than the KJV.
- There are those who get very legalistic over exact hair length for men and women.
- Some who not believe in head coverings can be extremely critical of those who do wear head coverings.

Application: We are to be hard on self, but easy on others.

Famous Hymn: "I have decided to follow Jesus." According to 14:13, what else are we supposed to decide? We are to decide never to put a stumbling block in the way of a brother. The strong must learn to have discretion! Don't give the enemy occasion to attack.

Word Study: "stumbling block" (14:13) is from *skandalon* (basis for scandal); a word that originally referred to the trigger of a trap, the bait stick. Each of us must purpose (decide) not to be the trigger Satan uses to entrap a brother, causing him to sin against his conscience.

ESV 1 Corinthians 8:8-9 Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

10. Based on 14:14, is there any such thing as unclean food? (Trick question!). Yes and no! The truth is that in Christ no food is unclean anymore (like it was under Moses). However, if a weak believer thinks it is still unclean, then to him it is unclean.

ESV 1 Corinthians 8:4-7 . . . as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one" . . . However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

Based on 14:15-16, why should strong believers not eat food that weak believers consider unclean? It has to do with walking in love and not grieving/destroying the weak brother.

If you love your brother you will not purposely do things that grieve him by violating his conscience. Be careful. Be circumspect.

Example: If some tiny thing goes wrong, a small child will collapse in tears. As adults we know whatever the problem was is no big deal. But since we love the child, we comfort him and are considerate of his feelings. So too the strong should be loving toward the weak.

11. In what sense would a weak brother be destroyed (14:16)? This is not a case of simple disagreement between mature brothers. The situation is that of a brother so weak his conscience would be violated to the point it hurts his walk with Christ. It shakes his faith. He thinks what you are doing is evil (14:16).

ESV 1 Corinthians 8:10-12 . . . if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

According to 14:17, what really matters in God's kingdom? What really matters is not your diet but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

You may lose joy by abstaining from a freedom, but you will gain joy from walking in love for your weak brother.

Based on 14:18, when you give up something you really want to do for the sake of a weak brother, what are the results? When you do this you are serving Christ and it is acceptable to God and approved by men.

What appeal did Paul make in 14:19? We are to pursue what makes for peace and mutual up-building. There should never be a church split over doubtful things.

ESV 1 Corinthians 10:24 Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.

ESV **1 Corinthians 10:31-32** . . . whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God . . .

******In what two cases is it not good to eat meat or drink wine (14:20-23)?** It is not good when it causes another to stumble (14:20b-21) or if you eat it with a weak conscience (14:23).

Clear Command: “Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God” (14:20).

ESV **1 Corinthians 8:13** Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

12. What work of God is meant in 14:20? It could be the word of God in the weak brother’s life or it could refer to the weak brother himself.

13. What new covenant truth about food did Paul declare in 14:20? It is a theological fact that every food is now clean. The weak are weak because they cannot let go of past taboos.

14. What application does 14:21 carry regarding alcohol? Paul’s mention of wine here may have been hypothetical (Cranfield, p. 696). However, if drinking wine (or something stronger) causes a weak brother to stumble, we should not drink it in his presence.

ESV **Proverbs 20:1** Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.

ESV **Proverbs 23:29-30** Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who tarry long over wine; those who go to try mixed wine.

15. Usually we are urged to share our faith. Verse 22 details one time we should keep our faith to ourselves; when is that? Paul is here speaking to the strong (to those who have no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves), telling them to keep quiet about their libertine eating habits.

16. Based on 14:23, when does something perfectly permissible become sinful? If it’s doubtful, it’s dirty. If due to weak faith you doubt something is acceptable to the Lord but you go ahead and do it anyway, it just became a sin. This is why the strong must be careful around the weak.

******17. What obligation do strong believers have (15:1-7)?** Strong believers have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak rather than pleasing themselves (15:1-2).

Reality: It is a fact that a weak conscience is a failing (15:1). The weak are a lot like physical babies that require extra consideration. The strong are called upon to be the adults in the room. The strong are to please the weak one for his good, to build him up (15:2). The ministry of the strong to the weak is one of self-denial.

What example is given of someone who did not please himself (15:3)? Christ is our supreme example (more on his example in 15:8-13). Just as Jesus did not please himself, so too the strong should not please themselves, but rather bear with the failings of the weak.

18. The quotation of 15:3 is from Psalm 69:9. What was Paul's purpose in quoting it? The idea is that if Christ took that kind of hit for us (dying for our sins), the strong should be willing to put up with, to bear with, the weak.

According to 15:4, what purposes do the Old Testament Scriptures serve? Even though we are under the new covenant and not the old covenant, there is a timelessness to the Hebrew Scriptures that still instructs and encourages us. (Notice it is written not to us, but for us).

19. It is stated in 15:4 that endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures combine to give us hope. From the context, why would we need hope? Hope in Greek means confident expectation. The strong are to bear with the failings of the weak because of a confident expectation that Jesus will work in their lives.

What prayer did Paul pray in 15:5-6? Paul prayed that God would grant both strong and weak alike to live in harmony and glorify God with one voice.

Worthy Church Goals: Paul's pray clearly expressed a goal every church should have: Living in harmony with one another and glorifying God with one voice (15:5-6). Based on 15:5a, it requires both endurance (not a one-time act) and encouragement (it can be discouraging).

What concluding application did Paul give in 15:7? "Therefore" we are to welcome one another (the strong are to welcome the weak and the weak are to welcome the strong). Paul concluded the same way he began:

ESV Romans 14:1 As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.

What historical setting would have created the scenario wherein each would need to welcome the other (15:7)? Perhaps the two groups were not meeting together for church. There seems to have been many different churches meeting in Rome. (See for example the different households greeted in Romans 16. Also, Paul did not address "the" church in Rome, further indicating there were multiple churches there). Perhaps believers were segregating along strong versus weak lines, with strong churches serving meat and wine and weak churches serving only vegetables and water. Paul is telling them to welcome each other, not to judge each other.

What standard did Paul give in 15:7 for how we welcome one another? We are to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us (for the glory of God).

****In 15:8-13, what reason is given for strong Gentile believers to bear with weak Jewish believers? Jesus served the Jews by becoming one in part so that the Gentiles could also become God's people. In that sense the strong Gentiles (free from any dietary restrictions) should follow Jesus' example and serve their weak Jewish brothers by bearing with their dietary foibles.

Why did Paul begin this section with "For I tell you" (15:8)?

20. What promises given to the patriarchs had to do with causing Gentiles to glorify God (15:8)? See Genesis 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, Galatians 3:6-9. God promised Abraham offspring and that though his offspring all nations would be blessed. Abraham believed God's promises and so God counted it to Abraham as righteousness. Jesus was a direct descendant of Abraham, Abraham's ultimate offspring. Jesus' death on the cross made forgiveness of sins possible. This forgiveness is offered to anyone who has the faith of Abraham (Jew or Gentile). The promised Offspring brought about the fulfillment of the blessing.

ESV Genesis 22:18 [God to Abraham] . . . in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed . . .

ESV Galatians 3:6-9 . . . Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness" . . . it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

In Romans 15:9-12 Paul quoted a number of Old Testament quotations (from Samuel, David Moses and Isaiah) that indicated the inclusion of the Gentiles.

What prayer blessing did Paul offer in 15:13? Compare back to 15:5-6.

Insight: That Paul uttered two prayers in this section indicates that obeying Romans 14:1-15:13 was/is not going to be easy!

So What?

21. Who should not pass judgment on others?

22. What is the goal/purpose/objective behind all this bearing with and accepting? 15:5-6, 7b.

Applications Review: 14:1, 3, 13, 15-16, 19-20, 22

Each one must ask himself, "How will my actions affect the peace of the church and the Christian growth of others?" (Alcohol, tobacco, hair length, head coverings, cursing, Sabbath observance, etc.)

Augustine: “In essentials — unity; In non-essentials — liberty; In all things — charity.” We ought to be unified on the Lordship of Christ. All else is secondary.

Credit Due: Parts of this lesson were taken from a sermon delivered by Adrian Rogers at Bellevue Baptist Church on Sunday September 5, 1982.

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.
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