

Being Fully Persuaded

Romans 14:1-5

Flickering like a little pilot light within your heart, there is an earnest desire to help others. It's time to stoke that little flame into a welcoming fire. You've grown weary of the emptiness of simply living for yourself. The "vanity of vanities" that King Solomon described — living for material things — makes life meaningless. But what if you could live a life full of meaningful joy — changing lives of others in this congregation by the way you live your Christian life? In any congregation, there are those who are weak. So every Christian congregation faces the danger of becoming a spiritual "caste system" of sorts. Some believers are poor because they poorly understand their freedom in Christ. Others feel more powerful, but despise the poor around them. This text helps us understand how to eliminate this spiritual "caste system" and live a life of joy and meaningful service.

Overview

The Book of Romans is an exposition (a comprehensive explanation) of a principle found in the Book of Habakkuk: **"Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith"** (Habakkuk 2:4). This Old Testament principle is emphasized in crucial places in the New Testament books of Romans, Galatians and Hebrews.¹ In Romans, the Apostle Paul unpacked this Old Testament principle — **"the just shall live by faith"** — in the following manner:

- He used this phrase (Romans 1:16-17) as the theme of the Book of Romans
- In Romans 1-3:23, he proved that every member of mankind — Gentiles and Jews — is proud and unjust. Therefore, since all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (3:23):
- In Romans 3:24-5:21, he proved that the only way that believers can be justified (3:24) is "freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Justification (a legal act declaring sinners to be righteous) came about as the result of Christ's resurrection (3:25). This remarkable act of justification by faith is illustrated using Abraham (ch. 4) and explained for every believer (ch. 5).
- In Romans 6-8, Paul showed how this great justifying work is fleshed out in the progressive sanctification of each believer.
- Romans 9-11 provides the answer to a profound puzzle: Can God's plan of redemption for all mankind proceed — even though God's people, Israel, rejected their Messiah, Jesus Christ? Yes, God's plan is going forward, and God will fulfill His promises to restore Israel before the end of the age.
- In Romans 12-13, Paul showed how "the just shall live by faith" is fleshed out in the church; he also showed the members of the church how to humbly respond to human government.
- In today's text, Romans 14-15:7, Paul taught Christians how to deal with questionable or neutral things — especially since God would gather believers from every tribe and nation. Those with various cultural backgrounds could and would be members of the same local congregation. How should they respond to the inevitable clash of cultures?
- In Romans 15:8-16:27, Paul rehearsed the comforting promises of God and greeted his co-laborers who were ministering in Rome.

As part of this series on *"The Christian Use of Liberty"* we want to consider Romans 14:1-15:7. How should we maintain peace as we work through what would otherwise be neutral issues? Today, we will consider Romans 14:1-5: **¹Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. ²For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. ³Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath**

¹ In Galatians 3:11 it is Paul's linchpin argument to prove that believers are not justified by the Law for "the just shall live by faith." In Hebrews 10:36-39, the fuller quote of Habakkuk 2:3-4 (a "Wait for It" passage) is used to encourage believers to patiently persevere because "the just shall live by faith."

received him. ⁴Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall, be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. ⁵One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. "About this chapter, one group of editors commented: "This chapter comes to grips with the problems related to balancing two spiritual laws. The law of liberty permits a Christian to do certain things which may be perfectly lawful but may raise a question in the minds of others. The law of love motivates the Christian to readily sacrifice liberty rather than to cause the other brother to stumble. Christians are free from sin and bondage, but not from spiritual obligations. We have liberty, but not license, for none of us are free to live as we please without regard to others."²

Differences between Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8-10

In our recent series, we have examined 1 Corinthians 8 – 10. Everett F. Harrison points out some of the differences between these two passages³. The Corinthians asked a specific question, but Paul wrote to the Roman church about more general issues. So, the passage on questionable or neutral things is briefer and more general. The letter to the Romans does not mention idols, food offered to idols or the conscience. All of these are prominent in the first letter to the Corinthians. In Corinthians, the weak are referred to as those who do not have knowledge (see 1 Corinthians 8:7, 9); but Paul does not say this in Romans 14. No, in this chapter, the weak are described as "**weak in faith**;" These folks did not eat meat at all and apparently continued to observe the Sabbath (7th day) and some of the feast days (which were probably from the Mosaic Law). (See also Colossians 2:16-17.) It is likely that "the weak in faith" were Jewish Christians – but the Old Testament Law does not exclude the eating of all meats (Romans 14:2). So it may have been a mystical group (such as Essenes⁴) with strange behaviors such as those listed in Colossians 2:18-23 and 1 Timothy 4:3. The context of Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8-10 are similar in their reminders about lust. Romans 13:14 leads into the discussion with the words, "**But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.**" So for our discussion of liberty, it's clear that issues in Romans 14 do not include making provision for lust nor gratifying lust.

Fully Persuaded

Today's text concludes with the words, "**Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.**" This text shows us how to place our feet on solid ground in order to be full of certainty in our Christian walk.

Command: Fully accept those who are weak in the faith, v.1

¹Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, *but not to doubtful disputations.*

➤ *Qualified: but not for the purpose of pronouncing judgment on their opinions.*⁵

The Apostle Paul commanded that unity should be preserved by brothers and sisters in Christ receiving each other in Christian fellowship. As he expressed it in Ephesians 4:3 and 13: they should be "**Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. . . Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:**" The "**weak in faith**" needed to more fully embrace the full meaning of the Gospel of Christ; the more mature in the faith needed to learn the patience of Christ in helping these believers (see Romans 15:2-3). Even the weakest Christian should be accepted with warm, Christian fellowship. The word translated "receive" was also used in Acts 28:1-2. There the natives of Malta received those who had been shipwrecked with warm hospitality. In the last verse of this section (Romans 15:7), Paul used the

² Ralph W Harris, et. al. The New Testament Study Bible, Romans – Corinthians, Springfield: World Library Press, 1991, p. 211

³ Everett F. Harrison, Romans, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976, p. 144

⁴ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/essenes/>.

⁵ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

same word twice: **“Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.”** Paul anticipated that some might receive others for the purpose of coercing them to doubt by disputing with them. He commanded that they would not do so. Instead, they were to help them understand what it meant that “the just shall live by faith.” This ministry to others is beautifully illustrated in the use of the same word in Acts 18:26: **“And he [Apollos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.”** May God grant that each of us would build up other believers in this same way. When you see the problems of another believer, ask yourself, “Which parts of Scripture do they need to understand?”

➤ *(The Problem) The Reason for the Command, v. 2:*

² For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.

One of the disagreements: what should they eat? Another disagreement is listed in verse 5.

- *One Christian believes that he may eat all things*
- *Another Christian (who is weak) eats only vegetables.*

Who would eat only vegetables? Charles Hodge speculated that “the most probable opinion is that they were a scrupulous class of Jewish Christians; perhaps of the school of the Essenes, who were more strict and abstemious than the Mosaic ceremonial required.”⁶ But, there may have also been Gentiles who wanted to completely avoid their old pagan sacrifices. In either case, these believers were deeply influenced by their previous religious beliefs. So how should we maintain unity and help every believer to grow into maturity in Christ? One commentator explained, “The strong are not to despise the weak as superstitious and imbecile; nor the weak to condemn those who disregard their scruples. Points of indifference are not to be allowed to disturb the harmony of Christian fellowship. Points of indifference are not to be allowed to disturb the harmony of Christian fellowship.”⁷ Another believer may seem strange, or a little weird to you. Nevertheless the response is the same: receive him warmly. A few years ago, I spent an entire day with a believer who was full of superstitions. It was a joy to turn the conversation to the Gospel of Christ over and over again that day. This is what he really needed.

Commands: Addressed to both parties, v.3

³ Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.

- The believer who eats (all things) must not despise the one who does not.
- The believer who does not eat (all things) must not judge the one who does.

Reason for these Commands, v. 3c: For God has received him!

The first of the two commands demands that the one who eats should not be scornful toward the weaker brother. But the one who eats should not judge the one who does. Behind these two commands is a wonderful theological truth: “. . . **for God hath received him.**” The word “received” is the same word used in 14:1 and twice in 15:7. This second reference contains the same glorious theological truth: **“Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.”** To the glory of God, we should readily accept other believers – just as Christ received us. It is important that you have “received Christ” (Colossians 2:6 uses the same Greek word). But it is even more important that we should understand that, at great expense to Himself, **“Christ also received us to the glory of God.”** Our Substitute set aside His liberty to serve sinners like us. He sacrificed Himself for our sins of the flesh and of the spirit – our evil actions and attitudes. But after He died the death we deserved, He triumphantly led captivity captive (Ephesians 4:8) when He rose from the dead and ascended on high.

⁶ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on Romans*, Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1975, p. 417.

⁷ Hodge, p. 418

Direct Appeal: Addressed to both parties, v. 4

⁴Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall, be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

- *Question: Who are you to judge the servant of another?*
- *Answers: To his own master he stands or falls. He will be upheld for God is able to make him stand.*

Christ has received your Christian brother and your Christian sister. He has become His Lord and Master. Can you or I judge a believer – a servant of the Lord? No! He stands before His Lord, who is the Judge of all. Verse 4 contains the second glorious theological truth in this passage: **“for God is able to make him stand.”** Not only does the Lord receive us (giving us eternal life), He also reinforces our ability to stand.

The Problem: (extending the description in verse 2), v. 5

⁵One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike.

- *One believer esteems one day above another.*
- *Another believer esteems every day (alike)*

This may refer to the Jewish reverence for the Sabbath day (in addition to the Lord's Day).

Command: Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. 5b

Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

Paul's point here seems to be this: let us seek the Lord through the whole counsel of God to be fully persuaded as to how we ought to live. Like his counsel in 1 Corinthians 10:31, he was encouraging the Romans to do all to the glory of God. Let us seek to do so. Let us also refuse to manipulate others; instead we should motivate them to embrace the Lord and all of His Word.

So if your pilot light is lit; if you desire to help others, this text shows you how to approach them. You could make a difference! You could reach out to a weaker believer to build him up in the faith.

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