THE EPISTLES TO THE ROMANS

ROMANS 12:1-15:13, *THE PRACTICE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS*

INTRODUCTION

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B. Comments on Romans 14
   1. Thomas Constable, *As Christians the 613 specific commands of the Mosaic Law no longer govern our conduct (7:6; 10:4), but the principles that Jesus Christ and His apostles revealed do (cf. chs. 12–13). How then should we deal with conflicting applications of these principles? How should we conduct ourselves when our interpretation of God's will conflicts with that of another believer? Paul explained how believers can disagree on nonessentials and still maintain unity in the church.*
   2. Warren Wiersbe, *...when it comes to areas that are not clearly defined in Scripture, we find ourselves needing some other kind of guidance. Paul gave principles of this guidance. He explained how believers could disagree on nonessentials and still maintain unity in the church.*
   3. John Witmer, *Christians are at different levels of spiritual maturity. They also have diverse backgrounds that color their attitudes and practices. The first lesson to learn in living harmoniously with other Christians, therefore, is to stop judging others.*

ROMANS 14:1-12, *PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY - DO NOT JUDGE*

A. Accept one another despite differing opinions (1), ***As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.***

   1. Concerning the *weak in faith*
      a. Introductory notes
         1) The phrase deals with *religious or moral weakness.*
         2) It could describe a person *whose belief in the Gospel is not secure or firmly established.*
         3) It has been translated by some, *welcome those who have only a little faith.*
         4) Romans 15:1, *We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.*
         5) Some scholars believe that *faith* in verse 1 is better translated as *assurance or confidence* when one observes the way *believes* is used in verse 2.

      b. Identifying the *weak in faith*
         1) Thomas Constable, *...the weak in faith, consisted of those whose faith was not strong enough to enable them to exercise the full liberty they had in Christ...Jewish Christians who refrained from certain foods and observed certain days because they remained loyal to the Mosaic Law...The weak in faith have a sensitive conscience about doing things that might be unwise.*

2) C. E. B. Cranfield, *The weakness in faith to which this chapter refers is not weakness in basic Christian faith but weakness in assurance that one's faith permits one to do certain things...*
3) Douglas Moo, *These are Christians who are not able to accept for themselves the truth that their faith in Christ implies liberation from certain OT/Jewish ritual requirements.*
4) I consider the best understanding of the disagreement would be to see the weaker person as one who believes obedience to the ceremonial law is compatible with faith in Jesus Christ. It is not to be considered a requirement of faith but a preference of practice.

c. Identifying the strong
1) Warren Wiersbe, *Paul was addressing those who were "strong in the faith," that is, those who understood their spiritual liberty in Christ and were not enslaved to diets or holy days.*
2) Thomas Constable, *Paul spoke here to those who, as himself, understood the implications of Christian liberty.*

2. Welcome others with differing opinions
a. *Welcome*
1) It should be noted that Paul commands Christians to welcome the weak in faith. He must consider the weak as brothers and sisters in Christ since he does not condone false doctrine, Galatians 1:8, *But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.*
2) C. E. B. Cranfield, *...the implication being that the Christian community in Rome as a whole is strong and that the weak are a minority—most probably a fairly small minority. They are to accept the weak in faith, to receive them into their fellowship, recognizing them frankly and unreservedly as brothers in Christ.*
3) John Witmer, *A believer with certain scruples is not to be welcomed into the fellowship with the intent of changing his views or opinions by quarreling with him about them.*
4) Douglas Moo, *...the Roman Christians were not only to "tolerate" the "weak" but that they were to treat them as brothers and sisters in the intimate fellowship typical of the people of God.*

b. *not to quarrel over opinions*
1) *Quarrel*
a) It means *to argue, dispute with someone, passing judgment.*
b) C. E. B. Cranfield, *...whereas the strong had recognized that, now that He who is the goal and substance and innermost meaning of the OT law has come, the ceremonial part of it no longer requires to be literally obeyed, the weak felt strongly that a continuing concern with the literal obedience of the ceremonial law was an integral element of their response of faith to Jesus Christ...*
c) Grant Osborne, *Paul is calling for unity in the midst of diverse beliefs, a search for truth that reflects acceptance of one another and our differences without judging each other. We should debate doctrinal issues; we are always searching for truth. But unless we are dealing with the core truths of the faith, we must be "iron sharpening iron" and accept differences without judging, realizing we could be wrong and respecting other views.*
d) John Stott, *...we are not to turn the church into a debating chamber, whose chief characteristic is argument, still less into a lawcourt in which weak persons are put in the dock, interrogated and arraigned.*

2) *Opinions*
a) It means *the result of one's thorough reasoning, scruple.*
b) Another word that describes *opinions* is *preferences.* There are still many church members who are motivated by *preferences* instead of *principles.* It might be said that numerous Christians major on minors instead of majoring on majors. More time can be spent on disputing types of music, styles of worship, political affiliations instead of clarity of the Gospel. It would seem that Paul is directing his attention in this section to the issue of preferences.

c) Douglas Moo, *The "disputed matters" are those differences of opinion respecting the eating of meat, the observance of days, and the drinking of wine that Paul mentions later in the chapter (vv. 2, 5, 21).*
d) Warren Wiersbe, *Many people have the idea that the Christians who follow strict rules are the most mature, but this is not necessarily the case. In the Roman assemblies, the weak Christians were those who clung to the Law and did not enjoy their freedom in the Lord. The weak Christians were judging and condemning the strong Christians, and the strong Christians were despising the weak Christians.*

B. Avoid disputes concerning food (2-4)
1. Preference (2), ***One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables***.

a. Eating meat or not eating meat is not a moral issue.
1) Genesis 9:3, *Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.*
2) 1 Timothy 4:34, *who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,*

b. Possible reasons for not eating meat
1) John Witmer, *The reason some Christians then were vegetarians is not stated. Since the issue is related to their Christian faith, it could be to insure against eating meat offered to idols (cf. 1 Cor. 8; 10:23–30).*
2) Douglas *Moo, ...the "weak in faith" probably decided to avoid meat altogether out of a concern to maintain OT laws of purity in a pagan context where "kosher" meat was not easily obtained.*
3) Paul declares that a person strong in faith should avoid meat if it causes a weaker brother to stumble, 1 Corinthians 8:7-13.
4) In verse 2, I believe the issue must be understood in light of the meaning of *believes*, where one's faith is in Christ but still has a preference for dietary laws, note Romans 14:14.

2. Improper motive (3), ***Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.***

a. *despise the one who abstains*
1) Thomas Constable, *The person who eats should not view himself as superior even though he is right or look down on his extremely sensitive brother with a condescending attitude.*
2) Douglas Moo, *"Despise" connotes a disdainful, condescending judgment, an attitude that we can well imagine the "strong" majority, who prided themselves on their enlightened, "liberal," perspective, taking toward those whom they considered to be foolishly "hung up" on the trivia of a bygone era.*
3) Grant Osborne, *Those with no dietary convictions thought the others inferior. Christ had negated the food laws (Mark 7:19), so they felt disdain for the ignorance of the Jewish believers.*

b. *pass judgment on the one who eats*
1) John Witmer, *The reason a "strong" Christian (cf. Rom. 15:1) should not despise a "weak" one, and the reason that a weak Christian should not condemn ...the strong one is that God has accepted (same verb as in 14:1) both of them.*
2) C. E. B. Cranfield, *...the eaters would be liable to despise the non-eaters as not worth taking seriously, while the non-eaters would be prone to adopt a censorious attitude to the eaters.*

c. *God has welcomed him*
1) God's acceptance is not based on keeping or not keeping dietary rules but placing faith in Christ alone.
2) Douglas Moo, *Christians have no right to reject from their fellowship those whom God himself has accepted.*

3) Grant Osborne, *We must learn to agree to disagree over noncardinal issues. It is not that they are unimportant. Rather, it is that God has accepted both sides, and so we must accept each other even while disagreeing.*
4) John Stott, *Indeed, the best way to determine what our attitude to other people should be is to determine what God's attitude to them is.*
5) Douglas Mangum, *Paul has captured the likely attitudes of both sides: the strong despise the weak as backward or immature, while the weak condemn the strong as sinners.*
6) William Barclay, *Within the church, there was a narrower party and there was a more liberal party. Paul unerringly pinpoints the danger that was likely to arise. Almost certainly, the more liberal party would despise the scruples of the narrower party; and, still more certainly, the narrower party would pass censorious judgment on what they believed to be the laxity of the more liberal party. That situation is just as real and perilous in the Church today as it was in the time of Paul.*

3. Proper requirement concerning food (4)
   a. Principle
      1) Paul uses a rhetorical question to deliver a principle (4a), ***Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?***

         a) *pass judgment*
            1] There is no Christian hierarchy assigned responsibility of judging other believers.
            2] James 4:12, *There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?*
            3] The principle is properly applicable to both the strong and weak believer but Paul is probably speaking directly to the stronger believer who is not doing what the weaker believer believes is right.
            4]

         b) *the servant of another*
            1] Douglas Moo, *It is the Lord, not the fellow Christian, whom the believer must please and who will ultimately determine the acceptability of the believer and his or her conduct.*
            2] Grant Osborne, *In the Roman world it was the worst sort of manners for a person to interfere with someone else's slave. How much more true is this when the master of that slave is God himself?*
            3] John Stott, *...we have no business to come between a fellow Christian and Christ, or to usurp Christ's position in his life.*

      2) The principle: the Lord is judge who keeps every Christian (4b), ***It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.***

         a) The master of every Christian is the Lord as noted in 4a.
            1] Paul specifically notes that Christians are servants of the Lord.
            2] Douglas Moo, *...it is God to whom each believer must answer, and God whom each believer must strive to please.*

         b) The Lord is able to keep every Christian.
            1] Philippians 1:6, *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*
            2] Thomas Constable, *God's grace provides both the possibility and the power for standing.*
            3] Douglas Moo, *...the Lord's approval is attained not by following rules pertaining to food but by the Lord's own sustaining power.*
            4] Grant Osborne, *God's presence in their lives is based not on their external activities (what they eat) but on their internal trust (the one in whom they believe).*
            5] C. E. B. Cranfield, *The metaphor of standing or falling could still perhaps just conceivably be explained as referring to the divine judgment, but is much more naturally understood as denoting perseverance in, or falling away from, faith and obedience.*

b. Comments
   1) Douglas Moo, *We are supposed to prayerfully get involved in each other's lives so that we encourage when encouragement is due and challenge when challenge is due. We do this out of love and for the harmonious unity of the group. The key is to refuse to judge others. When we admonish we do so out of love and avoid judgmentalism.*
   2) William Barclay, *We must banish both censoriousness and contempt from the fellowship of the Church. We must leave the judgment of others to God, and seek only to sympathize and to understand.*

C. Avoid disputes concerning observances (5-9)
   1. Preference (5), ***One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.***

      a. Some Christians observe special days while others considers all days of equal value.
         1) Galatians 4:10, *You observe days and months and seasons and years!*
         2) C. E. B. Cranfield, *...Paul is simply introducing another example of the controversy between the strong and the weak.*
         3) Most believe this is a reference to the observance of special days of Old Testament ceremonial law. It could include the dispute over Saturday (Sabbath) versus Sunday (the Lord's Day) as the proper day for worship.
            a) Thomas Constable, *When Paul wrote, Sabbath and Jewish feast day observances were matters of disagreement among Christians. The Jewish believers tended to observe these and the Gentile believers did not.*
            b) Douglas Moo, *...we would expect that the Sabbath, at least, would be involved, since Sabbath observance was, along with food laws (cf. vv. 2–3), a key Jewish distinctive in the first century, and surfaced as a point of tension elsewhere in the early church...*
            c) William Barclay, *It is not the day that we ought to worship, but the one who is the Lord of all days.*

      b. *fully convinced in his own mind*
         1) Romans 14:14, *I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.*
         2) Romans 14:23, *...For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*
         3) Paul's concern was not so much of which position was taken but what a believer does must be motivated by faith and not by works.
         4) John Witmer, *And he should hold his opinion to the Lord. This is true for any issue where an honest difference of opinion among Christians exists, whether in keeping or not keeping special days or eating or abstaining from meat, or in other matters not prohibited by Scripture.*
         5) C. E. B. Cranfield, *It is a reminder to each member that, whether his faith leads him to adopt the practice of the strong or the practice of the weak, it can, and must be allowed to, set him free for an obedience which (according to his own particular way of faith) is firm, decisive, resolute, courageous, joyful.*
         6) John Stott, *Paul is not encouraging mindless behaviour. Nor is he friendly to unexamined traditions. But assuming that each (weak and strong) has reflected on the issue and has reached a firm decision, he will then reckon his practice to be part of his Christian discipleship.*

2. Proper requirements concerning observances (6-9)
   a. Motive (6), ***The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.***

      1) 1 Corinthians 10:30, *If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?*
      2) The proper motive for preferences (Christian liberty) is honoring the Lord by giving thanks. Paul clearly states that the position of the weak and strong are valid within the appropriate parameters of conscience, and giving *honor and thanksgiving to the Lord.*
      3) John Stott, *If we are able to receive something from God with thanksgiving, as his gift to us, then we can offer it back, as our service to him.*
      4) Thomas Constable, *Christians will come to differing conclusions about what this means in practice, but their submission to Jesus Christ's lordship is primary.*
      5) C. E. B. Cranfield, *With his previous statement about the weak Christian who observes days Paul couples this statement concerning the strong Christian who eats all things, in order to make the point that both alike do what they do with the intention of serving the Lord.*
      6) William Barclay, *Whatever course we choose, we must be fully convinced in our own minds. Our actions should be dictated not by convention, still less by superstition, but altogether by conviction...We would do well to remember that, in a great many matters, it is a duty to have our own convictions, but it is an equal duty to allow others to have theirs without regarding them as sinners and outcasts.*
      7) Grant Osborne, *...we cannot take this principle to mean any movement that calls itself Christian must be tolerated and accepted. There is such a thing as heresy, and Paul said in Galatians 1:8–9 that anyone who proclaims "a gospel other than what you accepted" is "under God's curse." The movements we are talking about above agree on the cardinal issues—the Trinity, the deity of Christ, substitutionary atonement, the necessity of the cross for forgiveness of sins—but differ on noncardinal issues like sovereignty versus responsibility or the timing of the second coming. On these we can respect each other and disagree without rancor.*

   b. Principle (7-8), ***For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.***

      1) Every Christian is subject to the Lord in life and death.
      2) Verses to note
         a) 2 Corinthians 5:15, *and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.*
         b) Galatians 2:20, *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*
         c) 2 Corinthians 5:9, *So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.*

      3) Comments
         a) Thomas Constable, *Our whole existence this side of the grave and the other, in life and in death, should express our commitment to please the Lord...Death does not just mark a transition for the Christian from struggle to rest. Death is also a doorway that leads to new enlarged opportunities for service and worship (cf. Luke 19:11–27).*
         b) John Witmer, *Each Christian in both life and death is seen by the Lord, and is accountable to Him, not to other Christians.*
         c) C. E. B. Cranfield, *...all Christians live 'to the Lord', that is, they live with the object of pleasing Christ, they seek to use their lives in His service, and, when it comes to dying, they glorify Him by committing themselves to His keeping.*

d) John Stott, *While we continue to live on earth and when through death we begin the life of heaven, everything we have and are belongs to the Lord Jesus and must therefore be lived to his honour and glory.*
e) Grant Osborne, *We are not the central figure; we are not even needed. Rather, we are placed where God has us in order to proclaim his truths and honor his name.*

c. Reason (9), ***For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.***

1) One of the reasons why Christ died and was resurrected was so He could be the Lord of all.
2) John Witmer, *One Christian is not above another as his judge; all are equally under Christ, the Judge.*
3) John Stott, *Because he is our Lord, we must live for him. Because he is also the Lord of our fellow Christians, we must respect their relationship to him and mind our own business. For he died and rose to be Lord.*
4) Grant Osborne, *Church disputes are much more serious than just corporate tension; they endanger both the glory of God and the lordship of Christ.*
5) Warren Wiersbe, *When Jesus Christ is Lord, we permit Him to deal with His own servants as He wishes...If Christians would go to the Lord in prayer instead of going to their brother with criticism, there would be stronger fellowship in our churches.*

D. Let God be the Judge (10-12)
1. Don't judge or disdain brothers in Christ (10a), ***Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother?***

a. Paul addresses both the weak and strong with the same questions he raised in Romans 14:3, *Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.*
b. He reverses the order here, with the first question addressed to the weak and the second to the strong.
1) The weak judge the liberty of the strong.
2) The strong despise the perceived weakness of the weak.

c. Paul describes both groups as brothers and sisters in Christ.
1) This is not an issue in Rome concerning principles but preferences.
2) C. E. B. Cranfield, *...it is yet one more reminder that the member of the other group, in spite of his different ideas and different practice, is in the fullest sense a fellow-believer, one who belongs altogether to the same Lord.*
3) Douglas Moo, *Each...is guilty of casting doubt on the status of a fellow member of the spiritual family. No believer has such a right.*
4) John Stott, *Whether we are thinking of the weak, with all their tedious doubts and fears, or of the strong, with all their brash assurances and freedoms, they are our brothers and sisters.*

2. God alone is the righteous judge (10b-12), ***For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.***

a. Everyone will stand before God Who is the rightful Judge.
1) Paul emphasizes his point by citing Isaiah 45:23, *By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.'*
2) It is the judgment seat of Christ for Christians.
a) 2 Corinthians 5:10, *For 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.*
b) Revelation 22:12, *Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.*

3) It is the great white throne judgment for unbelievers, Revelation 20:11-15, *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

b. A Christian must give account to God for oneself not for other brothers and sisters in Christ.
   1) Thomas Constable, *The Lord will judge us to determine our faithfulness to our stewardship during our earthly lives. The judgment we receive will apparently determine our opportunity to serve Him in the future (Luke 19:11–27)....We will not have to answer for our fellow Christians or anyone else, but we will have to account for our own deeds.*
   2) John Witmer, *The issue of the believer's eternal destiny will not be at stake; that was settled by his faith in Christ (cf. Rom. 8:1). Each believer's life of service will be under review in which some loss will be experienced (cf. 1 Cor. 3:12–15), but he will be rewarded for what endures (cf. 1 Cor. 4:4–5).*
   3) C. E. B. Cranfield, *...it will be to God, not to men, that he will have to give his account of himself.*

c. Comments
   1) William Barclay, *THERE is one basic reason why we have no right to judge anyone else; and that is that we ourselves are under judgment. It is the very essence of humanity that we are not the judges but the judged.*
   2) John Stott, *...we have no warrant to climb on to the bench, place our fellow human beings in the dock, and start pronouncing judgment and passing sentence, because God alone is judge and we are not, as we will be forcibly reminded when the roles are reversed.*
   3) Grant Osborne, *God is watching our relationships with each other...he wants to blend us together into an evangelistic weapon to defeat Satan and win the lost. He demands this unity, and we will all answer to him at the final judgment for how we treated each other and whether we worked together for his glory.*

CONCLUSION

- Grant Osborne, *Everything from the onset of life to its natural closure in death is the Lord's. We are not the focus of anything we do, nor is our movement. Rather, our activities and achievements, including the movements to which we have devoted ourselves, serve only the Lord and must honor only him. They dare never become an end in themselves. If they do, they have failed to meet their true purpose.*
- John Stott, Four theological truths, then, undergird Paul's admonition to welcome the weak, and neither despise nor condemn them... They concern God, Christ, them and ourselves. First, God has accepted them (3). Secondly, Christ died and rose to be the Lord, both theirs and ours (9). Thirdly, they are our sisters and brothers, so that we are members of the same family (10a). Fourthly, all of us will stand before God's judgment seat (10b). Any one of these truths should be enough to sanctify our relationships; the four together leave us without excuse. And there are still two to come!