



When in Romans Do as the Righteous Do

"Giving the Benefit of the Doubter"

Romans 14:1-15:7

Diets and **days** were causing disputes in the church at Rome.

- There were Gentile Christians at Rome who had been saved out of pagan idolatry. They were shocked to learn that the diet of the Jewish Christians included meat from the marketplace. They knew from their former lives that some of the meat offered for sale in the public marketplace had once been part of a sacrifice to an idol. They felt that those who partook of meat were thereby contributing to idol worship (at the very least) and worshipping idols (at the very most).
- There were Jewish Christians at Rome. They continued to observe certain feast days and fast days according to the Jewish calendar. They were offended to learn that the Gentile Christians had no regard for their observances.

Such things still cause disputes in the church today:

- There are professing Christians who believe you must conform to certain dietary rules and regulations, especially those that are set forth for the Jews in the Old Testament.
- Disputes rage over Christians keeping or not keeping the Sabbath in the New Testament Church.

There are any number of other disputes as well, e.g.,

- Dress is an issue that causes disputes in the church. Many churches publish strict dress codes, and many others have unwritten but strictly enforced standards for their members.

- Diversions are a cause of dispute among Christians. The entertainments and recreations and hobbies you choose as a diversion from your daily life cause no end of debate among believers.

“Can’t we all just get along?” Yes; we can.

Romans 14:1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

Most of these disputes are triggered by those who are “weak in the faith.” This is a person who has unfounded scruples over matters of secondary importance - like the Gentile worried about meat sacrificed to idols or the Jew thinking every Gentile should observe the Sabbath.

A mature Christian can be “weak in the faith” about a certain practice. It’s not a matter of being immature in “the faith” of the Gospel, but in your personal “faith” regarding some practice.

“Receive... but not to disputes” means to not make it a goal to change that person’s mind about “doubtful things.” In other words, respect and tolerate one another’s preferences.

That, in itself, is difficult for us. We want everyone to agree with us.

We would say that a "doubtful thing" is any belief or practice that is neither *commanded* nor *condemned* in the Word of God. It is something we have freedom to partake of, or participate in, or not to.

Examples of those whose "faith is weak" are given in verses two and five.

Romans 14:2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.

The vegetarian in Rome was the Gentile Christian who did not want to risk eating meat that might have been previously sacrificed to an idol. It was perfectly alright to eat it - but not for him.

Romans 14:5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

The Jewish Christians were those in Rome who continued to observe certain feast days and fast days, according to the Jewish calendar. He was convinced everyone must observe those days.

We've already had the exhortation, in verse one, to "receive" the weaker brother. It is up to us as a fellowship to get along with each other. What follows is how we do it.

Romans 14:3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.

God has received us all into the fellowship of His Son. How can I refuse to receive someone whom God has received?

You know what this really means? If something is not an essential doctrine or practice, I must not make it one and then dispute with others over it.

You know what our problem is? **We make everything into an essential.**

Romans 14:4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

The believer who you dispute with over some diet or day, some dress or diversion, is God's servant. It's a matter for him to decide with the Lord.

Romans 14:6 He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

One of the hardest things for us to acknowledge is the diversity and variety in the church. We can each be becoming more like Jesus Christ and yet be significantly different from one another.

Romans 14:7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.

Romans 14:8 For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

Is everything you do - **everything** - being done as unto the Lord? *Of course not!* Each of us has areas in which we are, at best, "unprofitable servants." Rather than dispute with others, we should receive them the way God has received us, thinking more about our own walk with Jesus.

Romans 14:9 For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

The Gospel is that Jesus died, rose, and is alive forevermore to save all those who trusts Him for salvation. It may be a subtle way for Paul to say, "Hey, it's the Gospel that's important - *not* your liberty or your lack of liberty."

"To this end" seems to be a segue to what Paul will say next - that each of us will end by standing before the Lord to give an account of our life and not for anyone else's.

Romans 14:10 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Romans 14:11 For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God."

"Every knee" is a quote from Isaiah where it applies to God's own people - to believers. The use of it here seems to argue that all the believers in the church at Rome - the Gentile ones and the Jewish ones - are one people who will bow before the Lord. Therefore get along as one body **now**.

Romans 14:12 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

You will stand before Jesus - **and you will stand alone!** The stewardship of others will be of no concern to Jesus as He examines your life with a view towards rewarding you.

Romans 14:13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

Judging others in this context seems to mean you've determined they are wrong for holding their position and you want to change their mind. Better be careful. You might cause them to stumble or fall in their walk with

Jesus. The Lord once said it would be better for you to have a hundred pound weight tied around your neck and be cast into the deep ocean rather than stumble another believer.

What is the “stumbling block” that could cause a brother to “fall?”

Romans 14:14 I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

Romans 14:15 Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.

There are, in fact, lots of “things” in the world that are “unclean,” that are sin. Paul was talking here about doubtful things - *not* every thing.

The “stumbling block” that could cause a brother to “fall” is you demanding and promoting your liberty to participate in or partake of a doubtful thing when you know it is a problem for another believer.

If you have liberty in some doubtful thing, make sure you don't promote it in such a way that you "grieve" and "destroy" the brother whose conscience won't permit him to participate or partake.

- You “grieve” your brother whenever you try to force his conscience to agree with yours. Every believer must do what he truly believes and is convinced that God wants him to do.
- You “destroy” your brother when he follows you in your liberty against what his conscience tells him. The word translated "destroy" means *to cause the ruin or to cause the loss* of something.

If you force your conscience upon your brother, so that he partakes of or participates in some doubtful thing just because you do so - even though his conscience tells him not to - then he will suffer the loss of his reward when he stands before Jesus Christ.

Romans 14:16 Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil;

"Your good" is whatever your own conscience tells you is good in some doubtful thing that is neither commanded nor condemned in the Bible. But

what is "good" to you will be spoken of as "evil" if you allow it to grieve and destroy God's work in your brother.

Romans 14:17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

“Eating and drinking” is a shorthand for doubtful things. All of them are part of a temporary physical existence. Why fight about them, or over them, when we should be promoting the kingdom of God?

Instead of being characterized by disputes over doubtful things we ought to be characterized by “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Romans 14:18 For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.

By definition every Christian is accepted in Jesus Christ the moment he is saved. We are “acceptable” refers to our daily walk, to our sanctification, as we live to please the One who has accepted us into His family.

You will be “approved by men” means that if you have this spiritual mindset you won’t be stumbling to others; you will be approved by them to be able to minister to them and affect their lives for good.

This sometimes means that the believer who has liberty in some doubtful thing has the responsibility to abstain from it.

Romans 14:19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

Romans 14:20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.

Romans 14:21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.

Some doubtful thing might be alright for you but that isn’t the overruling concern. The overruling concern is how you affect others for Christ.

Romans 14:22 Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

Romans 14:23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

If you can participate or partake with a pure conscience, you may do so as long as you don't stumble your brother. If you cannot participate or partake with a pure conscience, then you must not. To do so is sin for you.

If you want to participate in or partake of something that is doubtful, and might stumble someone, "have it to yourself before God." In other words, do it privately - **not on Facebook.**

Romans 15:1 We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

You think you are "strong," mature, enough to partake or participate? True spiritual strength looks out for the weak.

Romans 15:2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.

Romans 15:3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me."

Romans 15:4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

Just as Jesus lived on earth in such a way as to only to please His Father in Heaven, you should live on earth in such a way as to only please your Lord Who is soon to return from Heaven. Your ability to partake of or participate in doubtful things doesn't impress Jesus as much as your love for the weakest of His followers.

Romans 15:5 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus,

Romans 15:6 that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 15:7 Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

God is "patient" with you. He "comforts" you when you see the vast areas of your life that are still under construction. You should likewise see your fellow believers as still under construction. Receive them the way God

receives you - as those in whom God has begun a good work and in whom God will one day complete His work.

Bible commentators all quote Augustine, who summarizes all that we have said in this phrase: "In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

There are certain essentials that all believers must agree upon. These are *any* and *all* those things that are clearly commanded or condemned by the Bible. In these things we must be united.

There are a great many nonessentials that believers might disagree upon - diets, days, dress, and diversions are just a few.

In all these matters, "charity," which is the old English word for God's love, must be supreme in your attitudes and actions. Charity will be shown in your tolerance of your brother's convictions, especially when in good conscience you disagree with him in some doubtful thing.