

Study 16: Romans Chapter 14

Introduction

Paul turns his attention towards relationships between brethren. He specifically addresses areas where brethren differ on things that are not essential, but could become wrong if the context caused one of our brethren to sin.

Body of the Study

Who are the people Paul is describing as “weak in faith”?

What illustration does Paul use to make his point?

What are the practical applications?

How do we use our freedom in Christ in an appropriate manner?

What final application does Paul make?

What is Paul’s final conclusion?

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *Should Christians hold Sunday above other days and “keep it”?*
- *Make a list of the things that you can think of that are not wrong in and of themselves, but your action in doing them could cause a weaker brother to sin.*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 15 in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 16: Chapter 14

Introduction

Paul turns his attention towards relationships between brethren. The issues he discusses are of some degree expedient in nature – that is they are not wrong in and of themselves, but they could become wrong if the context caused our brethren to sin.

These are areas that are not essential to our faith and putting it into practice, but can easily get in the way, and where brethren differ.

Body of the Study

Who are the people Paul is describing as “weak in faith”?

The background is set by the Jew / Gentile relationship. The Jews were not to eat some types of food, and they were also required to keep the “holy” days that God had set apart under the Mosaic covenant.

The food was not wrong to eat in and of itself, but it was wrong for the Jews to eat it because God had said that they were not to. Likewise, the keeping of the Holy days was a specific requirement of the Mosaic Law.

The Jews kept the Law for two reasons – for religious reasons, and for national reasons (for a study on this, refer to my Study in the Book of Acts, study 22). When Jews became Christians, they continued to observe the things of the Jewish Law – not for religious reasons, but for national reasons. This was why Paul went to the synagogue on the sabbath days, and why Peter abstained from eating certain kinds of meat.

The problems arose when some of the Gentiles became Christians. They had no background in the practices of the Jewish Christians. We need to notice that Paul did not condemn the Jews for continuing to observe their Jewish practices. What they were condemned for was for attempting to bind them on the Gentiles. This was **THE** significant issue in the New Testament church, and permeates nearly every book of the New Testament from Acts onwards.

Peter had been shown that under Christ’s Law, that it was not wrong to eat the kinds of meat that had been forbidden to the Jews (Acts 10,11). But then at a later time he sided with the Jews and condemned the Gentiles for doing the very things that he had previously done by eating “unclean” meat. Paul rightly condemned him for his hypocrisy (Gal 2:11).

So, who is the one who is *weak in the faith*? Paul has in mind the Jews (in this case). The Gentiles know that they can eat all kinds of meat, but the Jew – because of his *weakness of faith* – thinks that it is still wrong to eat some kinds of meat.

This creates a problem. The Gentiles like bacon & eggs for breakfast and ham sandwiches for lunch, but the Jews think that the Gentiles are sinning, and should confine themselves to plain eggs, lamb stew, and cheese sandwiches. How to resolve this?

Paul says that we need to have consideration for the needs and feelings of our brethren. Those who eat meat (have bacon and eggs for breakfast) should not think any less of those who abstain. Likewise, those who abstain should not regard those who eat as sinners “...*judge them...*” (14:3).

What illustration does Paul use to make his point?

He uses the illustration of a servant. We do not (or at least should not, and hence are not to) make judgements about the servants of other people. We don’t know them, their abilities, their constraints, nor the things that their master has asked them to do.

Importantly, each one of us are servants of God. And as servants, we should not make judgements against one another. We need to remember this relationship in our daily dealings with one another.

What are the practical applications?

The problem has arisen not because it is a theoretical problem, but because of the *practice* of the individuals. Although Paul has not yet been to Rome, he was well acquainted with the problems there in the church. This is likely to be due to the contacts that he has with the church there (vis: chapter 16). Paul is not addressing these issues *just in case they might happen to come up*. He is addressing them because they are real problems. Interpersonal problems will exist in every organisation – in the workplace – in the school room – in our sporting and recreational clubs – and equally so in the church. But we have a special privilege in the church because we can look at the issues from a Godly perspective and the relationships as a brotherly one where we all report to the one master.

Paul has already used one example – eating “unclean” meat. He now uses another – respect for the “holy days”. This should be handling in exactly the same way. But Paul adds “...*let everyone be fully convinced in your own minds...*”. The key here is whether we are doing what we do because of tradition, or because of conviction. Paul says that whatever we do, we need to do it by conviction – *be fully convinced* – that what we are doing is the right thing. There are some more applications of this a little later, and we need to consider the implications of our actions.

Importantly, whatever we do, we need to do it for the Lord. Whether it is abstaining from what we believe is wrong, or partaking of things that we are convinced are right – we must believe that God wants us to partake of it.

The outcome is that whatever we do – we need to live our lives – and indeed die – to the Lord, since we belong to Him. “...*For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living...*” (14:9 NKJV).

The next practical application Paul brings is judging our brothers. Sometimes we even show contempt for them. We need to remember that we are common servants of the Lord, and we will all be judged by Him. “...*For we must all stand before the judgement seat of Christ...*” (14:10) and “...*every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess to God...*” (14:11) and “...*each of us shall give account of ourselves to God...*” (14:12) None of us is in a position to make judgements against our brethren!!!!

This should very clearly direct our actions and behaviours towards each other. We need to remember who we are – and not in the sense of greatness, but in the sense of humility – that we will be judged with the same kind of judgement that we use to judge others (Matt 7:1-5).

At the end of the section, Paul adds that we each need to resolve not to put a stumbling block in the path of our fellow brethren.

How do we use our freedom in Christ in an appropriate manner?

Paul has argued that we are free in Christ, and we are not bound by the Law- that is (in the specific examples here) that we are not bound by the restrictive practices regarding food and the keeping of special days.

In and of itself, there is nothing “unclean”. We should note that that doesn’t give man the right to eat everything, or practice everything. The fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was not “unclean” in and of itself, but God said ***NOT*** to eat it. Poisonous mushrooms are not “unclean” in and of themselves, but if we choose to eat them we will get sick (and probably die). The mushrooms have a purpose in nature – and God has directed that purpose. Paul is not talking

about either the things that God has specifically forbidden (such as sexual immorality) nor eating poisonous food.

He is talking about how we practice our normal daily living with due regard for our brethren around us. “...*If our brother is grieved because of our food, then we are no longer walking in love...*” (14:15). It is how we show our concern and our actions for those who have a different view of things than we do. “...*Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died...*” (14:15).

We need to remember that even though we might not be doing anything wrong, others can see the things that we are doing and might think that it is wrong – and draw the wrong conclusions. Paul expands on this a little later. Keep things in perspective. The more important things are our relationship with Christ, not what kind of food we eat or abstain from.

What final application does Paul make?

Paul expands on the applications that he has made – not only the eating of food, but also the drinking of wine – and then adds “...*anything else...*” which might cause our brethren to stumble.

Paul has said that whatever we do, we need to do it by conviction – *be fully convinced* – that what we are doing is the right thing. When we partake of things that we are convinced are right – we must believe that God wants us to partake of it. Even though we might not be doing anything wrong, others could see the things that we are doing and think that it is wrong – and draw the wrong conclusions.

Paul makes the application to drinking of wine. The bible does not specifically condemn the drinking of wine (or other alcohol), but it does specifically condemn excessive use of alcohol and its effects in drunkenness (Eph 5:18; 1 Cor 5:11; 1 Cor 6:10; Gal 5:21). Paul goes beyond a specific condemnation here. He says that if it causes a brother to stumble (sin) then we ought not to do it. So, does wine cause others to stumble? If we drink wine are we convinced that it is right for us to do so? Are we are doing it because that is what God wants us to do? Is there anything in the wine that will cause anyone to stumble?

What is Paul’s final conclusion?

If we have any doubts about our action, then we are condemned because we are not doing it by faith. We need to *be fully convinced in our minds* – but being fully convinced is not enough. I can be fully convinced that poisonous mushrooms won’t harm me and eat them in full conviction of faith. But there will be sad consequences. Our faith is based on knowledge. *Faith comes from hearing the word of God* (10:17) It is faith with full assurance that we have as a result of our *knowledge* of God, of who He wants us to be, and of how we put into practice that kind of faith in our lives.

In fact, it is exactly the kind of faith that Abraham demonstrated in his obedience to God.