

Romans 14:1-12
When Church Members Hold Differing Positions

Introduction: The issues referred to in this section can lead to the strife and jealousy mentioned 13:13.

1) The principle of embracing fellow church members—14:1-4

- a) The reality: differences exist—14:1 ¹ *As for the one who is weak in faith,*
 - i) “Weak in faith” refers to those Christians who lack assurance or conviction about what is right and wrong. This weakness often walks hand in hand with an inadequate understanding of God’s Word and results in ongoing reservations about what he may or may not do.
 - ii) Stated POSITIVELY: welcome [proslamba,nw] *him*,
 - (1) This is **not** the concept unconditional acceptance. God accepts us **conditionally**, dependent on repentance and faith in the finished work of Christ.
 - iii) Stated NEGATIVELY: *but not to quarrel* [dia,krisij] *over opinions* [dialogismo,].
 - (1) We are not called to settle everyone else’s scruples or turn the church into a debate club.
- b) Contrasting distinctions concerning food—14:2
 - i) Strong, full participation, perhaps Gentiles: ² *One person believes he may eat anything,*
 - ii) Weak, limited or no participation, perhaps Jews: *while the weak person eats only vegetables.*
- c) Similar commands to each group—14:3
 - i) From a strong, full participation position, perhaps Gentiles: ³ Let not the one who eats despise [evxouqene,w] *the one who abstains,*
 - (1) To consider to be of little or no value, worthless, view with contempt
 - ii) From a weak, limited or no participation position, perhaps Jews: *and let not the one who abstains pass judgment* [kri,nw] *on the one who eats,*
 - (1) To determine to be guilty or liable to punishment
 - iii) The reason: *for God has welcomed* [proslamba,nw] *him.*
 - (1) This is the reason why we are commanded to do so in 14:1.
 - (2) As John Stott said: It is safe to treat others as we would like them to treat us, but it is safer still to treat them as God does. The former is a ready-made guide based on our fallen self-centeredness, while the latter is a standard based on God’s perfection.
- d) The significant question—14:4 ⁴ *Who are you to pass judgment* [kri,nw] *on the (household or personal) servant* [oivke,thj] *of another?*
 - i) *It is before his own master* [ku,rioj] *that he stands or falls.*
 - (1) His or her master will ultimately determine if they have sinned. It is not up to fellow servants to interfere and to criticize other servants.
 - ii) *And he will be upheld/stand, for the Lord* [ku,rioj] (some MSS read “God”) *is able to make him stand.*

2) The principle of the Lordship of Jesus Christ—14:5-9

- a) The reality: differing positions exist—14:5-6
- i) Concerning “holy days”—14:5
- (1) Weak, limited or no participation, perhaps Jews: ⁵ *One person esteems [kri,nw] one day as better than another,*
(a) Some recognize an ongoing Sabbath or special religious holidays.
- (2) Strong, full participation, perhaps Gentiles: *while another esteems [kri,nw] all days alike.*
- (3) The command: *Each one should be fully convinced [plhrofore,w] in his own mind.*
(a) Each person must operate with a clear conscience before God.
(b) Each option is equally valid before God.
(c) S. Lewis Johnson reminds us: Each believer is to study the Scriptures, seek the mind of the Spirit in illumination, and then follow that which seems to be the teaching of the Word.
- ii) Concerning “holy days” and eating food—14:6
- (1) Days: ⁶ *The one who observes [frone,w] the day, observes [frone,w] it in honor of the Lord.*
- (2) Food:
- (a) Strong, full participation, perhaps Gentiles: *The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks [euvcariste,w] to God,*
(b) Weak, limited or no participation, perhaps Jews: *while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.*
- (3) Paul assumes a righteous motive on behalf of both groups.
- b) The principle revealed—14:7-9
- i) The lordship of Jesus Christ **explained**—14:7-8
- (1) Submission to Christ stated **negatively**: ⁷ *For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.*
- (2) Submission to Christ stated **positively**: ⁸ *For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord.*
- (3) Submission to Christ stated **clearly**: *So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.*
- ii) The lordship of Jesus Christ **stated**—14:9
- (1) ⁹ *For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord [kurieu,w] both of the dead and of the living.*

3) The principle of individual accountability to God—14:10-12

- a) Convicting questions—14:10-11
- i) Judging other believers usurps Christ’s responsibility—14:10
- The questions referring back to 14:3
- (1) From the weak, limited or no participation position, perhaps Jews: ¹⁰ *Why do you pass judgment [kri,nw] on your brother?*

- (2) From the strong, full participation position, perhaps Gentiles: *Or you, why do you despise [evxouqene,w] your brother?*
- ii) It is Christ's responsibility to evaluate believers: *For we will all stand before the judgment seat [bh/ma] of God;*
 - (1) It's certainty is based on Isaiah 45:23: *¹¹ for it is written, "As I (emphatic) live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me (emphatic) (i.e. submission), and every tongue shall confess [evxomologe,w] to God (i.e. acknowledgement)."*
 - (2) This is not the same as the Great White Throne Judgment. This does not concern one's eternal destiny.
- b) **THE POINT**—14:12 *¹² So then each of us will give an account [di,dwmi lo,goj] of himself to God.*

4) **Something to remember:**

- a) Keep things in perspective:
 - i) There ARE some attitudes and actions that are clearly sinful, but that is NOT what this section is talking about.
 - ii) But when it comes to fundamental doctrines, there is no room for personal opinions.
- b) Stop meddling!
 - i) Believers should not sinfully criticize other believers when their opinions differ. We do not possess the authority or the knowledge to do so. See Rev. 2:23.

Romans 14:13-23
How I Should Tend to My Conscience

Introduction: This section is directed to the “strong” Christians. It appears to center on their church’s fellowship meals. What should they bring to share with others? An important principle to keep in mind is this: people differ in their ability and the speed with which they internalize Biblical truth.

1) The importance of conscience—14:13-19

a) A legitimate concern for the conscience of others—14:13-15

i) A play on words—14:13-14

(1) Stated NEGATIVELY: ¹³ *Therefore let us not pass judgment [kri,nw] on one another any longer,*

(a) Cf. 14:3

(2) Stated POSITIVELY: *but rather decide/judge [kri,nw] never to put a stumbling block/an obstacle to trip over [pro,skomma] or hindrance/a snare in which to be captured [ska,ndalon] in the way of a brother.*

• This refers to causing someone to do something against his or her conscience. Sometimes this is detected by the pressure toward a weaker brother to violate his standards and conscience. (Moody)

(a) Clean for the “strong”—¹⁴ *I know [pf. oivda] and am persuaded [pf. pei,qw] in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean [koino,j] in itself,*

(i) Cf. Mark 7:15-23 and 1 Tim. 4:4.

(ii) What a startling statement for a Jewish man to make!

(b) Unclean for the “weak”—*but it is unclean [koino,j] for anyone who thinks [logi,zomai] it unclean [koino,j].*

(i) Acting contrary to what one perceives to be right is to weaken one’s own moral structure and undermine integrity. (R. Mounce)

(ii) Robert Yarbrough writes: If I flagrantly eat a pepperoni pizza while dining with a Christian friend who has converted from Islam and cannot stomach eating pork, my brother is grieved and I have not walked in love. The fact that Christ died for this brother should motivate me to order a pork-free pizza instead. I can pray that in coming years this brother’s dietary scruples will move him in the direction of less rigor in an area where Scripture declares freedom. In the meantime, my job is to accept and affirm the brother, not pressure him to see things my way.

ii) A correction—14:15

(1) Walk in love: ¹⁵ *For if (1st class condition, assumed true) your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love [avga,ph].*

(2) Cause no harm: *By what you eat, do not destroy [avpo,llumi] the one for whom Christ died.*

(3) If, Paul implies, Christ has already paid the supreme price for that “weak” Christian, how can the “strong” refuse to pay the quite

insignificant price of a minor and occasional restriction in their diet?
(D. Moo)

- b) A life-long concern for serving Christ—14:16-18
 - i) A command—14:16-17 ¹⁶ So do not let what you^{pl} regard as good be spoken of as evil.
(1) Why? ¹⁷ For the (future) kingdom of God (only use in Romans) is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
(a) While the kingdom is manifested in and through the church, the church should not be equated with the kingdom. (Moody)
 - ii) A comfort—14:18 ¹⁸ Whoever thus serves [douleu,w] Christ is acceptable/is pleasurable [euva,restoj] to God and approved [do,kimoj] by men/people.
- c) A loving concern for harmonious relationships—14:19
 - i) ¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

2) The importance of faith—14:20-23

- a) A concern for the work of God—14:20-21 ²⁰ Do not, for the sake of food, destroy [katalu,w] the work of God (in the life of a weaker brother).
 - i) A contrast—14:20 —**Everything** (emphatic) is indeed (ritually) clean [kaqaro,j], but **it is wrong** [kako,j] for anyone to make another stumble [pro,skomma] by what he eats.
 - ii) An antonym—²¹**It is good** [kalo,j] not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble [prosko,ptw].
(1) Just because someone can participate doesn't mean they should.
 - iii) It is frightening to think of hindering God's work in another believer's life through my own choices.
 - iv) Tom Schreiner remarks: "When human beings begin to act contrary to their consciences, they no longer have an anchor for their lives. The center no longer holds; they are now adrift and subject to the convictions and consciences of others, and authentic faith can't survive when one lives on the basis of the convictions of others."
- b) A concern for a clear conscience before God—14:22-23
 - i) Privacy—14:22a ²² The faith that **you** (emphatic) have, keep between yourself and God.
(1) You don't need to insist on influencing a weaker brother to change his ways.
(2) Tom Schreiner wisely reminds us: "The self-denial of the strong should not be understood as an assault on or criticism of their theology. They are free to maintain the convictions of their faith in the privacy of their home or with other believers of like convictions."
 - ii) Satisfaction—14:22b *Blessed* (satisfaction) [maka,rioj] is the one who has no reason to pass judgment [kri,nw] on himself for what he approves [dokima,zw].

- (1) “Love God and do whatever you please: for the soul trained in love to God will do nothing to offend the One who is Beloved.” (paraphrase of Augustine’s “Love, and do what you will.”)
- iii) Condemnation—14:23 ²³ *But whoever* (the weak) *has doubts* [diakri,nw] (wavers) *is condemned* [katakri,nw] (by God) *if he eats, because the eating is not from faith.*
 - (1) *For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin* [a`marti,a].
 - (a) Trust is the willingness to put all of life before God for his approval.
(R. Mounce)
 - (2) i.e. when in doubt, don’t.

3) Things to remember:

- a) Don’t bully or intimidate other Christians into violating their conscience by bragging about or parading your own “convictions”.
 - i) Sometimes those who brag the loudest about their freedoms are simply trying to convince themselves, not others.
 - ii) D. Moo formulates three principles that relate to today:
 - (1) Believers continue to differ over certain matters that are not essential to the Christian faith. Paul did not expect such differences to vanish.
 - (2) Thus we should learn to relate to people in terms of their background and particular scruples in a loving manner.
 - (3) The unity of the church and the glory of Christ should be our ultimate goal.
- b) Your conscience is not a perfect guide. It needs to be trained by means of the Word of God.
- c) If we were to live this way, how countercultural we would be. Imagine someone refraining from exercising their own rights in order to help someone else.