

Community Group Discussion Guide

March 10, 2024

Romans 14:1-15:7 | Christian Liberty

MOTIVATE

Starter Question:

- ⇒ *What are some freedoms you enjoy? Are there differing opinions on what our freedoms allow us to do?*

DISCUSS

Christians in the church in Rome were united by their faith in Christ, but Paul detected a lack of unity between Jewish and Gentile believers. The two groups disagreed in particular about eating of meat, observance of special days, and drinking of wine. In Romans 14:1-15:7, Paul taught that harmonious relationships are important and that believers should live without judging others. He offered guidelines designed to achieve and maintain unity.

- ⇒ *Do we still have similar disagreements in the church today? Can you give an example?*

Leader's Note: It may be wise to warn your Community Group not to allow today's discussion to devolve into criticism and complaining about "disputable matters." Discussions that deteriorate into divisive issues are the very target of this passage.

Romans 14:1-4 *As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. 2 One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. 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. 4 Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? 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.*

Paul spoke of two groups whom he designated as the "weak" and the "strong." Paul used the term "weak" in a figurative sense. In Rome there were Jewish Christians who were reluctant to give up certain traditional aspects of their Jewish faith. Therefore, they maintained a literal obedience to the ceremonial part of the Old Testament Law. They were "weak" in the sense that they were uncertain about how faith in Christ affected the status of Old Testament regulations. (Shepherd's Notes, Romans, page 80)

1. Those who are weak in the faith: Mainly Jewish Christian who could not bring themselves to abandon the requirements of the law they had observed all their lives. Paul's nuanced use of the word "faith" refers not directly to one's belief generally but to one's convictions about what that faith allows one to do. The weak in faith are not necessarily lesser Christians than the strong. They are simply those who do not think their faith allows them to do certain things

that the strong feel free to do.¹ Paul characterized the “weak” by their lingering legalism. They tended to be harsh in their criticism of those who did not share their opinions.

⇒ ***Why are we so critical of those who do not share our opinions?***

2. Those who are strong in the faith: Mainly Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians like Paul who felt no need to observe these laws. While Paul wanted both groups to accept each other, he was most concerned about the attitude of the strong. The strong were convinced Jesus ended all religious legalism and rejoiced in their Christian liberty. But they were also tempted to look down upon the less mature.

⇒ ***What should our attitude be toward a “weaker” believer?***

“Disputable matters” was Paul’s emphasis—things that are neither commanded nor prohibited to Christians. These two groups should not allow differences over such things to interfere with unity. Each believer should act in light of his or her convictions regarding religious traditions. Both the observer and the non-observer of regulations like food laws can have an equal desire to honor God.

⇒ ***What is a “disputable matter” you’ve seen interfere in a church?***

⇒ ***How can “observers” and “non-observers” find unity?***

In verses 2-3, Paul rebuked these Christians for standing in judgment over one another. The weak condemned the strong for dismissing God’s laws, while the strong looked down on the weak for clinging to old ways. Paul insisted these judgmental attitudes must give way to mutual recognition. In verse 4, Paul made it clear that both the weak and the strong were God’s servants. As servants, neither had the right to pass judgement upon the other. This right belongs to God alone.

⇒ ***Why are we inclined to pass judgement on one another over matters to which the Bible does not address clear guidelines?***

⇒ ***If judgement belongs to God, what should our attitude be toward other believers who share different convictions?***

Romans 14:5-6 *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. 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.*

Paul cited one of the disputable matters creating tension: judging certain days to be “more sacred” than others. These were most likely holy days like the Sabbath which were important Jewish identity markers. In any case, Paul wanted each believer to be firmly convinced in his or her own mind in order to keep their consciences clear before God. Both positions are acceptable and believers who hold each position should not condemn others.

¹ Moo, D. J. (2000). *Romans* (p. 448). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

Paul was not saying that one may commit any act or indulge in any behavior as long as one is convinced in his or her own mind. Rather, among those spiritual behaviors that people do for the Lord, giving thanks and glory to Him in the process, all are acceptable to God—and therefore should be acceptable to each other.²

⇒ ***While groups may differ over specific practices, why do both need to recognize the sincerity of the other?***

Romans 14:7-9 For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. **8** 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. **9** For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

No believer should act out of regard to himself or herself alone. Christians must take into account not just our own interests, but the interests of the One who died for us and returned to life so that He might be our Lord. As our Lord, Christ expects us to act in obedience to Him.

⇒ ***How do we apply verse 7 practically to our Community Group?***

Decisions on disputable matters should not be made in isolation but in accordance with the will of God as understood by the individual. In light of verses 7–9, Paul indicated every believer is ultimately accountable to God, not to other believers, for our conduct in this life.³

⇒ ***Why must we understand that Paul is not saying the spiritual life involves making up our own rules regardless of what anyone else thinks?***

Romans 14:10-12 Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; **11** for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." **12** So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

If Christ is going to judge every person, Paul asked the obvious questions: Then why do you look down on each other? Whenever a person puts himself or herself in a position of judge of another, he or she usurps the position of the true Judge of all. Because each of us will stand before God's judgement seat to give an account, no Christian should judge another or be intimidated by the judgments of another.

⇒ ***If there is only one Judge of all people, can we determine to live generously with one another?***

⇒ ***Why is unity in the body of Christ bigger than personal perspectives?***

² Boa, K., & Kruidenier, W. (2000). *Romans* (Vol. 6, pp. 422–423). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

³ Moo, D. J. (2000). *Romans* (p. 450). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

Romans 14:13-18 *Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. 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. 15 For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. 16 So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.*

Rather than debating the fine points of the law, Paul focused on the highest value in the kingdom of God: love. In this section, Paul addressed the strong in faith, the group with which Paul specifically identified himself in Romans 15:1.

Paul gave this example: If a mature Christian brought meat purchased in the marketplace into a communal meal at which are present those who felt the eating of that meat was wrong—then the more mature Christian is at fault. Why? Because the weaker brother or sister would be encouraged to participate in something which for them was sin.⁴

Negatively, Paul warned strong believers not to use their liberty in a way that brings spiritual harm to weaker brothers and sisters or causes them to “stumble.” Positively, he wanted the strong to use their freedom on these matters in accordance with love in order to build up the faith community. More important than being right is to act in ways that build up the body of Christ. Kingdom values take precedence over self.

⇒ ***When a Christian insists on his or her rights to the detriment of another Christian, why is that person no longer acting in love?***

Romans 14:19-23 *So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. 20 Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. 21 It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. 22 The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. 23 But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*

⇒ ***When differences arise, what steps can we take to ensure peace and edification continue in our Community Group?***

Paul urged the strong to keep their convictions about these matters in dispute to themselves. There is no need for them to be continually trying to convince other believers how right they are. The blessing at the end of verse 22 is the bottom line for strong believers. They should act in such a way that they have no reason to condemn themselves with respect to the practices they consider to be right. Paul wanted those who have clear consciences about the ways they use their freedom to exercise it out of love and concern for the edification of the Christian community. Freedom is wonderful but love is even greater.⁵

⁴ Boa, K., & Kruidenier, W. (2000). *Romans* (Vol. 6, pp. 425–426). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁵ Moo, D. J. (2000). *Romans* (p. 466). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

But, Paul reminded again, there are those who were unconvinced about freedom on these matters. Those believers, who still doubt, should refrain from acting as it is wrong to violate one's conscience.

- ⇒ ***Is there any lifestyle behavior of mine that is causing another Christian problems? Am I willing to stop that behavior for the sake of unity if necessary?***

Romans 15:1-4 *We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. 3 For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me." 4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

Paul continued his concern that weak and strong Christians find unity. Rather than pleasing themselves, strong believers are to seek the good of the weaker, helping them to develop into more mature Christians. By doing so, the strong follow Christ's example of forbearance.

- ⇒ ***What is the obligation of the stronger believer toward the weaker? What is the obligation of the weaker believer to the stronger?***
- ⇒ ***In what ways did Jesus demonstrate self-denial? As we follow His example, what principles might we draw on?***

Paul indicated that everything written in Scripture is written for believers. Not only did Scripture serve the needs of its own day, but it is still relevant in our modern world. It is through the endurance taught in Scripture and the encouragement it brings that we are able to live in hope.

- ⇒ ***How do we take Scripture written in the past and apply it to our present?***
- ⇒ ***How has the Scripture taught you endurance and given you a future hope?***

Romans 15:5-7 *May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, 6 that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*

Paul asked God to grant believers in Rome a spirit of unity. Paul prayed they would live in harmony with each other and in such accord with Christ that they would be able to glorify God as if with one voice. Both the weak and the strong are to accept one another. This is what it means to follow Christ.

TRANSFORM

1. Make personal application: Three principles arise from Romans 14:1-15:7

- Judgement is God's right, not humanity's.
- Love requires self-limitations for the sake of others.
- We are to follow Christ's example of forbearance and His desire for unity.

- ⇒ *Which of these three principles is the most challenging for you?*
- ⇒ *Discuss this quote: May the church today become unified in the essentials, extend liberty in the nonessentials, and love one another in all things—that the gospel of the kingdom may go forth in power and purity to those yet to hear.*⁶

2. Pray: Thank God for accepting and loving us in spite of our weaknesses. Ask Him to help us live by convictions that are grounded in faith. Pray for Him to help us be accepting of those who are weak.

STUDY

Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- *Holman New Testament Commentary, Romans, pages 415-442.*
- *The NIV Application Commentary, Matthew, pages 446-476.*
- *Shepherd's Notes, Romans, pages 79-87.*

⁶ Boa, K., & Kruidenier, W. (2000). [*Romans*](#) (Vol. 6, p. 419). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.