

Romans 14 • Handling Doubtful Things

Introduction

The most repeated mis-interpretation of the Old Testament-times believer was in thinking that the sacrifices were all that was needed to “wipe the slate clean”. In reality, they were intended as the **END** of the process that began with repentance and changes of the heart; the sacrifices were supposed to be an external sign that one was making a sincere effort to never repeat the sin—not do it as many times as one had animals to sacrifice. The Bible is a very large book and there are still those today that tend to think of it as a set of rules which, if followed, will “wipe the slate clean.” God desires neither sacrifices nor rules-followers, but a heart that desires to follow Him **evidenced** by following the rules. This is most evident in the fact that we all have consciences that differ in their sensitivity. Sometimes, when people strictly follow or make new rules, they’re not trying to justify a new doctrine or bizarre behavior; sometimes it’s a visible way of establishing their conscience’s sensitivity that sees something as a sin for them that is not for you. Why are there differing views of dancing? Music? Celebrations? They’re not always about potential occultic things; sometimes it’s how to handle “doubtful things”.

¹Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. ²One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. ³The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. ⁴Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

[Read v.1-4.]

Q: What is the context in which these verses are written? (Hint: read the last verse of chapter 13.)

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.”

--Romans 13:14

A: The context is making “provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.” The connection is this: we are not to make any provision for the flesh, which would include satisfying our appetites or judging one another. The word “lusts” carries with it a much broader connotation than just sex, for instance sometimes being translated as “covet”.

Q: When Paul writes, “Now accept the one who is weak in faith,” is this a put-down?

A: No. It is a statement of fact regarding how the Christian regards his relationship with God. The implication is that the more one relies on rules to make decisions, the more dependent they are upon the Law. Remember that the argument made by Paul in Romans to this point is that a person’s relationship with God is not based in any way upon law, but upon faith, which is really a relational thing. If a person has just come out of being under the Law, such as a Jewish Christian, they will no doubt struggle with the issue of relying strictly upon faith. That may be a hard thing for them to do.

An analogy would be someone who was in a car accident and experienced physical trauma. For a while, this person is weak; they cannot be expected to do the things a healthy person can do. But because they cannot do them is not a cause for judging. We certainly wouldn’t make fun of that person, judge or put down that person because they were “weak.” So neither do we judge the person because their faith is not at the point that they are totally free from all past beliefs. To judge that person would be making provision for the flesh. (I spent a lot of time on this point because it is **SO** important.)

Q: What is the example that Paul gives in verse 2?

A: The example pertains to what a person eats. The specific issue is probably eating meat sacrificed to gods.

The historical context is this: Just as you and I go out to eat at restaurants, so Gentiles would go to the temple to have dinner. Temples were often the center of the commercial world, and housed many restaurants. One of the guarantees was that the meat served there had been offered to its god. Now, this situation raises some issues. Should a Christian avoid eating at the temple because they only serve meat that has been offered to other gods, which is idolatry? Or should the Christian avoid the temple altogether because of what it stands for? Or could a Christian go ahead and enjoy a fine dinner at a fine restaurant at the temple, realizing that, because there are no other gods, the whole issue is irrelevant? And again, should a Christian avoid going to the temple to eat because it might tempt someone **else** to eat there who had doubts about eating there?

Application: *What are some issues that we struggle with today that are similar to what these Christians struggled with? Are there any places, activities or relationships that are a part of your life which—while comfortable to you personally—may not be comfortable to other Christians, particularly new Christians that haven't yet developed great discernment or wisdom?*

Q: What is supposed to be the response of Christians toward each other regarding these doubtful things?

A: Do not judge one another and do not look down with contempt upon one another. (v.3-4)

Application: *Apply this principle to the following specific issues: watching R-rated movies, drinking alcohol, smoking, one's dress or attire, dancing, celebrating Christmas, and living a luxurious lifestyle.*

⁵One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. ⁷For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; ⁸for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

[Read v.5-9]

Q: What is the other example Paul gives, that was obviously an issue for the early Christians? How does Paul resolve the issue?

A: The day of worship.

Some (probably Jews) felt that the Sabbath was the only day for worship. Others worshipped on Sundays, as that was the day they customarily worshipped (the Sun God). Some early Christians kept the Sun Day because it was the day of the week Christ rose from the dead. What Paul is saying is this: If you want to worship on Sabbath, worship on Sabbath. If you want to worship on the Sun Day, worship on the Sun Day. But whatever day you worship, do so in the name of the Lord. Why? Because the only thing that really matters in the end is that it is done **to** the Lord and **for** the Lord.

[Read v.10-12]

Q: What is the essential message of these verses?

A: That we will be judged, not upon whether or not we ate various kinds of meat (or meat at all), and not upon what day we worship. What God will judge us on is how we treated one another.

¹⁰But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹For it is written,

“AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD,
EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO
ME,
AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE
PRAISE TO GOD.”

Romans 14 • Handling Doubtful Things , Page 2 of 3

¹²So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

¹³Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way. ¹⁴I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. ¹⁵For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.

¹⁶Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; ¹⁷for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.

¹⁹So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. ²⁰Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. ²¹It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. ²²The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. ²³But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

[Read v.13-23]

Q: Besides not judging or condemning one another, in what other ways are Christians to relate to one another over these matters? What does it mean “to stumble”?

A: We are to act on the basis of love. In other words, even if we think something is okay but another Christian does not, then we shouldn’t participate in it in such a way as to cause them to “stumble.” To stumble means to do something that a person is not sure is right. For example, if a person has doubts about seeing an R-rated movie, and we talk that person into going because **we** see nothing wrong with it, then **we’ve** caused that person to sin because they were not able to do it in faith.

Q: How is “sin” defined in the context of “doubtful things”?

A: In this context, what is sin is that which is not of faith. Therefore, sin is not defined on the basis of law, but on the basis of one’s faith relationship with God.