

SRMBC Family Bible Study

Romans: A New Lifestyle

October 10, 2018

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Lesson 17: To Eat or Not to Eat Romans 14

The Bible contains many clear commands. But it also seems to be silent or ambiguous about many moral issues. These “gray” areas have always been a source of dispute and conflict among Christians, even though the disputed practices change from time to time. What principles should guide us when our actions are criticized by others or when we feel critical toward them?

Group Discussion: In the 1924 Olympics Eric Liddell refused to run a qualifying race on Sunday, even though failure to qualify would eliminate him from competition. He believed that to run on Sunday would break the commandment “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (Exodus 20:8). Do you think his decision was right or wrong? Explain.

Eric Henry Liddell (/ˈlɪdəl/; 16 January 1902 – 21 February 1945) was a Scottish Olympic Gold Medalist runner, rugby union international player, and Christian missionary.

At the 1924 Summer Olympics in Paris, Liddell refused to run in the heats for his favored 100 meters because they were held on a Sunday. Instead he competed in the 400 meters held on a weekday, a race that he won. He returned to China in 1925 to serve as a missionary teacher. Aside from two furloughs in Scotland, he remained in China until his death in a Japanese civilian internment camp in 1945. Liddell's Olympic training and racing, and the religious convictions that influenced him, are depicted in the Oscar-winning 1981 film Chariots of Fire, in which he is portrayed by fellow Scot Ian Charleson.

Right Decision?

- Honored his personal Godly conviction.
- Made an impact on those around him.
- Gave him an opportunity to witness to others.

Wrong Decision?

- It is possible to both honor God and Sunday.
- Maybe he missed out on God-Given opportunity to medal for His Glory.
- The Sabbath/Sunday may have become an idol – Worship God and not the Sabbath.

Read Romans 14.

1. What are some areas of dispute between the “weak” and the “strong” in verses 1- 6? What types of behavior do Christians disagree about today?

The “Weak” Believers

- But he who is weak eats only vegetables
- He who eats certain meats/food IAW OT law/tradition
- One person esteems one day above another

The “Strong” Believers

- For one believes he may eat all things
- All meats/food are clean when offered in thanksgiving to God
- Another esteems every day alike

For modern Christians, a “Romans 14 issue” might take any one of a number of forms:

- Christians wearing or not wearing of head coverings (or other issues related to clothing).
- Whether or not celebrating secular holidays is permissible, Public school vs. Homeschooling.
- The use of birth control vs. trusting God to determine family size.

2. Why is it wrong to pass judgment on other Christians (vv. 1-13)?

Attitudes of the “Weak” and the “Strong”

- Superiority over the other (Judging)
- Anger/Hatred (Despising)
- Shunning (Failure to receive each other as family)

Points to Ponder

- Both may be wrong
- One may be wrong
- Neither may be wrong

The story is told of a zoo that was noted for their great collection of different animals. One day the gorilla died, and to keep up the appearance of a full range of animals, the zookeeper hired a man to wear a gorilla suit and fill in for the dead animal. It was his first day on the job, and the man didn’t know how to act like a gorilla very well.

As he tried to move convincingly, he got too close to the wall of the enclosure and tripped and fell into the lion exhibit. He began to scream, convinced his life was over...until the lion spoke to him: “Be quiet or you’re going to get us both fired!”

3. When we are not around those whose faith is weak, what principles should govern our Christian liberty (vv. 5-23)?

- God has received both the weak and strong in matters of conscience or Christian Freedom
- Your “weak” brother is your servant – but God’s. We are not anyone’s Judge – God is.
- When someone does or doesn’t do something – it is unto the Lord’s
- When someone sincerely conducts themselves in areas of disagreement with a clear conviction and conscience the Lord get the praise/thanksgiving.
- No one lives for themselves but to the Lord – the Lord of all.
- Christ is the One who is the Savior, Lord and Judge – that we all must give and account of our own behavior.
- To put a stumbling block by judging another is sin

What Romans 14 Does Not Say:

- It does not say that all opinions regarding matters of conscience are equally valid.
- That Christians should go against their own conscience in order to accommodate believers who disagree. When someone does or doesn’t do something – it is unto the Lord’s.
- That Christians should refrain from judging a believer who is engaging in obvious sin.
- That the convictions of the weakest brother or sister should determine the acceptable exercise of liberty in a local church.

4. When we are around those whose faith is weak, what principles should guide our actions, and why (vv. 13-21)?

We must be careful to understand what Paul means by “weak” faith. Paul does not mean a weak trust in God but rather an incomplete or inaccurate understanding of the Christian life.

- Let each person be fully convinced in his own mind.
- In everything you do - exercise your faith as unto the Lord.
- Have the mindset of bringing peace.
- In matters of dispute or preference – don’t be pushy. Have it to yourself and to God.

5. A clear conscience and faith should govern what we do. Someone somewhere is bound to be offended by almost anything we do! How can we practically apply these principles?

- Do not wrongly judge one another anymore.
- Be resolved not to a cause our brother to fall.
- Do not destroy with your food/freedom the one for whom Christ died.
- Do not let your good be spoken of as evil.
- Christians are to be governed by the law of love (14:13-18).

- Understand that the Kingdom of God is not earthly issues, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
- A clear conscience and faith should govern what we do.

6. Someone somewhere is bound to be offended by almost anything we do! How can we practically apply these principles?

Paul is certainly not telling us to give up every practice that is disapproved of by other Christians.

Some Applications can be:

- When the weak are hurting, troubled, confused, we dare not gloat in our self-sufficiency—even if they should have been “*more mature by now!*”
 - Accepting one another as Christ accepted you, and working patiently with one another as Christ works with you.
 - If you have personal convictions that differ from others, keep them to yourself unless asked, or unless the issue comes up.
- 7. In his treatise On the Freedom of a Christian Man, Martin Luther wrote: “A Christian man is a most free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian man is a most dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” How do these words summarize the essence of this chapter?**
- We should handle whatever issues we face concerning the exercise of Christian freedom with the overall good of the church as our highest goal.
 - We should be happy to exercise our liberty in ways (and contexts) where no harm is caused to a brother who differs with us.
- 8. In what ways do you need either to become more free in your choices or to take into account your influence on others?**

We should also be willing when necessary to say with Paul, “if [_____] causes my brother to stumble, I will never [_____] again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble”

Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. 1 Cor. 8:13 (NKJV).

Thank God for the freedom you have in Christ. Pray that you will use your freedom to build up other Christians and not to tear them down.

Keys for Living



In areas of life where the Bible doesn't have a specific command or principle, believers can disagree without being disagreeable.



It is better to forgo your own Christian Liberty in order to preserve the faith of a weaker brother or sister (ex. not eating pork or shellfish, etc.)



It is important to remember that we are not saved by what we eat or don't eat (or any thing we do) but because of the Person and Work of Christ.