

Gospel-Centric Issues vs. Personal Opinions

Romans 13 closed with the idea that we are to put on Christ and love one another. Essentially, we learned, “it’s not about me.” Chapter 14 will now speak to potential conflicts and *how* to walk in love in light of the big gospel picture, calling on what we have learned regarding justification by faith and the sacrifice of Christ. Paul will address hot button topics that caused strife for 1st century Christians, including dietary laws and the keeping of days. These are secondary issues of personal choice, conscience, and practice, and while they are not trivial, they are also not essential for fellowship together. The basis of our unity is Christ, and these secondary issues, like the ones we face today, are not to steal from the beauty of our gospel fellowship according to the mutual measure of faith. As we are involved with many people, there will undoubtedly be many opinions and issues to navigate, but we’ve been made one person in Christ, and if we can’t lay down our rights in these non-essential matters, we may have allegiances and motivations that are more important to us than *him*. The Romans may have thought their opinions were on par with core gospel issues, but when we elevate our preferences to that level of importance, we won’t be able to see when it’s right to lay them down.

Chapter Highlights

VS 1-2

Abstaining from certain meats was part of Jewish worship according to the law of Moses. Many Jewish Christians still felt strongly about these practices in the new community of those who follow Christ. Also, it was difficult to know if what was sold in the marketplaces was offered in sacrifice to idols, which many Gentile Christians used to believe in as part of their pagan worship. As we see here in Romans 14 and in I Corinthians 8, all food is clean because of Christ. Jesus has fulfilled the whole law, so there are no longer dietary restrictions in the new covenant. However, for some, it weighed heavily on their heart that it was an idolatrous practice to eat this food. This was not a bad reason for them to abstain from partaking in it. Others, though, felt it was a demonstration of faith to eat it. Having the knowledge that an idol is nothing, they wanted to exercise their right to eat freely. This difference in opinion made people feel like they couldn’t eat with a brother based on what was on their plate. Paul calls the strong in faith to sacrifice their right to eat, and to receive those who were weak in faith instead of quarreling and disputing over this issue. They could build them up and help them, instead of forcing their own opinions on them until they believed it was okay.

VS 3-4

People from both sides would have been tempted to despise the other. Both could have thought, “you don’t get it,” and both could look at each other with contempt. Is this what Christ died for? We are not to think, “I am correct,” but “**God** is correct.” **HE** received them. God is basically saying, “This isn’t a big deal to me, why is it to you? I received them, why can’t you?” If I find my identity in my practices, I am conflating my own opinions with the truth of God, and pitting my ideas against the importance of calvary’s hill. In doing so, I bind the conscience of others to my personal preferences. However, this doesn’t mean we compromise on matters of sin. There are Scriptural answers to those situations and sometimes reproof is warranted.

VS 5-6

Another 1st century issue was that some esteemed every day the same and others observed special days. For instance, Jews honored the Sabbath, and that was close to their heart as part of how they worshiped. God wasn’t asking them to give that up. But Paul calls on people of both opinions to let everyone be persuaded in their own mind and do all in reverence of the Lord. If you’re going to keep a day, keep it in honor of the Lord. If you don’t, do it because of your Lord, recognizing your freedom in Christ and the sabbath rest we have in him. We are not bound to either way of doing things.

Some examples of things that come up today in Christian circles that cause disputations and strife include: clothing, diet, dancing, political ideas, financial ideas, education, occupations, holiday traditions, translations of the Bible, where you assemble, biblical training, and many more. None of these things are the standard for justification. They may be important, but they are not the measure or means by which we are united as one person in Christ. I Corinthians 10:31 says, “**Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.**”

VS 7-12

We all belong to Christ. Even in death, we are his. He is over our whole lives, and understanding that, we will be able to see clearly what is important. Everything in our life should be affected by total allegiance to him. Whether or not we agree on many ancillary issues, there is one common ground: Christ is all and in all. This kind of love is discerning, but it is also unselfish. Think about the conflicts you have with people in your life. Are they directly related to the dying and rising of Jesus, or are they only loosely related? Regardless of what others do, we can do what our Lord calls us to do. God is the one who will judge the secrets of men’s hearts, as we saw in chapter 2. We must be concerned about our own accountability to God regarding how we live and love as a Christian.

VS 13-23

While we need to judge evil and address sin, we are not to judge each other on non essential matters. Rather, we should focus on judging *ourselves*. I examine my own heart, asking, “Am I causing others to stumble with what *I’m* doing? Am I walking in love?” I don’t look around and question, “are they?” If someone is made to think they’re worshiping idols because of what I’m doing, I’m the one not walking in love. What’s more important? My right to eat, provable in Scripture, or the fact that I’m grieving and hurting my brother? We need to lay down our rights for our brothers, like Jesus did for us when he died for us. This is well-pleasing to God. Even good things will be seen as evil if they hurt others. Serving Christ by laying down our preference for the sake of the weak is more important than our personal opinion, even if we are slighted in the process. Don’t be so in tune with your own ideas that you’re out of touch with Christ’s opinions and purposes. Jesus taught, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” Thinking this way, we will be those who get what the kingdom is all about: ***“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the holy ghost.”***

Don’t ruin what God is working because of your opinion. If what we are doing is in accordance with the faith, we can feel free to do it. However, if it causes someone else to stumble, it’s not okay to sin against your brother by causing him to think he’s violating God’s will.

Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.

For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.

ROMANS 15:2-3

Conclusion

We give the world, the heavenly realm, and the global church a glimpse into what God is doing in new creation by displaying Christ’s love toward others in sacrificial ways. As we bear the infirmity of the weak, laying down our personal preference for their benefit, we honor our Lord. We need to see our brothers and sisters and think, “This is one for whom Christ died.” May we let God’s kingdom reign among the brethren, navigating what is and is not essential with wisdom, righteousness, peace, and joy.

Romans

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