

ROMANS 14:1-13

Paul now instructs the brethren about certain differences among them. These concerned matters of authorized liberties that would not affect their fellowship with God, and therefore should not affect their fellowship one with another. He is concerned that there be proper attitudes on both sides and that the brethren receive and love one another in the pursuit of peace and unity (15:5-6).

I) Obligation to Receive One Another Despite Differences over Matters of Liberty (14:1-13)

- A) Receive one who is weak in the faith (receive such a person into fellowship)
 - 1) “Weak in the faith” = person’s conscience not fully convinced about matters of liberty
 - a) Brethren described as **weak** [having doubts of personal conscience] or **strong** [having no doubts] (15:1); the “strong” applied knowledge of truth about liberties (14:14; 1 Cor. 8:7a)
 - 2) Not to dispute over “doubtful things” [passing judgment on another’s conscience, opinion]
 - a) Not dispute over personal opinions in matters of authorized liberties (things God allows but does not demand)
 - b) Some are obsessed with relentless dispute, argument, and wrangling which leads to envy, strife, and evil suspicions – we are to withdraw from such (1 Tim. 6:3-5)
- B) Example of such a dispute
 - 1) One believes he may eat all things (strong, informed, undoubting conscience)
 - 2) Another eats only vegetables (weak, not convinced of eating all things, personal doubt)
 - 3) *Background* – Judaism forbade certain meats to be eaten (Col. 2:16); Gentiles did not, but some did have concerns about meats offered to idols (1 Cor. 8:7)
- C) Problem attitudes
 - 1) He who eats [meat] should not despise him who does not eat [meat]
 - a) “Despise” = look down on, treat with contempt, due to being puffed up (1 Cor. 8:1)
 - 2) He who does not eat [meat] should not judge him who eats [meat]
 - a) “Judge” = find fault with, condemn
 - 3) God has received him (both the one who eats and the one who does not eat)
 - a) God has “received” him, so brethren are to “receive” one another (14:1)
 - 4) No one is in position to judge another’s servant – to his own master he stands or falls
 - a) He will stand for God is able to make him stand [approved]
- D) Another example of such a difference
 - 1) One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike
 - 2) *Background* – Judaism esteemed certain days (Col. 2:16)
 - 3) Each person is to be “fully convinced in his own mind” (personal conscience/conviction)
 - a) Issues of difference did not involve beliefs or practices affecting fellowship with God (therefore were not to affect fellowship between brethren)
 - b) Issues of difference did not involve sin and doctrinal error – immorality or false teaching (Rom. 13:13; 16:17)
 - c) Issues of difference involved authorized liberties and matters indifferent to God
- E) Each person practices observing/not observing days and eating/not eating meats “to the Lord” (reverent, committed action of personal conscience/conviction)
 - 1) No person lives or dies to himself, but to the Lord – we are the Lord’s!
 - 2) Christ died and arose from the grave to be Lord of both dead and living
- F) Some were wrongly judging and showing contempt
 - 1) All will stand before the judgment seat of Christ/God (2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:11-12; Matt. 25:31f)
 - a) Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess (Isa. 45:23; Phil. 2:10-11)

- b) Each person shall give account of himself to God (1 Pet. 4:5)
- 2) Should not judge one another anymore, but resolve not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in a brother's way (God makes him stand – 14:4; 1 Cor. 8:9)
 - a) No cause for judging a brother if no sin is involved in his choice or action of personal conscience toward God in a matter of liberty
 - b) Strong should not act within his liberty IF it would lead the weak to violate his conscientious conviction (see 1 Cor. 8:1-13; 10:23-33)

Paul instructs here about the obligation of receiving one another even while differing in matters of authorized liberties. He addresses the concerns of two classes of brethren, the weak and the strong. Paul identifies himself as one of the "strong" (15:1) and admonishes them to receive one who is weak in the faith – a weakness in understanding divinely allowed liberties that led to certain scruples of personal conscience and action.

Both Jewish and Gentile matters appear to be involved: Judaism forbade certain meats to be eaten and they esteemed certain days; Gentiles did not observe these but did have concerns about meats offered to idols (see 1 Corinthians 8 and 10). This may have led some to eat only vegetables and to avoid meat altogether. These issues of difference were not of a type to involve beliefs or practices that involved one in sin, whether immorality or false teaching, which would affect their fellowship with God (God had "received" them, thus they were to receive one another). The issues of eating meats and observing days were examples of opinions, authorized liberties, and matters of indifference to God. They had become matters of difference between brethren to the extent that they were judging and despising one another, instead of receiving one another. This is the problem Paul is addressing. It is regrettable that this chapter has been perverted by some to teach that faithful brethren can receive and maintain an ongoing fellowship with brethren who are teaching and/or practicing moral and doctrinal error and sin. This erroneous interpretation is a violation of the specific and larger context of the passage, and the teaching of scripture concerning the limits of fellowship.

Tom Roberts wrote, "...our 'receiving' a brother into fellowship is not conditioned upon an agreement or forced decisions concerning all his internal doubts. Brethren may worship together even when they disagree in matters about which God is indifferent (1 Cor. 8:8). A weak brother may have personal, inward doubts about authorized liberties that a strong brother may practice, but fellowship is not restricted because of this disagreement. Obviously this "agreeing to disagree" does not involve sinful doctrines and practices but with things inherently 'good,' 'clean,' and 'pure'" (Liberty in Christ: An Analytical Exegesis of Romans 14:1 - 15:7. <http://soundteaching.org/fellowship/fellowship7.htm>).

Paul makes it clear that since God is the ultimate Judge, and He had received both the strong and the weak despite their differences in these matters, they were wrong to judge and show contempt toward one another. In particular, the strong had the obligation not to judge or put a stumbling block in the way of the weak to cause him to fall (14:13). This is the central admonition of the chapter.