

Matters of Opinion or Matters of Doctrine?

Romans 14

Introduction

1. In each generation there are those that attempt to justify a "*broader fellowship*" by including those teaching or practicing some sin or doctrinal error.
2. The attempt to justify their teaching in this area usually includes Romans 14.
 - A. This is based on the apostle Paul's instruction to "receive" the one who is weak. (Verse 1)
 - B. But they go on to include doctrinal matters or practice of some sin!
3. This morning we want to look at what Romans 14 teaches:
 - A. Does Romans 14 include *doctrinal error and sinful practice* in the differences under discussion?
 - B. Does it justify the continued acceptance of some doctrinal errors and sinful practices or is its scope limited to *matters of indifference or opinion*?
4. Paul is discussing matters of indifference or opinion.
 - A. Either practice involves no sin - both are right in and of themselves.

Study of the Context

1. Paul says "receive" - John says "receive not".

Romans 14:1 **Receive one** who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

2 John 9-11 Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, **do not receive him** into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

A. Do these two inspired writers contradict each other?

2. The difference under consideration is plainly declared to involve the DOCTRINE in 2 John 9.

A. Have nothing to do with those who do not bring the doctrine of Christ!

3. Did the apostle Paul contradict himself in Romans 16:17-18?

Romans 16:17-18 Now I urge you, brethren, **note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine** which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

A. He did not contradict himself. There are two differences under consideration in Romans 14 and Romans 16.

B. Paul says in other writings that some are not to be received. (Eph 5:11; 1 Cor 5; 2 Thes 3:6-14; Titus 3:10-11; Gal 2:5)

4. Brother Irven Lee in the Florida College Lectures of 1983 said the following:

The fourteenth chapter of Romans does not say one word in defense of the man who knows he is openly and deliberately violating God's law. No man is allowed the luxury of fulfilling the lusts of the flesh (Gal 5:16-21). A man must control his temper and his passion if he would be called a brother in good standing among Christians. Repentance brings forth worthy fruit (Matt 3:8). Thus repentance is absolutely essential (Luk 13:3; 2 Pet 3:9).

The factious man who would cause divisions contrary to the doctrine of Christ by subverting whole houses is not the weak brother whom we shield and protect. He is a strong enemy of Christ, and consequently is to be silenced, marked, avoided, rejected, and put away from the flock (Rom 16:17-18; Tit 1:10,11; 3:10,11; Phil 3:17-19). One point of maturity in the stronger saint is the ability to discern between the weak brother who serves to the limit of his knowledge and the wolf in sheep's clothing that would destroy the flock. The Lord has not asked his church to let the heretic be in charge lest he complain (**Irven Lee, Romans for Every Man, Florida College Lectures, 1983, p. 168**).

5. The issue of Romans 14 is brought into focus in the very first verse:

Romans 14:1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. (NKJV)

Romans 14:1 Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.(KJV)

Romans 14:1 Now accept the one who is weak in faith, {but} not for {the purpose of} passing judgment on his opinions.(NASB)

Romans 14:1 As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions.(RSV)

- A. This clearly sets the guidelines for the rest of the chapter talking about matters of opinion only - not doctrinal issues!**
- B. Two people can be acting in a way that is right, with a different opinion, given their diverse backgrounds, circumstances, and consciences.**

- 1) **Romans 14** instructs these brethren not to "argue," "judge," or "dispute" over such matters.
- C. **But in differences in doctrine, both could not be right. In such cases judging a sinful practice is right and necessary. 1 Corinthians 5:3-5**
6. **Verse 2 defines the stronger brother as the one who had "faith" to eat meat - the weak brother "herbs"**
 - A. **Faith comes by hearing - hearing by the word of God (Rom 10:17). One gains principles of faith based on the word.**
 - 1) **God created meat to be received by man with thanksgiving. 1 Timothy 4:3-5**
 - 2) **God allowed man initially to eat meat (Gen 1:29)**
 - 3) **God showed Peter that the restrictions regarding clean and unclean meat in the law of Moses were no longer binding. Acts 10:11-16**
 - 4) **Even when meat was offered to an idol God allowed partaking of it as long as it gave no deference to the idol and provided no stumbling block for another (1 Cor 10:25-32).**
7. **Verses 3-4 is the basis for receiving a brother with a differing practice.**
 - A. **The meat-eater recognized that it was not essential to eat meat, it was the non meat-eater that believed the meat-eater was engaged in an unlawful practice.**
 - 1) **This idea is refuted by Paul in verse 3 - "God hath received him"**

- 8. Verse 5:** "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind".
- A. About what? MATTERS INDIFFERENT! In this case days of the week.**
- 1) Fully persuaded he could "commit adultery"?**
 - 2) Fully persuaded he could "steal"?**
- B. Those that differed in practice both acted "unto the Lord" (Verse 6)**
- 9. Verses 7-12 Paul urges those differing in practice not to judge one another and to remember that they face a final judgment of God**
- 10. He urges that they refrain from acting in such a way as to cause another to stumble (Verses 13-23).**
- A. One can see how this could happen with the eating of meat from either of these two possibilities:**
- 1) THE JEW:**
 - Converted to Christ
 - Problem eating meat seen as unclean his whole life
 - Knows it is allowed - needs time for old feelings to die so no doubt remains.
 - If a stronger brother encouraged him to eat while he still doubted, sin would result (vs 23)
 - 2) THE GENTILE:**
 - Converted to Christ
 - Problem eating meat – practice was tied to worship of an idol all his life
 - Knows it is nothing to the idol - needs time for old feelings to die.
 - If a stronger brother encouraged him to eat meat while he still doubted, sin would result (vs 23)

B. POINT ILLUSTRATED TODAY:

Taken from Guardian of Truth, February 1991, by Cecil B. Douthitt)

A man who had been a Seventh-Day Adventist from his youth learned the plan of salvation and obeyed it. He could make distinction between the law of Moses and the gospel of Christ with one exception: he still thought that it was wrong to eat pork or hog meat of any kind. He and other guests were invited to eat with a brother who knew how this former Adventist felt about eating hog meat. But ham was served. The host made a few jesting remarks about "unclean meat," and others laughed. This made a refusal to eat the ham entirely too embarrassing for this brother of "weak faith". Therefore, in violation of his conscience he ate a little of the ham; he did not eat "of faith"; he sinned. Everyone who influenced him to eat that meat sinned too; they did the very thing the Lord forbids in Romans 14.

Under the circumstances that host should have served food that his guests could eat without violation of conscience. Neither the work of the church nor the method of doing the work was involved, but only a personal lawful privilege, and that "liberty" should have been relinquished on that occasion.

On the other hand, if that former Adventist had tried to force his unwarranted scruples on others as an ordinance of God, it would have been the duty of the strong to tell him plainly that he had no right to legislate where God has not, and that "the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking," neither the "weak" nor the "strong" should be permitted to make it such.

- 1) Another point in regard to days would be those that celebrate Christmas by getting a tree and exchanging gifts and those that don't.**

KEY POINT OF THE CHAPTER:

- Brethren differed in thought and practice regarding matters that were right in and of themselves.**
 - It is true that the weaker brother did not understand that the practice of the stronger brother was right.**
 - However, the fact remains that both practices were right!**

Fact vs Dangerous Consequences

We have looked at the fact of Romans 14. Now let's look at the dangerous consequences of those that mis-apply it.

1. Some today believe that this chapter teaches that one can practice wrong as long as it does not involve others in those actions.

A. This would mean:

- 1) Forgive the fornicator or idolater as long as we are not involved.**
- 2) Receive the murderer as long as we were not involved in pulling the trigger.**

2. This is the key book and chapter of the "Unity in Diversity" doctrine.

A. What is "Unity in Diversity"

- 1) Basically it is accepting all those into fellowship with Jesus with any differences as long as one "believes Jesus is Lord"**

B. Modern differences between brethren over the worship, work, and organization of the church are embraced within Romans 14.

- 1) This would include things such as Instrumental Music, Fellowship halls, Gymnasiums, etc.**

- C. Differences in matters of sin are included in Romans 14 by brethren in areas such as:
- 1) Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage
 - 2) Any other error as long as the teacher of the error is honest, sincere, and not factious. (Doesn't bind his teaching on others)
 - 3) Most all who will Unify with these doctrinal errors will not Unify with Homosexuality. Why not? *If Romans 14 applies to some sins, why not all sins?*

Conclusion

1. A practice comes under the regulation of Romans 14 not because we *think* it does, but because the facts of God's word *prove* it does.
2. The kingdom of God is "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Verse 17)
3. Romans 14 teaches us that we are not to push our own OPINIONS and SCRUPLES upon others.
4. All brethren should realize that we must live in love and in peace with each other, each esteeming others better than self.
Philippians 2:1-4
 - A. But we need to understand that sin is to be dealt with accordingly but not to destroy one another with opinions.
5. May God continue to help each one of us *recognize sin* and those things which are also a *matter of opinion*.

