

Romans 14:1–23 (CSB)

THE LAW OF LIBERTY

14 Welcome anyone who is weak in faith, but don't argue about disputed matters. ²One person believes he may eat anything, while one who is weak eats only vegetables. ³One who eats must not look down on one who does not eat, and one who does not eat must not judge one who does, because God has accepted him. ⁴Who are you to judge another's household servant? Before his own Lord he stands or falls. And he will stand, because the Lord is able to make him stand.

⁵One person judges one day to be more important than another day. Someone else judges every day to be the same. Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶Whoever observes the day, observes it for the honor of the Lord. Whoever eats, eats for the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; and whoever does not eat, it is for the Lord that he does not eat it, and he gives thanks to God. ⁷For none of us lives for himself, and no one dies for himself. ⁸If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹Christ died and returned to life for this: that he might be Lord over both the dead and the living. ¹⁰But you, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹For it is written,

**As I live, says the Lord,
every knee will bow to me,
and every tongue will give praise to God.**

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

THE LAW OF LOVE

¹³Therefore, let us no longer judge one another. Instead decide never to put a stumbling block or pitfall in the way of your brother or sister. ¹⁴I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself. Still, to someone who considers a thing to be unclean, to that one it is

unclean. ¹⁵ For if your brother or sister is hurt by what you eat, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy, by what you eat, someone for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Therefore, do not let your good be slandered, ¹⁷ for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Whoever serves Christ in this way is acceptable to God and receives human approval.

¹⁹ So then, let us pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another. ²⁰ Do not tear down God's work because of food. Everything is clean, but it is wrong to make someone fall by what he eats. ²¹ It is a good thing not to eat meat, or drink wine, or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble. ²² Whatever you believe about these things, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves. ²³ But whoever doubts stands condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith, and everything that is not from faith is sin.

Introduction

A. I was driving east on Highway 60 the other day and saw this incredible billboard.

1. It declared that:
2. Going to church on Sunday is the Mark of the Beast! (Seriously, what it says)
3. I'm going to be honest and say it got my attention.
4. I went to their website, and it is an elaborate argument saying that worshipping on Sunday was the Catholic idea and is the mark of the beast...
5. They have a lot of information, scripture, and historical evidence.
6. And Romans 14 completely disagrees.

B. A lot of people will laugh it off.

1. But some will take it seriously.
2. I was reading the comment sections on the website and some are utterly convinced that you and I are doomed for eternal death because we have been deceived.
3. Yet, the Apostle Paul addressed this clearly in Romans 14.

C. These kinds of teachings pose a serious danger for us:

1. We can be misled by arguments that sound biblical and true but are actually wrong.

2. This isn't new, and Paul addressed these same questions in his letter to Rome.

BIG PICTURE:

A. Something is happening in Rome.

1. The Roman Christians lived in a confusing world.
2. The Romans permitted just about everything, and worshipped a lot of stuff.
 - a. You've probably heard the phrases:
 - b. When in Rome, do as the Romans do.
 - c. We like to think of the people of the old days as being more moral than us:
 - d. Truthfully, the Greeks and Romans set the example for depravity.

B. Rome was a terribly hard place to live for Jesus and not be contaminated.

12:1-2 Welcome anyone who is weak in faith, but don't argue about disputed matters.

²One person believes he may eat anything, while one who is weak eats only vegetables.

1. The meat in the markets was usually offered to an idol first and then sold off, because idols don't eat.
2. So some who had come out of idol worship knew what happened in those places and had no desire to eat the meat that had come from there.
3. Those who had been raised Jewish wouldn't eat pork or some seafood: which stinks if you live in Italy.
4. They worshipped on the Sabbath and kept lots of holy-days, like their ancestors had.

C. And now the Gentiles and the Jews were worshipping Jesus together, and it was messy.

1. Who was right?
2. Who should give up, who should give in, and who should fight until they get their way?
3. Paul is addressing real-world relationships and the struggles of living with other believers who are also trying their best to live for Jesus.

D. But this is messy, because some things are not crystal clear.

1. Many aspects of Christianity are crystal clear and easy to discern right from wrong.
2. Other aspects are extremely personal and are within the realm of faith.
3. Worshipping with other people has a way of challenging us that isolation doesn't.

Weak and Strong in the Faith.

A. Paul distinguishes those who are weak in faith from those who are strong in the faith.

1. Paul's answer is not what I would expect.
2. This isn't about who loves Jesus the most.
3. This is not a contest about the best Christian, who God uses the most, or anything like that.
4. Instead, Paul focuses on food and worship.

B. What distinguished a Jew from the rest of the world?

1. What they wouldn't eat (pork and lobster).
2. What day they worshipped God (Sabbath).
3. The Roman Christians had none of that.
4. Likely, the Jewish Christians and the Roman Christians are fighting over who is the strongest in the faith, who the best Christ followers are.
5. Who is the strongest and who is the weakest.

C. I would assume those who had the most rules and did the fewest things would be the strongest in the faith.

1. Paul calls them the weakest.
2. In Rome, it wasn't those who kept all the special days and the special diets that were showing the most faith, they were the weakest!

Disputed matters, Disrupted Faith

A. The result of all these extra rules and regulations was not better faith but disrupted faith.

1. Everywhere the Gospel of Jesus was preached with the Law attached, the result was a struggling and divided Church.
2. This was true in the letter to Galatians and is true in Romans 14.
3. These arguments were seriously upsetting to how the Christians worshipped.

B. These arguments over food laws and what day to worship were tearing people away from Jesus.

1. Paul commands them:
2. Don't despise your brother
3. Don't judge your brother
4. Don't trip your brother or make him stumble by what you do.
5. The arguments were not only threatening the Church, it had the potential to pull people away from Christ.

C. This is not everything, or anything goes.

1. Paul is not advocating a freedom to do whatever you want.
2. Instead, this is an opportunity to be people guided by faith in every aspect of life.
3. Paul's desire is that the Brothers and Sisters in Rome would lovingly and with faith live and worship together.

Rome didn't need better law; they needed more love and faith.

A. When faith and love are separated, the result is false religion.

1. "Faith" without love results in legalism.

2. Love without faith results in liberalism.

3. These are the opposite sides of the road, what we call the ditch.

B. We all will pull toward one side or another.

1. I'm much more familiar with the faith without love part.
 - a. I would make a terrible liberal, but a great Pharisee.
 - b. That's my natural temperament.
2. The problem here is that you can have all the details right and be absolutely wrong.
 - a. These were the Jewish believers.
 - b. They looked right, sounded right, and acted right, and they were wrong.
 - c. It kind of made sense not to eat pork or meat offered to idols.
 - d. Sometimes all the rules and laws feel right, because grace seems too good to be true.
 - e. Many of us feel that if something goes smoothly or easily, it must have been a scam.
 - f. But the Gospel is that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.
 - g. Jesus did the hard work.

C. But the liberal ditch is bad too.

1. When love has no constraint, it isn't love.
2. When love has no faith, no greater object or purpose, then liberalism sets in.
3. Phrases like "you do you" and "love is love" run rampant and are contrary to what true and real love looks like.
4. Legalism has rules with no love, and liberalism has love without rules.

D. In every church, there are people who are drawn to the legalism and those who are drawn to liberalism.

1. Let me ask you this:
2. Husbands, if your wife or teenager called and said they drove off in the ditch, our first question is usually not "which ditch." The response is usually, "Are you ok?"
3. Whether you are in the Legalism ditch or the Liberal ditch, both are dangerous and can keep us from following Jesus the way Jesus intends.

Big Picture: Christ didn't die for this.

A. The Apostle frames this debate with the Big Picture:

1. Jesus died.

⁷For none of us lives for himself, and no one dies for himself. ⁸If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹Christ died and returned to life for this: that he might be Lord over both the dead and the living. ¹⁰But you, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

2. The Christians were fighting over things that Jesus had settled.

a. The billboard on Highway 60 saying that I've taken the mark of the beast because I worship on Sunday is wrong because Jesus has settled it.

b. People online telling you that you aren't worshipping God correctly if you don't use Jesus' Hebrew name, if you don't act Jewish enough or fit into the Jewish club, all of that was settled.

3. Saved people shouldn't have time to argue with each other over things that are settled.

4. We shouldn't be arguing about what day to worship, pews or chairs, concrete or carpet, or putting bacon on our burgers.

B. Reminder: This is not referring to things that are sinful.

1. Paul has been very clear in Romans:

2. If you are following the flesh and living in sin, you are lost.

3. If you are living to satisfy the flesh, you are not part of Christ and have no fellowship with Him

4. When someone who claims to be a Christian says, "Don't judge me," that does not give them a pass on things that are clearly sinful.

C. In baseball, there is a new process where a player can appeal a ball or strike.

1. Part of the strategy is that you only appeal the calls that are on the line, questionable, or hard to see.

a. If the pitch is perfectly down the middle and it's called a strike, you don't challenge it.

- b. If the pitch is over the batter's head, you know it's a ball.
- 2. Same with throwing a flag in football.
 - a. You don't challenge the calls that are perfectly clear.
 - b. You challenge the plays that are made out of the referee's conviction.
- 3. Paul understands the distinctions in ways that we do not:
 - a. This is where it gets complicated, especially for people who like Law and Rules.
 - b. Romans 14:19-23

¹⁹ So then, let us pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another. ²⁰ Do not tear down God's work because of food. Everything is clean, but it is wrong to make someone fall by what he eats. ²¹ It is a good thing not to eat meat, or drink wine, or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble. ²² Whatever you believe about these things, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves. ²³ But whoever doubts stands condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith, and everything that is not from faith is sin.

A New Category

A. Paul makes a new category: ANYTHING that is not from faith is sin!

- 1. A word picture used to help us imagine sin is that of an archer missing the target.
 - a. The archer pulls back, aims, and lets the arrow fly, but the arrow misses.
 - b. The miss, the distance between the aim point and the impact, is sin.
- 2. If we are not aiming and hitting at the heart of God, we are sinning.
- 3. And when we live and act without faith, we are missing the mark.

B. Paul is introducing to us what we might call "convictions."

- 1. There are some things that are so clear, that your opinion of them doesn't matter: it will always be sin.
 - a. Paul talks about these things in lists: adultery, murder, envy, jealousy...

b. You can never say, well it's ok for me to be jealous because it doesn't bother me.

c. You never have permission or the freedom to call what is sin "good".

2. None of us can reclassify what God has cursed as a blessing.

C. Convictions are personal areas that God is dealing with us, where we cannot in good faith participate.

1. This is where, if you feel you shouldn't eat pork, then you shouldn't do it, but you can't require others to do so in order to be saved.

2. If you are convinced you should worship on Saturday, then you worship on Saturday while realizing that it is not required to obey Jesus.

3. Convictions are where the rubber meets the road.

4. Personal convictions are where the conflict and tension ramp up.

D. Let me illustrate this in a personal way.

a. I absolutely do not drink alcohol.

1. This is such a clear conviction to me that I've never tasted alcohol.

2. I don't think I've ever had Nyquil.

3. Part of my conviction is because Jesus delivered my family from alcohol two generations ago, and I will NOT undo what Jesus has done.

4. I also serve people who struggle with alcohol or have been hurt by those who abuse alcohol.

b. Yet alcohol is sold everywhere and is served in many restaurants today.

1. A personal conviction that I have is that I will eat in a restaurant that serves alcohol, but I won't eat in bars, pubs, or breweries.

2. That can be hard to determine at times, but if the main product, focus, or atmosphere centers on alcohol, then I'm not comfortable being there.

a. I do eat at the Mexican restaurant.

b. I don't eat at Crow Creek or Tater Patch.

c. When Julie and I were in Ireland, our tour had to stop at a pub for lunch as it was the only place available.

d. We did not enjoy our time there, not because anyone in our group was drinking, but because it violated our personal conviction and conscience to be there.

e. We truly felt that where we were eating was sinful for us.

c. I can in no way say that if you eat at those places, then it is a sin.

1. I can 100% say that for me to spend time there is sin.

2. Maybe that makes me weak in the faith.

3. But for me and my house, that is how we walk out our faith in Jesus.

E. Convictions are part of the journey of faith.

a. I absolutely believe that the Lord deals with all of us in various ways.

b. He calls all of us to respond in faith, and we must be ok when that call looks different from others.

1. There will be things God places off limits for you that may not apply to others.

2. The Lord can ask of me anything He wants, because my life is a living sacrifice.

3. Our purpose is to serve Christ through righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The Kingdom is...

¹⁶ Therefore, do not let your good be slandered, ¹⁷ for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Whoever serves Christ in this way is acceptable to God and receives human approval.

A. There are a lot of things that can divide us.

1. Some should divide us.

2. If the leaders of a church are immoral, then you should leave.

3. One of the reasons there are other churches in town is that we don't all agree on some relatively significant matters of doctrine, so we don't worship together.

4. There are reasons to fight, leave, and move on.
- B. When it comes to convictions, don't split the Church over them.
1. We will ALL stand before the judgment seat of God.
 2. We will all give an account for what we have done and didn't do.
 3. When we stand before the Lord, He isn't comparing us with our neighbor; He's measuring us against the target: Jesus.

Advice for Living in God's Kingdom on Earth

1. Do what points you to Jesus.
 - a. There are so many ways to distract us or point us away from Jesus.
 - b. Sometimes, those things are not evil or overtly sinful.
 1. Some things look and sound really good.
 2. Some things, like using the name YHWH or YESHUA or attending church on Saturday might appear constructive.
 3. But these matters, that have nothing to do with salvation, can serve as a major distraction from what Scripture clearly teaches.
 - c. What has my attention has my worship, and if it is that thing, that place, or that person is pointing me away from Jesus, then it is sin.
2. Do what glorifies Jesus.
 - a. No, it doesn't mean we have to stop watching movies or live like the Amish.
 - b. It does mean that we will encounter things that grieve the Spirit.
 - c. There will be moments in life when things you love, all of a sudden, convict you.
 - d. You're watching a movie you've seen a million times, and that last time you watch it, you realize that it not only doesn't glorify Jesus, it actually grieves Him.
 - e. There are literally hundreds of movies and famous shows I've never seen because I cannot watch them with a clear conscience.
 - f. We all are called to glorify God, and anything that challenges that needs to be removed.

3. Do what builds others up.

- a. Just because I can do something, it doesn't mean that it's beneficial.
- b. If what I'm doing or saying tears down the sincere believers around me, then it is sin.
- c. I will offend some people, not everyone will agree with me, and some will never understand.
- d. But my goal must be to encourage and build up as much as I can.

Prayer