



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Romans

Lesson 21: Romans 14:1-12

As we begin to study chapter 14 let's quickly review what Paul has been teaching: early on in his letter Paul focused on righteousness, and the need for Christians to be righteous because God is righteous. From there he established common ground for his readers by reminding us that we have all sinned, and as Christians we have all been buried with Christ in baptism. Since we have all been buried with Christ, we must not look down on each other regardless of our background, for Jews and Gentiles each have a special role to play in God's scheme of redemption. How are we to live in this unity? By being a living sacrifice, transformed into the image of Christ. As those who are transformed, he gave us an extensive list of qualities we should exemplify, and reminded us that we are to be obedient to those in authority, even civic authority, and that our lives should be centered around Christ and our love for each other.

This is the perfect foundation for what Paul will address in chapter 14. If we are truly striving to live by the qualities, he has laid out for us, the teachings in the next 12 verses in particular will come naturally for us. In theory. In reality these verses are difficult, challenging and scary. I believe our American culture makes these verses even more difficult and scary for us, because we are taught to fear and even hate those who disagree with us. We are taught that the world should fit in our particular little box, and anything outside our personal box is wrong. We are taught that the world is black and white, right or wrong, good or evil. I personally am certainly a Type A rule follower, and I love my boxes, my checklists, and clear answers and directions. And yet, the next 12 verses deal exclusively with the world of grey.

Typically speaking, when deciding what is opinion and what is doctrine anything more "conservative" than what I believe is a matter of opinion, and anything more "liberal" than I believe is a matter of doctrine. Before beginning this study say a specific prayer for wisdom, openness and guidance, that God will help us discern matters of opinion from matters of doctrine rather than trusting in our own judgment, opinions or "what we have always thought" regarding these issues.

Before you begin read Romans 14:1-12 and mark any key words or phrases that you find.

Read Romans 14:1

In this verse Paul is setting the context for this section of teaching. He concluded chapter 13 by telling us not to live by the flesh, but rather to live for Christ. As we discussed in the last lesson this is an ongoing process for Christians, and we are all at different stages of growth at different times. Here Paul identifies how we should respond to those who are "weaker" in faith than we are. While we may be tempted to give this word a negative connotation it's difficult to believe that Paul meant this in a derogatory or shaming way, but rather it's a way to help us keep the big picture in mind rather than getting bogged down in the particulars. While yes, as we continue on, he will provide some specific examples, he is teaching a global principle that would apply in any area in which we find a difference of opinion.

We must also use the context to understand what Paul means by "faith." In Scripture this word is used both for our personal belief in Jesus, and to denote "the" faith which would be



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Christian doctrine. Paul clarifies that he is dealing specifically with our own personal belief and convictions, rather than matters of doctrine, when he specifies “opinions” at the end of the verse.

In this verse we are given both a command and a caution, what are they and how do we apply them in our lives?

Read Romans 14:2-3

Here Paul gives a specific example of a matter of opinion that they are *not* to argue over: what to eat. While this may not be a significant matter of contention for us today, for the brethren at Rome this would have been huge. There are Jewish Christians who have been taught their entire lives that pork is unclean. There are Gentile converts who view eating meat sacrificed to idols as participating in pagan worship. Then there are more mature Christians who simply view food as food. Notice that at this point Paul doesn't tell those who believe pork is sinful to get over it and eat what they are given, nor does he tell those who don't see a problem with it to abstain (although he will deal with this idea more in the next lesson.) Why isn't that his answer? Because God has accepted both.

As Christians we simply do not have the power to give or break another's fellowship with God. It really doesn't matter what we “think” about an issue. The truth is that God's word is the only authority, and it is our job to live out what is taught in Scripture. This means that a sinner is lost even if we accept them into our fellowship (in which case as we saw in 1:32 we put ourselves in jeopardy). It also means that a Christian is a part of the body even if we deny them. And for Paul's specific point here, we do not have the authority

to judge or reject someone simply because we do not like something.

How do you as an individual, and the body you worship with, handle matters of opinion?

How can you improve in this area?

Read Romans 14:4

Paul is very blunt here with the question, “Who are you?” Basically, he is saying that when we pass judgment or condemn each other over matters of opinion we are putting ourselves in the place of God. Yikes, that's scary! And it should also be humbling.

One specific area we really need to keep this verse in mind is regarding our ministers. Sisters, the simple truth is that oftentimes we are not kind to our ministers. I personally have known of far too many situations where a minister was fired over matters of opinion or “personality differences.” While I understand that if a minister is being ineffective there may be a need for a change, in the vast majority of these situations there was no effort to work with or guide the minister first. In many of these situations the minister's family was given little or no consideration as they lost their home (if they lived in a parsonage), their income and their spiritual family in one fell swoop. And in these situations, the majority of the congregation never batted an eye or questioned why it was happening.

Sisters, this is simply not acceptable. Ministers are not the servants of our congregation; they are the servants of the Most High! It is not our place



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to condemn and dismiss them over matters of opinion. It should be a congregation's last resort to fire a minister, particularly if there has not been a breach of doctrine/morality. To cause such financial, emotional and spiritual harm to a brother in Christ and his family should never be taken lightly, and we must ensure that we as a congregation are not putting ourselves in the place of God in these situations. If such important decisions are being made when emotions are high for reasons other than a clear moral/doctrinal infraction, it is certainly wise to pause and spend some time in prayer to honestly evaluate our motivation, and what Scripture has to say about that motivation.

According to this verse before whom do we stand or fall?

Do we view each other primarily in regard to our status before God, or through our preferences first and foremost?

Read Romans 14:5-6

Here Paul provides another specific example of a matter of opinion: esteeming one day over another. The word "esteem" here means to judge as good or to separate or distinguish. This example hits a little closer to home for the modern-day church. Mother's Day, Father's Day, Easter, Christmas, birthdays, mention any of these holidays in a large group and you will likely get a variety of responses. Some will become angry stating that to celebrate these days is to promote pagan worship. Some will say, particularly of Christmas and Easter, that it's acceptable to celebrate these holidays as long as you leave

religion out of it. Some believe it's honorable to celebrate these days as religious holidays because so much of the world is already focused on Jesus during these times.

Yet we must ask the question, "What does Scripture say?" In verse six Paul specifically says that people are celebrating specific days to honor the Lord, and the one who abstains does so in honor of the Lord. According to Scripture this is not an acceptable issue to cause division over! Both individuals, regardless of which side of the coin they are on, are obeying their conscience in the best way to honor the Lord. As their brethren it is God's expectation of us to not bind our opinions on others, and certainly not to be divisive on this issue.

Read Romans 14:7-9

Paul is using strong unifying language here and is keeping himself in the mix with the phrase, "none of us," found twice in verse seven. We are all in this together, and what you eat and what days you celebrate simply pale in comparison to the heart of the matter, "*we* are the Lord's!" How are we the Lord's? Because Jesus died that we might all, together, have this opportunity. Put another way: how dare we judge and look down on each other for trivial things when Jesus died for us!

There are two key words found repeatedly in these three verses, what are they?

How are they compared and contrasted in this section of Scripture, and how is Paul using this contrast to make his point?



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Compare these three verses to Romans 6:1-11. What is Paul trying to get us to understand in these passages?

Read Romans 14:10-12

In these verses Paul is using the exact same phrasing that he used back in verse three: despising and judging. His point is that I don't have either the time or the authority to judge you, because one day I am going to stand before the Almighty and I will give an account to him of my heart and my actions. This is both a reminder of what's at stake, and a call for unity. We are all in this together! We are all fallen sinners striving to be transformed into the image of Christ! Instead of despising each other over opinions, we should be remembering that because of Jesus we are all new creations.

In verse 11 we see another Old Testament quote, this time from Isaiah 45:23. He is reminding us that we will stand before God, our knees will bow, and our tongues will confess Him. How can we expect God to accept that praise and acceptance if we have spent our time on earth judging and despising our brethren? Sisters, we will give an account. In this context we are being specifically reminded that we will give an account of how we judge and treat each other.

Do you want to stand before God and give an account of how you currently think of and treat your brethren, or are there changes you need to make?

Is there an issue you have been divisive over that may be a matter of opinion? Study to see

what God's word says about the issue (if anything) and then apply these verses to your interactions with your brethren over this issue.
