

Romans 14

Introduction

Long passage to deal with, but belongs in one piece. It concerns differences of opinion and interpretation about details of Christian conduct. Some said that a certain thing was alright, while others denied it. Some, because of their Jewish background, thought it was wrong to eat certain foods. Some, because of their Gentile background (of Corinth), thought it was wrong to eat food offered to heathen gods. Some kept certain foods as holy. Another issue was the Lord's Day – 7<sup>th</sup> day or 1<sup>st</sup> day, or both. Weak despised and criticized the strong as too broad minded, too lax, easy-going, letting side down. Strong had ridiculed others because narrow minded, rigid, legalistic and strict.

Now situation is still with us. Preliminary point – not dealing with matters which are at heart of faith, for example, the way of Salvation – as at Galatia - or setting aside 10 Commandments. Here we are dealing with secondary matters. Matters of interpretation where Scripture can be interpreted in two ways, or where Scripture does not speak clearly, “grey” areas.

These areas can cause great deal of suspicion, fear and gossip and criticism and bad feeling. Need to allow that our upbringing, culture, background, reactions all play a part. Not always realize this and can confuse our cultural background with essence of Gospel. Cultural differences seen in the Highlands of Scotland, the blinds are drawn, the piano locked and organ locked because it is the Sabbath. Similarly, Continental Christians drink wine in moderation, which shocks American Christians, but the way American Christian women make up their faces shocks Continental Christians.

Once heard an American preacher denounce the evils of mixed bathing - with three cigars in top pocket. The way Good Friday is disregarded in some places comes as a shock to those who have been brought up to go to church on Good Friday. Heard of some people who feel it is OK to take a Sunday afternoon drive in the car along country lanes, but feel that the Sabbath is profaned if they drive home via the front at Portstewart! Some maintain it is alright to go for a walk on Sunday, but not for a swim. Been to a Brethren Assembly in Europe where 1<sup>st</sup> hymn announced by man with Sunday newspaper sticking out of his pocket. Heard of pastors who visit their flock with bottle of wine, and in time for football match on TV. Some missionaries refuse to shop in the only market because it is on a Sunday – and then do not have anything decent to eat for the rest of the week. Pacifism and politics is another issue. When we say “that is worldly”, we are merely expressing our own culture and values shaped within our culture. It is worldly to wear ties and drive cars in some Christian countries.

Need to be firm and unflinching about primary and essential matters. Need to be tolerant about secondary matters, and not allow any one to make them essentials. Unity in things essential, liberty in non-essentials, charity in everything.

### Mutual respect between both sides

Person who eats must not despise person who thinks it is wrong to eat, as old fashioned, behind the times, too narrow, cranks or stick-in-the-muds. Person not eating must not criticize those who do for being too loose, letting side down. Conviction, not convention, is our rule. Know where we stand. Think matter through. Do not be swayed by what others do and say or think. But allow for fact that what may be right for us may not be right for other man. The strong are not to grieve the weak. Weak are not to judge the strong. Mutual respect. Not encourage arguments and quarrels about differences, but accept them. And respect one another. Do not irritate, or ridicule or be contemptuous. Recognize, respect, sympathize, see other man's point of view. Never laugh at something someone else holds dear.

We are God's servants, not servants of one another. **Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord** (Romans 14:9). We are answerable to Him. To go before God's judgement seat. Make sure conduct is **to the Lord** as you see it (Romans 14:6-8). May I do this? Yes, if I can do it to the Lord and ask His blessing.

Judge everything in light of Scripture and also Christ's Lordship. When we judge we are usurping position which belongs to God alone. No right to make our practice on secondary things the universal standard for all other people. Follow own convictions, but allow others to have theirs, without regarding them as sinners and outcasts.

Paul ends by emphasizing to all parties importance of consecration to Lord. He is strong who is not bound by rules of weak – utterly dedicated to Lord. Both the strong and the weak are to be concerned with things that really matter – love Lord, diligent in his service, anxious to obey the Word, love Bibles, forgiving to others, in touch by prayer, filled with Holy Spirit. These are the things which will matter when we are before Him. Therefore these are the things which ought to matter now.

### Word to the strong

Make sure not to put stumbling block in way of weak. In non-essential matters – e.g. things which are not clean or unclean, the extras of life. If a man feels something is wrong, respect him. It may be unimportant to you, but very important to him because of his background. Do not go out of way to shock. Do not flaunt way of life to tantalize and deliberately to irritate. Be careful lest he follows your example and hurts his conscience, persuaded to do what he feels is wrong. This is to ruin him **for whom Christ died** (Romans 14:15). So precious to Lord – and ruined spiritually by our carelessness. Self-denial is better. **The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink** (these are not essential) **but righteous and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost** (these are essentials) (Romans 14:17). Never violate another's conscience by insisting on liberty. No right needlessly to distress others. Principle of love to be our guiding light. Respect another's genuine feelings.

Think of how our conduct is going to affect others. Think of the effect of our example. Freedom and love to go hand in hand. For sake of others and spiritual growth – deny self. We are our brother's keeper. Consider how Christ lived. He pleased not Himself. So we should limit our selves for the sake of others. We have the

right to our opinion, but not to lead others astray. Do not bring reproach on the name of Christ because of lack of consideration.

“I followed you” – remark by young man to city councillor at a civic function. Luther said “A Christian man is most free lord of all, subject to none... A Christian man is a most dutiful servant of all, subject to none.” Rather than destroy God’s work in another, we are to be concerned with things which make for peace and build others up in the faith. Peace and edification are to be our concerns. Not to destroy peace and harmony in Church because cannot have way in matters which are so trifling and unimportant. Peace of Church and harmony are to be highly prized.

For example, a woman might choose not to wear a hat in church because of her interpretation of 1 Corinthians Ch. 11, believing that her wedding ring is the sign of her submission to the man. But because this might cause offence within the church, and for the sake of peace, she might decide to wear a hat. She makes it clear she does not accept the usual interpretation, but she does accept the other principle, of peace within the Church. Equally, it is right to say that the other person making a fuss over the situation should keep quiet for the sake of peace within the Church.

So in relations between pulpit and pew. Where issues are personal to the preacher, they are his affair. But when the congregation are involved, when they want to have their wishes observed (e.g. saying of the Lord’s Prayer, observation of Good Friday), there should be no resentment on the part of the preacher. Indeed he should be grateful for pulpit freedom which is not obtained everywhere.

#### Word to the Weak

**He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith, for whatsoever is not of faith is sin** (Romans 14:23). Whoever does anything against his conscience is condemned by conscience. If not able to do something or say something in faith, it is a sin. Make sure we act in good conscience. Do not silence conscience because we are in the minority, or because of pressure or fear of being different. Conscience may prove to be wrong later, but never act in violation of conscience. Simple rules “If it’s doubtful, it’s dirty” “If in doubt, don’t”. These rules especially helpful for young Christians. If cannot ask God to bless, or do it to His glory, if any hesitation, don’t.

#### Conclusion

Not dealing with the essence of the Gospel – Salvation or Commandments. But dealing with secondary matters, the extras, luxuries, matters which are not principle. Things that we need not do if we do not want, e.g. pleasures and pastimes. Not good or bad in themselves, but may be to some people. Respect. Do not criticize. God is judge. Think position through. Act and speak unto the Lord and for His inspection.

Strong not to outrage or cause the weak to stumble. Definite influence on others by us. Do not insist on rights if injury to brother will follow. Understand other’s practical difficulties. Peace and up-building are our main aims. Act always in faith. Never violate the conscience.