

STUDY GUIDE

Romans Chapter 14

Introduction.

In Paul's day, much like today, there were many different types of people becoming Christians. They ranged from Jews with a strict religious background to Gentiles with no religious background. These people from different backgrounds were being brought together to form the body of Christ.

When people become Christians they often carry with them many of their old ideas and ways of life. For example, the Jews were not allowed to eat certain types of food. After becoming Christians, many of these Jews did not feel free to eat such types of food because of their background. On the other hand, the Gentile Christians had no problem about eating all types of food. The Gentiles felt free to eat, while the Jews did not feel free to eat.

Another example would be observing Jewish holy days such as the Sabbath. For the Jew, the Sabbath day was sacred; the most important day of the week. For the Gentiles, the Sabbath day was just like any other day of the week. Therefore, the Jewish Christians still felt that the Sabbath day should be kept holy while the Gentile Christians did not feel the need to keep the Sabbath day holy.

In the body of Christ there were many people who had different religious standards, or ways they were accustomed to doing things. Sometimes problems arose in the body of Christ when one group tried to force its standards on the other group. This is what Paul deals with in Romans Chapter 14.

Even today, there are people in the body of Christ from nearly every religious and non-religious background possible. And, when we become Christians, we bring with us certain "standards" which we feel are right. When we meet people with different standards, we can have problems. What does Paul say about the problem of differing standards?

Read.

Read Romans 14 at least twice during the week and meditate on it.

VERSES 14:1-2.

In the opening two verses, Paul introduces us to the problem. There are two Christians who come from different backgrounds. One of them (probably a Jewish Christian) is used to abstaining from meats. The other (probably a Gentile Christian) is used to eating all things.

What term does Paul use to describe the person who only eats vegetables (does not feel free to eat meat)?

Why does Paul use this term to describe this person?

How would someone with strong faith feel about eating all types of food?

Sometimes we think the spiritually “strong” person is the one follows and is bound to all kinds of rules and regulations. Actually, this is the person with a less mature faith. The strong one is the one who has realized what it means to be free in Christ. Free from all kind of rules and regulations from our former religious way of life. He/she is free to follow Christ, not religion.

VERSES 14:3-12.

The most important thing for each of us as Christians to learn from this chapter (and then to apply it!) is how to live with one another in an understanding way; in a way that will cause each of us to grow spiritually; in a way that avoids fighting and division within the body of Christ. The basic issue is that we must honor one another’s standards regardless of who is right or wrong.

What does Paul repeatedly command his readers not to do?

How would you summarize Paul’s command to not judge one another?

Who will be the ultimate judge?

POINT: We must give one another a certain amount of freedom to live the Christian life the way each individual believes it should be lived. This does not mean we tolerate clear cases of sin in another person’s life. When dealing with a clear case of sin, it is right to talk to the person about it. But when dealing with issues the Bible does not speak clearly on, we must allow room for differing opinions and practices.

Can you think of a situation in which we could have differing opinions and practices? Share an example with the group.

ILLUSTRATION: Jim grows up in a strict religious home where dancing is considered to be a sinful activity, along with playing cards, smoking and drinking. In his college years, this person becomes a Christian by inviting Jesus into his life. Bill, one of his new Christian friends, doesn’t feel like dancing is sinful. He grew up in a home where dancing was not considered sinful and was even encouraged. Both have convictions developed in their youth. So for Jim it still seems sinful to dance while Bill is ok with it.

The Bible does not have much to say about dancing, although there are a few references in the Old Testament to a form of dancing which was appropriate for worshiping God. However, the modern form of dance we are talking about in this illustration is very different in form and purpose from that found in the Bible. Therefore, it is safe to say that the Bible does not speak directly to the question concerning dancing.

Regardless of who is right or wrong in this illustration, it is important for Jim and Bill to honor one another's stance on dancing and allow each one the freedom to practice and live accordingly. Jim should not judge Bill for dancing and Bill should not judge Jim for not dancing. Both will stand before the judgment seat one day and give an account for his behavior. In the meantime they both must guard against judging.

VERSES 14:13-23.

Paul concludes this chapter by giving special instructions to the "strong" one (the one who knows his freedom in Christ).

What does Paul say the strong person should avoid being (vv. 13-15)?

What problem might this cause for our brother in Christ?

Instead of hindering our brother in Christ, what should we seek to do (vv. 19-21)?

How would this apply to our illustration from above?

SUMMARY:

Let's review the main points of this section...

1. The weak are bound by old religious rules, while the strong know that they are free in Christ.
2. We must not judge one another; rather, we must respect one another's religious convictions.
3. We must avoid becoming stumbling blocks and seek to build up one another.

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

Applying these main points to our lives:

1. Are there any religious standards from your past to which you still feel bound by?

Does the Bible speak clearly about this particular issue? If so, state the passage(s) which speak about this issue.

If the Bible does not speak about this issue clearly, why do you think you still feel bound by it?

What do you think it means to be “free in Christ”? Look up the following passages as you try to answer this. 1 Corinthians 9:1-5; Galatians 5:1, 13; James 2:12; Acts 10:9-16; Mark 7:17-23.

2. Is there any brother or sister in Christ whom you are judging in your heart because of their behavior?
Is this behavior a clear case of sin? Can you point to a specific Biblical passage which indicates it is a sin?

If you cannot point to a specific passage of Scripture, then how can you be sure that it is a sin? Is it possible that it is an area of “freedom in Christ” and that you should allow the person to have this freedom?

3. Is there any behavior of yours which might be causing another brother or sister to stumble? (This would be an area which you consider to be non-sinful, but which others might consider to be sinful.)

If you thought of a specific behavior which is causing others to stumble, what do you think you should do about it?

For next time...

Read Romans 14 once each day this week. Continue to ask yourself the question “Is there anything in my life that might be a stumbling block to others”? Also, continue to ask yourself, “Are there any useless old religious traditions or standards which I am still being bound by which I need to be freed from”? As you think of things write them down in the space below.

OLD STANDARDS WHICH I NO LONGER SHOULD BE BOUND BY:

BEHAVIORS WHICH MIGHT BE A STUMBLING BLOCK TO OTHERS:

Download Bob's commentary and read it. Available the Sunday he preaches.

If you haven't done so already, complete and review the personal application section from this week's study.

Download next week's study and complete it before your next Life Group meeting. Available online one week ahead of the sermon.