

Romans 14:1-6

PREVIOUS

NEXT

ROMANS ROAD to RIGHTEOUSNESS				
Romans 1:18-3:20	Romans — 3:21-5:21	Romans — 6:1-8:39	Romans — 9:1-11:36	Romans — 12:1-16:27
SIN	SALVATION	SANCTIFICATION	SOVEREIGNTY	SERVICE
NEED FOR SALVATION	WAY OF SALVATION	LIFE OF SALVATION	SCOPE OF SALVATION	SERVICE OF SALVATION
God's Holiness In Condemning Sin	God's Grace In Justifying Sinners	God's Power In Sanctifying Believers	God's Sovereignty In Saving Jew and Gentile	Gods Glory The Object of Service
Deadliness of Sin	Design of Grace	Demonstration of Salvation		
		Power Given	Promises Fulfilled	Paths Pursued
Righteousness Needed	Righteousness Credited	Righteousness Demonstrated	Righteousness Restored to Israel	Righteousness Applied
God's Righteousness IN LAW	God's Righteousness IMPUTED	God's Righteousness OBEYED	God's Righteousness IN ELECTION	God's Righteousness DISPLAYED
Slaves to Sin	Slaves to God			Slaves Serving God
Doctrine				Duty
Life by Faith				Service by Faith
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Romans 14:1-6

[Romans 14:1-6:](#)

Our Responsibilities Under Grace - Part 13

by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

I love it when God just moves and you don't know what to do. So often He chooses to do it that way, and I just appreciate it. We are living in a day when the word "celebration" is very important. We come together as a church on Sundays to celebrate what Christ has done for us, not just the fact that He died for us but that He resurrected, that He ascended, was glorified and, even more, that He has chosen to live now in the lives of those who put our faith into Him. We celebrate.

I want us to understand from Romans 12-16 that our celebration of the Lord Jesus Christ is not just to be in places like a church building. Sometimes I am like Simon Peter. I would love to build a tabernacle and just stay right there. Wouldn't it be wonderful? But our celebration is not just to be with our lips, it is to be with our lives as we go outside the church walls into the community where people can see that what we are saying with our lips inside these walls is so real that it has literally dramatically changed our life.

Well, let's turn to Romans 14, beginning with verse 1. The first thing Paul does in verses 1, 2 and 3 is lay out a principle. Here is the principle: We are never to judge a brother, especially those who are weaker in the faith, because we have been accepted solely upon our faith in Christ Jesus. I am not accepted by Christ because what I do or don't do. I am accepted by whether or not my faith has been placed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul is going to be talking about food. Now please understand what is going on here. When you talk about eating food and not eating food, it doesn't have anything to do with diets. It doesn't have anything to do with when you go to the doctor and the doctor prescribes a certain way you are supposed to eat. What it has to do with is that some people actually thought that if they ate this or

didn't eat this, it would affect their relationship to God through Jesus Christ under His grace. Others were more mature. They understood grace and they realized nothing could infringe. Paul even said in another place, "all things are lawful to me." But he went on to say that "not all things are expedient."

That doesn't mean I do all things, but there is nothing I could do or not do that would cause in any way a break in my relationship with God. My relationship is founded upon the Lord Jesus Christ and that is eternal. Now my fellowship with God can be severely affected by some of the wrong choices of my freedom. But nothing I can do or not do can break my relationship. So Paul says never judge a weaker brother on the basis of what you know and what he doesn't know. That is the principle. We are all accepted by God by our faith in Christ. That is the only way, by faith alone in Christ alone.

He says in Verse 1, "Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him."

Now a little background might help you. There were a lot of people, mostly Jews, who felt there were certain foods they could not eat as believers. This was a carry-over from the Mosaic Law. In the covenant that we are in with the Lord Jesus Christ there is no ceremonial or dietary restrictions. This was hard for a lot of the Jewish believers, particularly in Rome, to understand. They struggled deeply with this. In 1 Timothy 4:1-3 Paul warns that even in latter times this is going to be a problem. He says, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth."

This was a struggle. You have to understand what he is dealing with here. The Apostle Peter had much difficulty with this. On three different occasions God Himself had to declare to Simon Peter that the food that he would eat would be clean. There is no such thing as an unclean food anymore as far as it is affecting our relationship and our righteousness that we find in Christ Jesus. Over in Acts 10:15-16, after God had lowered a sheet with all these foods on it and showed Peter, He says to him, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." Part of that teaching was to bring in the Gentiles who would eat a lot of these foods. He says it is by grace you are saved, not by what you eat or don't eat.

Well, aside from Simon Peter, the Gentiles had a struggle. You see, the Gentiles would offer meat to idols. As a result of that, they were afraid that all meat then was unclean. So what you have is a group of Jewish Christians and a group of Gentile Christians eating vegetables and scared to death to eat meat, thinking that if they ate meat somehow that is going to affect their standing with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what Paul is addressing.

Verse 1 says, "Now accept the one who is weak in faith." The word "accept" means to receive, to take unto yourself. It is proslambano—pros, to or toward; lambano, to take or to receive. The idea is not that we scorn anyone, but that we continue to bring people alongside us, that we don't look down on them, that we don't talk down to them, but to bring them alongside, certainly to encourage, certainly to instruct, but never to scorn, never to judge, never to demean in any possible way.

It says "weak in faith," but it is "the" faith. When a definite article is there, it is not referring just in their ability to believe God, it is referring to the gospel of grace. Paul is saying there are going to be a lot of weaker brothers who don't understand grace. I don't know of a city in America where this message doesn't need to be preached. There are people in our midst who do not understand grace. They don't understand that you can eat whatever you want to eat. Obviously whatever you eat or drink you do unto the glory of God and it is all by the Lordship of Christ whether we eat or drink, but there is nothing we can do that can affect our eternal standing in the Lord Jesus Christ. There are some who just don't seem to understand that.

So the Apostle Paul says, "Just because you are a little more mature in the faith, just because you understand grace better than somebody else, your brother who is just as sincere as you are but in the context would be the weaker brother, you take them alongside yourself. Don't scorn them. Don't make them look like fools. Don't demean them. Bring them alongside. Keep them in your company."

He goes on to explain why that is such a significant thing that we do in verse 2: "One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only." It is very clear there what he is saying. The word for "weak" is astheneo, and it is in a participle form which has the idea of a temporary weakness. It is not always going to be that way.

How many of us remember times in our lives when we did not understand what grace really meant and we were still hung up with

certain things we had better do and if we don't do them, somehow God is going to smite us or God is going to get us? Paul is saying is, it is not a permanent thing. It is a temporary thing. They are weak in the faith. They don't understand grace. But you have no right to judge them. You have no right to act as if you are their lord. What we understand is only by His revelation anyway, it is only by His grace. So he says the weaker brother is the one who only eats vegetables in this context and the more mature realizes he can eat anything. It doesn't matter. Nothing is going to affect his relationship with God unless the Holy Spirit of God would lead him not to. There is no dietary law to this covenant of grace.

Verse 3 continues, "Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him." Now that goes on both sides. The weaker brother is denoted here in this context, but I guarantee you, if you are the weaker brother, you really think you are the stronger brother. That is the weakness of it. When you are not eating certain things, you are more spiritual than the other. Isn't it funny? Spiritual pride doesn't matter if you are strong or whether you are weak. It has exactly the same temperament. It judges, it tends to treat with contempt. That is what that word means, to scorn, to demean in any way. It means to despise or to treat with contempt. So if you're the weaker, don't you do that to the stronger. If you're the stronger, don't you do that to the weaker. Why? He says, "for God has accepted him." The word for "accepted" is the same word when it says accept the weaker brother. It means that God has brought that brother alongside. God has not demeaned him. God has accepted him. Of course, he is accepted in the beloved just like we are accepted in the beloved.

You know, sometimes we forget that our faith does not come on the basis of what we eat or don't eat or what we do or don't do. Our faith is by the grace of God. Let me just read from Romans 3:21 to remind you of the context of what we have already studied. It says, "But now apart from the Law [apart from anything you can do to think that somehow that is going to give you a better standing with God], the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

We have no right to ever scorn or demean a brother who does not understand God's grace. Now that is Paul's principle. He lays it as solid as any foundation that could be laid. You may have come out of some situation where the people do not understand grace the way you do, and the first temptation is to make fun of the way they are. But remember it was by God's grace that you came out. It is by God's grace that you see it differently.

Well, then Paul makes the point of that principle. What is his point? Why does he bring out this point so strong that we are never to judge or to treat with scorn a weaker brother in the faith? Well, he makes the point that Jesus is Lord of both the weak and the strong. And not only is He Lord of them, He will be their judge. We are not to be the lord and we are not to be the judge. We are brothers on equal ground with those people. Maybe we understand more than they do. Maybe they think they understand more than we do. It doesn't matter. Join hands and as long as we remember it is Jesus who is Lord of both the strong and the weak that is what affects the way we celebrate Christ. This kind of relationship is where you see more than ever His life alive in you when you don't put another brother down for what you by grace have come to understand.

Verse 4 of chapter 14 says, "Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand." The word "judge" is *krino*, which means to separate or to discriminate, to form or give an opinion after considering the particulars of a case.

Let me give you an example. I go overseas a lot, and a lot of the people there just don't understand grace. They are so tied to the law. They are tied to so many things. I walk in and see these precious, precious people and immediately the discernment comes. But you see, I can't take the next step and make a judgment. I am there to encourage and instruct. By the grace of God they will be able to come to the light of realizing that Jesus Christ determines their eternal security with Him and that nothing they do or don't do affects that. It may affect their fellowship, but not their eternal standing with God.

You see, it is immediate that we realize we are not somebody else's lord. He is Lord of both. Paul says, "to his own master he stands or falls." In other words, it is his master that is going to cause him to stand or determine whether he is going to fall. It is not our determination. Our determination is to love without hypocrisy. Our determination is to make sure that whatever we do builds up, encourages and instructs. We are never to take the place of lording over or judging that individual for his lack of understanding of grace.

Then Paul goes on in verse 4 to say, "and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand." The word "to stand" there means to be established and to confirm. Thank God for that. God will establish both men. He will establish the strong men. He will establish the weak men.

Thank God for that back when I did not understand grace. Folks, I didn't. And I tell you what, hiding behind the corner of great things that God is doing in your life is that temptation to be spiritually proud and to judge your brother because he hasn't done what you have done. There have been many, many times when God has led me to a fast that nobody knew about. Those times of fasting are those times of deep commitment. Somehow you think you are in a realm that nobody else is in, and you become spiritually proud and begin to judge others because they don't do as you do. I had that judgmental "I can tell you how to live if you will just ask me" attitude.

That is the biggest problem in the body of Christ today. People are spiritually proud of what they know and what they understand, so they take that and use their freedom under grace to become a stumbling block for somebody else. We have no right to do that. It says that He will be the one to establish them. I am so glad that God loved me when I was so arrogant. I went from ignorance to arrogance in about six weeks. When I was so arrogant, I had an answer for everything. Buddy, if you wanted to know how to live your life, just ask me and I would tell you. The word "lovingkindness" is one of my favorite words in scripture. God just loved me.

Finally through people and situations He began to bring me into an understanding of what grace really is. When you come to realize it that way, who are you going to throw a rock at? You used to be in the same boat. You see, this is what this love is all about. This is the thing that distinguishes us. Let's don't get proud of what we know or what we do or don't do. It is not that at all. My spirituality is not ever determined by what I do or don't do in the sense of that. It is in the sense of whether or not my relationships are totally wrapped up in such unconditional love that nobody can question that God is doing something in this person's life. That is the key.

Verse 5 continues, "One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind." Here he shifts from food to days. It is the same thing, isn't it? You had better get this straight in your theology. A lot of people who love God believe that you have to meet on a certain day. That is exactly what Paul was dealing with. Paul was dealing with the Jewish mind-set there. The Jews felt the Sabbath was the day to be revered and set aside. That is the last day of the week. Sunday is the first day of the week. Not only was the Sabbath a particular day but it also was in regard to other periods that were reserved. The word "Sabbath" doesn't just mean the Sabbath as we think about it. There were several Sabbaths they would honor. They would fight to keep this day very special.

The Apostle Paul was the greatest preacher of grace in the New Testament. I think he learned it certainly not from the apostles, but he learned it in that desert when the Holy Spirit of God took him for three years and taught him what grace was because as soon as he came out, he went immediately to Simon Peter and told him, "Man, you are not living under grace. You won't even eat with the Gentiles and other like that when the Jewish higher ups are around. You have got to get out from under that mind-set."

Paul knew and understood grace. He says in Colossians 2:17, "Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ." Here is Paul, who wrote that, telling them in Rome not to ever treat with scorn somebody who doesn't understand that, who still hangs on to a day. Others treat every day the same. You see, when you understand grace, you realize that the Sabbath is a shadow. The shadow means that it is a day of rest, but we don't have a day of rest. Every day is a day of rest for the believer when he rests himself in the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is our rest. The reason we worship Him on Sunday is because that is the day He resurrected. The Psalmist said, "This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it." He referred in the context specifically to resurrection Sunday. That is why we do it. It is a day of beginnings, the newness of what God has done.

But what about a brother who loves Jesus just as much as you do but still sees the Sabbath as the day that he wants to worship God? Does that mean I become his lord or his judge? I pray that God may help me to instruct him. I pray that God may help him to find the understand where he is wrong, but I don't scorn him and look down on him and demean him because God will establish that brother. I am not his lord. Jesus is his Lord. God is the revealer of all truth.

You see, the mature believer understands that he is free on any day. Every day is the same as far as loving and praising and celebrating the Lord Jesus. But Paul drives his point home. It is why you do what you do that God is looking at. Look at what he says in verse 5: "Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind." The word "fully convinced" is the word that means to be fully persuaded. It comes from two words, pleres, which means full and phoreo, which means to cover. So the two words together mean to cover fully to the point that you are motivated, you are fully persuaded.

There is no doubt whatsoever in his own mind. The word for "mind" is nous. There are different words for "mind," and this word has to do with one's understanding which leads him to deep convictions in his life. Let each man do whatever he is doing. Now there are some people on both sides who will do it for the wrong motive, and they are already out of the picture. That is not what he is talking about. But a person who is sincere and at that point in his life is doing it because he thinks this is what will please the Lord,

then let him do it out of that motive. One sees it one way, and one may see it another way. But let them do it from their own conviction. It is the motive of the heart that God looks at.

Now, before I go any further, let me draw a line and say he is not referring to anything that is wrong doctrine or anything that is intentionally deceptive. He is talking about a person's walk with God and his sincerity and purity of his heart. He may not understand grace because of the trappings of what he came out of, because of other people's influence in his life. He may have it all wrong, but if in his heart he really believes this is what God wants, you just leave him alone. Instruct him if you can, encourage him if you can, but don't demean him because God will bring him out of that. He will come to understand it. If it is not from your encouragement, if not from your instruction, if it is not somehow from you, your love will keep him intact and not become a stumbling block to him while God is able to bring him into an understanding and revelation of what he needs.

Verse 6 says, "He who observes the day [that is the weaker], observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God." I want you to know the greater responsibility to celebrate Christ moment-by-moment, day-by-day, falls upon the more mature believer. The context is clear. Those of us who may understand grace and have come further along than others in our own congregation and in our own city have the greatest responsibility in this.

Listen to what some great mature believers have said over the years. Ignatius, who was martyred for the faith in 115 A.D., said, "Those who were concerned with old things have come to newness of confidence, no longer keeping Sabbaths but living according to the Lord's Day on whom our life as risen again through Him depends." Justin Martyr, who was martyred about 168 A.D., said, "How can we keep the Sabbath who rest from sin all the days of the week." Yet, even with that maturity, Paul says that we are not to use our freedom under grace to become a stumbling block to a weaker brother.

In 1 Corinthians 8:9 Paul says, "But take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. And thus, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ."

You know, this gets into several very, very complicated areas, doesn't it? You know there are balancing principles. Whatever you do, you do not cause your brother to stumble. I have people coming to me all the time and say, "Do you think it is alright in scripture to drink wine?" I think sometimes people listen to me say something, but they don't hear it. They just can't wait for an opportunity to ask me that question after it is over with. "Is there a verse in scripture that says you can't drink wine?" No, there really isn't. It just says don't get drunk with it.

But there is another principle in Romans 14, and I want to tell you something straight out, friend. If you are using your freedom under grace to cause a brother to stumble, you had better get that stuff out of your house because you are sinning against God. I say that on the authority of Romans 14. That is not an opinion coming from this preacher.

Don't we live in a day of the weaker and stronger brother? I am telling you, they are on every corner. And what God is saying is, "Don't you dare use your freedom under grace to become a stumbling block to someone else."

Well, in verse 7 Paul says, "For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself." If you are a believer, sincere in your walk, that is who he is talking about. You don't live for yourself, and you don't die for yourself because you are not your own. Verse 8 continues, "For if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." There is your principle. There is no greater statement of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in every single believer's life. If I am eating, then I ought to eat for Him. If I am drinking, whatever I am doing, it is to Him. If I mess up and do it wrong, He is the Lord and He is the judge and He will deal with me about it. So every man is under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the stronger and the weaker.

First Corinthians 6:20 he says, "For you have been bought with a price, therefore glorify God with your body." Sometimes we don't do that, do we? Therefore we have to be chastened and disciplined, and God will do that. But our motive is to live unto Him. Ephesians 1:7 says, "In Him we have redemption through His blood." He paid a great price for us. We are His property. We are His own. He is talking about people who love God, people who have differing opinions on things but they are doing what they are doing because they love God. It is the motive of their heart to serve Him. He says, "You had better back off and don't be their lord and judge because if they believe that, then you are not to be lord over them. Hopefully you will have an opportunity to encourage them and instruct them." That is what the Christian community is all about. But don't shun them, don't demean them, if they are doing with sincerity what they are doing, for all of us live unto the Lord.

Verse 9 says, "For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." I want to encourage you that when you finish your life someday, you can look at others and look at God and say, "I have lived my life, not perfect, but I have dealt with sin. I have dealt with mistakes as best I know how, but I have lived my life so as my convictions have never been compromised. Fallen, failed, yes, but never compromised. But I have also lived my life so that because of my life my brother's convictions were never compromised or defeated." Now that is the way we are supposed to live.

The Apostle Paul said something in Acts 23:1 that caught my attention when he spoke before the council. It says, "And Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, 'Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.'" Can you say that? Have you lived your life that way? That doesn't mean perfection at all. Paul wouldn't even want you to think that. It simply means that the convictions that governed him have continued to govern him until that day but in such a way that he didn't take his convictions and cram them down somebody else's throat to where their convictions somehow were demeaned and scorned. That is a balanced life.

You say, "I can't live that way." Neither can I, but God never said we could. He can, and He always said He would. You live Romans 12:1-2 and let Him take care of the rest of it. A love without hypocrisy is going to be developed in you. It is going to cause you to see people in the body differently and people outside the body differently. It is even going to cause you to treat people who persecute you in a different way than you ever thought possible. As a matter of fact, you are going to have a respect for government authority that you never dreamed you would have. You are even going to pay your taxes without grumbling. But not only that, you are not going to cause a weaker brother to stumble with the freedom that you have found under grace.

How is your spirit? Is it celebrating Christ, celebrating His resurrection, celebrating His life in you? Then it is going to be seen in the way you handle people. It is going to be seen in the way you handle a weaker brother.