

# "Liberty & Scruples" • Romans 14

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. *Pointless Work*

1. A man was on a business trip one day and stopped for gas on a two lane highway
2. After filling up, he purchased a soda and went back out to his car
3. Deciding to finish his drink before driving off, he leaned back against his car for a short break
4. He noticed that across the road from the gas station was a two-man work crew that was doing something very curious
  - a. one man with a large shovel would dig a hole about 2 feet wide and a good 2 feet deep and then move another about 10 yards along and start another hole
  - b. the second man would then take his shovel and carefully take the dirt the first man had removed, and put it back in the hole
  - c. he could see from their work truck and uniforms that they were county employees
  - d. but the more he watched, the more perplexed he became
5. Tossing his empty soda bottle in the trash, he walked across the road and asked the men, "What are you doing?"
6. They looked up from their work and replied, "What do you mean?"
7. So he explained.
8. The man who was filling in the holes answered
  - a. "I'm Tom, and that there is Fred."
  - b. "Usually Bill works with us."
  - c. "Fred digs the holes, Bill plants the tree, and I put the dirt back in around the tree."
  - d. "Bill's sick today, but Fred and me, we figured that just cause he's not here, that's no reason why we can't work."

### B. *Unity*

1. We have something to learn from old Tom and Fred
2. To people on the outside of the church, it often looks like we are working against each other rather than with one another
3. Rather than being the community of love and peace that Jesus called His followers to, the Church often looks like a wrestling ring
4. And that's tragic when we realize how important the issue of unity was to the Lord
5. One of the things he stressed to the disciples was their call to be of one mind
6. Jesus knew our unity would be a critical factor in our witness to a lost world
7. In John 13 He said that we would be known as His followers by the love

we had for one another

8. In His prayer to the Father in John 17 we read this:

**I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.**

9. Clearly, unity was important to Jesus; So it should be important to us

10. Indeed, it should be a priority, yet all too often, our unity is fractured by an unfortunate attitude of judgmentalism

11. Paul deals with this very thing in Romans 14

## II. TEXT

### A. V. 1

**{1} Receive one who is weak in the faith, *but* not to disputes over doubtful things.**

1. Paul has already said much in Romans about the *devoted fellowship* believers are to have with one another
2. Here he deals specifically with the issue of *hospitality*
3. "**Receive**" means to welcome or greet with genuine friendliness
  - a. in other words, Paul is calling them to practical expressions of unity and love
  - b. it's one thing to *talk* about being friendly, but an altogether different thing *being* friendly
  - c. I'm sure you've heard the well worn ditty that goes . . .

*To dwell above with saints we love*

*O, that will be glory*

*But to dwell below with saints we know*

*Well, that's a different story!*

4. Friends, we need to be warm and friendly
    - a. not just because it's a nice thing to do
    - b. but because we are called to it in the Word of God
    - c. Paul says it right here!
  5. There is something right here that Calvary Chapel needs to take note of
    - a. you've probably noticed that are a pretty high number of visitors at virtually every Sunday service we have
    - b. because there are so many, we regularly hear reports back on people's first impressions of Calvary
    - c. regarding the warmth of the fellowship, how friendly we are to newcomers, we typically hear one of two responses
      - 1) "The church was so friendly, I felt so welcome."
- or-
- 2) "Calvary is not very warm and welcoming. I went for three weeks, and during that time not a single person every took the time to greet me or make me feel welcome."
- d. why the totally different impressions?
  - e. it's simple:
    - 1) the ones who found us warm were greeted by someone and gained a

sense of connection through that contact

2) the ones who found us to be cold never made that contact

- f. now, whose responsibility is it to initiate that first contact?
  - g. OURS!!!!!!!
  - h. we need to be warm and welcoming because this is our fellowship and they are the visitors who very often are looking for a church home
  - i. since it *already* is our home, we have the duty and calling to make them feel welcome
6. So, let's address this need in our fellowship and make sure we are all doing our part to reach out to those who are new
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7. Paul is careful to call his readers to be warm and welcoming of those who are **weak in the faith**

- a. very simply he means that we are not to limit our friendliness to just those we are already friendly with
  - b. it's easy to come to church with the mindset of being friendly, WITH OUR FRIENDS
  - c. but we need to widen the circle of our hospitality
  - d. we need to widen it to include people that we might not normally consider our peers
  - e. and we need to widen it especially to include those who are **weak in the faith**
    - 1) those who are new believers
    - 2) and those who for whatever reason are less spiritually mature
  - d. how will they ever grow up in the things of Christ if they don't have some good, solid mature friends who can help them along
8. Paul's words in verse 1 are directed to the spiritually mature and strong
- a. he puts the burden of hospitality on them
  - b. and his specific instruction is that they have a duty to their weaker brothers and sisters to be their friends and mentors
9. So he says, "**Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things**"
- a. nothing will divide friends quicker than an argument
  - b. so Paul says to the spiritually strong,
  - c. "Be warm and friendly to those who are spiritually weak; and don't get wrapped up in debates on issues that aren't cut and dried."
10. "Don't get involved in arguments over things that are up for dispute"
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11. You see, friends, while we might like it otherwise, everything isn't black and white

- a. there are many issues in the Christian life that fall somewhere in between
  - b. there *are* gray areas in life
  - c. and people have different opinions and convictions about these things
12. A good word to describe these personal moral convictions is "scruples"
13. In verse 2, Paul gives an example of the kind of debate that should not hinder our commitment to one another . . .

## B. V. 2

{2} For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables.

1. In many of the churches, including the church at Rome, there was a controversy over the proper diet of the Christian
2. It arose like this . . .
  - a. most meat that was sold in the marketplace was meat that had originally been offered to an idol
    - 1) picture the scene at the local pagan shrine
    - 2) there was a daily line of people bringing their sacrifices to be offered to whatever god they were worshipping
    - 3) the priests would typically take just one part of the animal being offered and put that on the altar as a sacrifice
    - 4) the rest of the meat was taken by the priest as his portion – kind of like payment for services rendered
    - 5) as a result there was way more meat than the priests needed for their own consumption
    - 6) so they sold the excess meat to the meat sellers in the market
    - 7) this was then resold to the public
  - b. to the Jews, this meat was unclean because it had been defiled by being offered to an idol
  - c. to many Gentile Christians who had been deeply devoted to pagan gods, the meat was defiled
  - d. to others, it was just meat, and the only question was whether they should fry, roast or barbecue it
  - e. those who considered it defiled and unclean meat were offended by those who didn't share their opinion and went ahead and ate
  - f. they took a vow to never touch such evil flesh and would only eat vegetables – poor people!
3. The result of course, was a debate between these two groups
4. And where there is a debate, a division is soon to follow
5. So Paul says . . .

## C. V. 3

{3} Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.

1. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat,
  - a. the tendency is for those who have the liberty to do something to look down on those who don't
    - 1) they make value judgments on their faith
    - 2) and begin to peg them with dangerous and damaging labels, like
      - a) immature
      - b) legalistic
  - b. when we attach labels like that to our brothers and sisters, then we begin to assign them an inferior place in the fellowship
  - c. and that is totally contrary to what genuine fellowship is all about
2. On the other hand, Paul also writes, “and let not him who does not eat

**judge him who eats; for God has received him”**

- a. those who are convicted about something and do not possess the liberty to engage in it tend to look at those who do with a judgmental eye
  - b. they peg them with their own labels
    - 1) immoral
    - 2) unholy
  - c. they may even doubt their salvation
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3. Now, notice something about what Paul has said so far
  4. He says that the strong are to be warm and friendly to the weak, and not get embroiled in disputes over personal scruples
  5. We might naturally think that by the strong he means those whose moral convictions place a very tight rein on them
    - a. you know what I mean—the people who live by a very strict set of rules and live narrowly defined lives
    - b. we do have this faulty idea of holiness that says that the holy person is the one who lives by the code, “I don’t smoke, and I don’t chew, and I don’t go with those who do.”
  6. But notice what Paul says in verse 2: In regards to the issue of eating meat, Paul said it was the weak one who ate only vegetables
    - a. in other words, the strong in faith were those who had the liberty to eat meat without it defiling their conscience
    - b. it was the spiritually weak who could not eat without a sense of having done something wrong
  7. Spiritually maturity is seen in one’s increasing sense of liberty in Christ, not in regard to the clear cut issues of biblical morality, but in regard to the multitude of gray areas in life

***D. Today’s Scruples***

1. Paul uses the example of eating meat
2. What are some of the scruples Christians debate today?
  - a. movies; ratings, going at all
  - b. TV
  - c. makeup
  - d. dress
  - e. tobacco
  - f. alcohol
  - g. cards & dice
  - h. dancing
  - i. bible translations
  - j. sports
  - k. music
3. Friends, these are all scruples
  - a. and while we can talk about them and have great discussions as we share our various opinions
  - b. we must never divide over them
  - c. rather, we must make a commitment to not let our scruples divide us

from one another

#### **E. V. 4**

**{4} Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.**

1. Paul asks a great question: **Who are you to judge another's servant?**
2. I don't serve you, and you don't serve me: We serve God
3. It's *to Him* each will have to give account, not each other
4. So reserve your judgment on the scruples of others, because quite frankly, it's none of your business!
5. Since your brother & sister belong to God, let Him deal with them about their scruples or lack thereof

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6. Now Paul is going to go on and give another example of the kind of thing we are not to let get in the way of our devotion to one another

#### **F. Vs. 5-6**

**{5} One person esteems *one* day above another; another esteems every day *alike*. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.**

**{6} He who observes the day, observes *it* to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe *it*. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.**

1. Another issue that was being debated in the early church was what days of the week should be reserved for worship
2. Paul doesn't answer that issue; he doesn't let himself get caught up in the debate
3. Notice that, because it's an important point: With neither the issue of eating meat or which day Christians should worship did Paul use his apostolic authority to settle the issue
4. Why? The answer is right here!
5. Because these issues aren't ones that the word of God speaks directly to, they are matters of personal conscience, they are scruples
6. And what's important is that in these gray areas, a person live by the dictates of their conscience
7. That is precisely Paul's point here: **Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.**
  - a. it you violate your conscience, then it is sin for you
  - b. because what you do is not from faith, then it is sin
  - c. look at verse 23

**{23} But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *he* does not eat from faith; for whatever *is* not from faith is sin.**

8. Look again at the end of verse 5 = **Let each be FULLY convinced in his own mind**
  - a. Paul is saying that our scruples have to be the result of real thought and study
  - b. they mustn't be merely positions of prejudice
  - c. we need to be diligent to bring our scruples before the Lord for review

9. Then, having done that, we must be diligent not to judge others because they don't share our opinions
10. You've often heard me quote Charles Spurgeon, one of my very favorite preachers
  - a. there was another man of God who named Joseph Parker who ministered at the same times as Spurgeon in another church in London
  - b. early in their ministries the two were friends and even exchanged pulpits occasionally
  - c. but a disagreement broke out between them that divided them
  - d. it was so great that it was even reported in the papers
  - e. Spurgeon accused Parker of being unspiritual because he attended the theater
  - f. and Parker harangued Spurgeon because he smoked cigars
  - g. in fact, someone once asked Spurgeon if it was really permissible for a Christian to smoke
    - 1) Spurgeon replied, "As long as one does not smoke to excess."
    - 2) when the same person asked what smoking to excess meant
    - 3) he wittily said, "Why I suppose two at a time."

### **G. Vs. 7-9**

**{7} For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.**

1. For Paul, the bottom line is maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of love
2. No man is an island, no one lives just to and for himself
3. Paul Simon of Simon & Garfunkle wrote the following lyrics:
 

Don't talk of love, I've heard the word before;  
It's sleeping in my memory of feelings that have died.  
I have no need of friendship, friendship causes pain.  
If I never loved, I never would have cried.  
I am a rock; I am an island.  
I have my books and my poetry to protect me.  
Shielded in my armor,  
Hiding in my room,  
Deep within my womb,  
I touch no one and no one touches me.  
I am a rock; I am an island.
4. Simon was wrong; Everyone of us touches others in a multitude of unseen ways
5. And every touch sets in motion an entire future

## **III. CONCLUSION**

### **A. Wednesday**

1. Paul goes on in the rest of chapter 14 to give some more insight in how we can live with one another in a tough minded commitment of unity and still maintain our convictions

2. We'll examine that more this Wednesday evening
3. But let's conclude our study today with this . . .

### **B. Unity**

1. In Ephesians 4 Paul wrote,

**{1} I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, {2} with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, {3} endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

2. The Christian walk is one in which we walk side by side with one another
3. Not only are we called to faith in Christ, we are called to faith in one another
4. I know we all think that our opinion is the last word on any given subject
5. But there is something more important than our opinions - and that is our fellowship in the faith
6. So with all lowliness and gentleness, let's bear with one another's scruples patiently

### **C. To The Lost**

1. The message today has been for Christians
2. It may be that you've come this morning and while what you've heard may be mildly interesting, it doesn't really apply to you because you're not a Christian
3. I don't know what your impression of the Church has been up to this point
4. But I want to apologize to you if all you've seen from Christians is pettiness and quarreling
5. As you've seen today, that's not the way it should be or even the way the Bible describes the Church
6. We here at Calvary are not better than others--but we do want to do things God's way
7. If you'd like to be a part of a real family that loves one another and is devoted to one another, then we'd like to invite you to join us
8. How? I'm glad you asked
  - a. first of all, joining the church is not an issue of signing a card or attending some classes
  - b. there is only one way to become a genuine Christian
  - c. and that's by believing that Jesus Christ died for your sins and rose again from the dead to give you a new life
  - f. if you acknowledge that your sins are wrong and turn from them to faith in Christ, you can be saved