

R & R BIBLE STUDY 2019-20



breath-taking grace

THE BOOK OF ROMANS

LESSON 16

Welcome to Romans chapter 14. Some people love this chapter while others really dislike it! In this lesson we'll be discussing the principles of Christian liberties and how we view and treat others with different opinions on what we call "gray" areas. Starting in chapter 12, Paul described what it means to live a life of love, which transforms our relationships with others. Whether it be loving our enemies (12:9, 14, 17-21), or loving our neighbors (13:8-10), Paul emphasized the importance of love. Now, in chapter 14, he will give his readers an example of how to do this, using a problem within their Roman church. His desire is to show them how to apply the truths he's been sharing with them to a particular conflict they were experiencing. This problem has never really resolved itself in the Church. Today's issues may look a little different, (maybe not), but the problem of passing judgment on each other has never stopped. While studying this chapter, remember that the issues Paul was addressing are matters between basic principles and individual preferences. Keller calls these "matters of conscience" and defines them as a practice about which God has not specifically spoken in His Word. He has not clearly forbidden it nor clearly commanded it." Swindoll calls them "non-essentials" or "disputable matters." As we discuss these issues, let's make sure we come to the table with a heart of humility and love, like Paul advises. Such practices don't make us "better" or "more spiritual" than one another, just different. I'm looking forward to a great week!

First Day

1. Let's begin today by reading Romans 14:1-23. Observe the text and write any repeated words, thoughts, or phrases. What would you say is his main point? Give the chapter a title that reflects that point.

2. After briefly reviewing chapter 13, how would you say these chapters are connected or tied together?

3. Read Romans 13:14. How are the issues Paul discusses in chapter 14 an example of “making provision for the flesh”?

4. Which two (possibly three) issues is Paul using as examples?

5. What “nonessentials” have you seen believers fight about?

6. Have you seen any of these issues divide people? In what way?

7. What are your initial thoughts after reading this chapter? Any comments? Questions? Anything stirring in your heart?

We will end here for today. I pray you take time to ponder the questions that will be raised this week concerning practices in your own lives. Our goal isn't to be “right” or “more spiritual” but to learn to allow God to be the judge of all men, and not to cause someone else to stumble by abusing our own liberties. The goal is love, the goal is love ... repeat after me. 😊

As believers, we must act according to our conscience. We shouldn't engage in a practice unless we've thought it through, prayed about it, and are firmly convinced it's right. Verse 6 tell us we must be able to do it as "unto the Lord." (1 Cor. 10:31) Everything we do should be to the glory of God.

9. Read Paul's words about using our liberties to glorify God in 1 Cor. 10:14-33. How does this text shed light on our section in Romans 14?

10. Read 1 Cor. 10:23-24 and 33 again. How would you explain and summarize them?

11. Last question. It's actually from John Stott. He asked, "Are you restricting yourself in some area, but forcing others to adjust to our limitations? How could you begin to grant your friends freedom and respect in matters that are not central to the Christian faith – and still obey your own conscience?"

Third Day

Work on your verse.

I'd like to start today with a quote by Irving Jensen: "Each Christian must determine for himself, on his knees, whether it is right or wrong to engage in questioned practices. If he is willing to know God's mind in the matter, he will know (John 7:17). If he is content only to justify a course of action he personally wants to take, or if he wants to make a display of his conscious liberty, he is off to a bad start. According to Romans 14:1-15:7, a believer should

come to his decision of action only after he has considered his own obligations, his Christian brother's good, and God's glory. Then his thinking will sound something like this: 'This thing seems perfectly right to me. I can do it with a clear conscience so far as I myself am concerned, but when others are led into sin by my self-indulgence it grieves God and hinders His work. On the contrary, I want to glorify Him before men. I want to live a Christlike life, and even Christ pleased not Himself. Therefore, for the glory of God, I will refrain from doing this thing.'

1. Think of some "practices" you participate in that may be considered "gray" areas. (Again, not clear doctrinal issues.) Did you come to the conclusion using the method above? Did you consider your conscience, consider your brother's good, and consider God's glory? If not, any changes need to be made after pondering it? (I heard once that if it's "gray to you, it is wrong...)

2. Read Romans 14:1-23 again. What do you think Paul meant in verses 7-12?

3. Swindoll uses the analogy as believers being all on the same "team" to explain these verses. What do you think he means? (I LOVE this analogy!)

I love what Shepherd's Notes said about this section: "None of us lives to himself alone' often has been understood in the sense of John Donne's statement, 'No man is an island.' Paul's statement, however, was not a sociological observation regarding the oneness of the human race. What he said is that all believers live out their lives accountable to God. Decisions about such matters as special days and eating meat are not made in isolation but in accordance with the will of God as understood by the individual."

4. Does verse 14 scare you or give you comfort? Why?

5. In my Bible, at the end of verse 14, I added ... “and not others.” Basically, we stand before God and answer for everything. So why am I judging others instead of letting God be God? Is there someone in your life who you are presently judging for something? Can you repent and give the situation to God?

6. Read verses 13-23. What do you think Paul’s definition is of a “stumbling block”?

7. “Love requires self-limitations for the sake of others.” What does that mean? What verses in this section illustrate this principle?

8. So ... if a “mature” believer ignores or refuses to consider the influence their behavior has on others, are they “actually” mature? Are they walking in love? How does “love limit liberty?”

9. Verse 15 is pretty sobering. Summarize it in your own words. Have you destroyed someone because of a choice you’ve made concerning your liberties?

10. Have you personally been “destroyed” because of the misuse of someone’s liberty? Can you explain? (Has God restored you from it?)

Bruce Barton wrote, “Both ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ believers can cause their brothers and sisters to stumble. A stumbling block or obstacle refers to something that might cause someone to trip or fall into sin. The strong but insensitive believer may flaunt his or her freedom, be a harmful example, and thus offend others’ consciences. The scrupulous but weak Christian may try to fence others in with petty rules and regulations, thus causing dissension. Paul wants his readers to be both strong in the faith and sensitive to others’ needs. Because we are all strong in certain areas and weak in others, we constantly need to monitor the effects of our behavior on others.”

Freedom is such a beautiful thing. And it’s just like Satan to get in there and mess it up by causing confusion and pain. Some are tempted to “flaunt” their liberty and use it insensitively. Harrison wrote, “This liberty, however, if resented because it has been flaunted in the face of the weak, can be regarded as an evil thing on account of its unloving use. What should be celebrated can end up being condemned when Christians are self-righteous rather than self-sacrificing.”

Swindoll believes that we should be “considerate (vs 21), confident (22), and confidential (vs 22).” Our convictions are our own, between us and God. And many times, those convictions can be acted upon privately. Everett Harrison wrote, “The natural explanation is that the exercise of his freedom in public would grieve the weak brother and raise a barrier between them, and this is the very thing to be avoided if at all possible. The strong is ‘blessed’ in this private enjoyment of his freedom, because he is free from doubt and because no one who might be scandalized is looking on.”

11. Do your spouse or children or others who live in your house count as “others”? Should you continue to exercise your liberty if it puts a stumbling block in front of them?

12. Lastly, according to verse 23, if a person is not convinced in his own conscience that this “liberty” is right or wrong before God, should he practice it?

That's it for today. I pray we learn to put the needs of others before our own needs and liberties. See you tomorrow.

Fourth Day

Work on your verse.

1. We've been jumping around a bit, so let's read our chapter again, then focus on verses 16-17. According to Paul, what is more important than food and/or drink?
2. As a culture, do you think we place too much emphasis on food, drink, health, fitness, etc.? Explain your thoughts.
3. Do you think you personally focus on it too much?
4. Verse 19 tells us to "pursue things that make for peace and things that edify another." What are some of those "things"?
5. Let's revisit verse 22 again. Paul is basically telling us to keep our views to ourselves in those "gray" areas. (Areas that are not clearly forbidden or commanded in Scripture.) Why does he say that? Is he forbidding us to ever voice our opinion? In light of the whole chapter, what do you think he means?

6. We clearly must not violate our own conscience. But should a “strong” believer encourage a brother to violate theirs by convincing them of the freedom they have? Can you give examples of this? Do you think you’ve ever been guilty of this?

Timothy Keller wrote, “The principle that should guide the behavior of a strong believer is not to be ‘How can I enjoy my freedom in the Gospel here?’ But rather, ‘What will lead to peace with my brother, and the encouragement and the holiness of my brother?’”

7. Do you allow the principle in the above paragraph to guide your behavior and choices?
8. Paul said “None of us lives to himself alone.” How do we apply this principle to our church body, as well as the larger body of Christ?
9. Only God has the right to bring judgment on another. I asked you earlier if you were judging another because of the liberties they are choosing, but are you judging someone else for a different reason? How they look? Or how they act? Why is this ultimately a faith and trust issue? How does pride factor in?

It’s important to point out that the “weak” that Paul mentions were not keeping the food laws and religious calendars in order to gain righteousness with God. Paul had already dealt with that and called those individuals unbelievers. These “weak” brethren didn’t regard food and calendar as necessary for salvation. They were real believers who had begun to accept the grace of God in Christ Jesus, but most likely had not come to a complete understanding of the freedoms they had in Him, as far as food and religious calendars.

10. People have different ways of processing “truth” when its received. How can our backgrounds and the way we were brought up affect our response to the grace of God in Christ?

I pray the Holy Spirit has cut to your heart and given you a lot to think about. I know He has shown me some things I’m wrestling through. God is always looking at our heart, isn’t He? What’s our motive? What’s our focus? Are my eyes on myself, on judging or pleasing others, or on pleasing Him?

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory.

Today we’re going to do some review and some reflection on our chapter. I really liked it, as heart-searching as it was. Liberties and convictions are always a challenging topic. People accuse people with “convictions” of being “legalists” at times, and I don’t like that. It’s when we expect others to measure up to our personal convictions and expect them to abide by “our” rules that it becomes a problem. Let’s watch out for that, shall we? (Hmmm... I believe I’m preaching to myself here ...)

1. In Romans 14:1, Paul clearly wants his readers to welcome and love on another. (Also, in 15:7) He wants them to accept each other because God has accepted them (vs 3)! Let’s look at this from another angle. Do you believe that God has “accepted” you? (Ephesians 1:6) Do you live as “accepted” and “received,” or are you still seeking His love and acceptance?

2. How is the Gospel of grace the remedy for our anxiety about our image? (Chris Ash wrote, “Image says it matters desperately what others think of me; grace says God has already decided what He thinks of me, and nothing else matters.”)

3. Can someone have an “over-sensitive” conscience? What does that mean?

4. What’s your conscience like? Sensitive to the things of the Spirit, over-sensitive, or pretty hard?

5. I love this definition of conscience: “Conscience is a sensitive instrument that needs to be calibrated by the objective truth of the Word of God.” Is God’s Word or your own opinions, thoughts, and experience, calibrating yours? (How does continued study of His Word strengthen it?)

6. Unity in Christ is established when we die to the desire to please ourselves, because Christ didn’t please Himself. How does true unity in the body of Christ make an “invisible God visible?” (How does selfish behavior divide a church?)

7. What’s your biggest take-away from Romans 14?

8. What did you learn about God? What did you learn about yourself?

Next week we will continue our conversation about Christian liberties. Only two more chapters to go, guys. I’m so sad! We are almost done! 😞

