

## The Book of Romans

By Doug Hamilton

### Romans 14: “Putting Personal Relationships Ahead of Personal Traditions”

Romans 14:1-4, “*Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.* <sup>2</sup> *One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only.* <sup>3</sup> *The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.* <sup>4</sup> *Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”*

To best understand the passage, we must cover some of the history behind it. When the gospel spread from the Jews to the Gentiles, a clash of cultures arose. Jewish Christians, who had a background of clean and unclean foods, felt the gentiles were barbaric in their approach to diet. When the Gentiles wished to eat pork, the Jewish Christians were repulsed. If the Gentile wanted to eat lobster or catfish, the Jewish Christians were appalled.

There were also religious groups among the Gentiles who refused to eat any meat whatsoever. Neo-Pythagoreans would not eat anything that had a soul, including animals according to their traditions. Many Gnostic groups would not eat meat because it carried the stigma of being fleshly. When some from those groups converted to Christianity, they brought their beliefs into the church with them. They would view “meat-eating” Christians with disdain.

Even more complicated was the practice of eating meat which was sacrifice to idols. The pagan convert usually had no problem purchasing meat for the dinner table from the supply sacrificed to idols in the temple. When they started inviting Jewish Christians in their homes for barbeque, they ran into a problem (1 Corinthians 8:7-13).

This leads to an important question, who is the *weak in faith*? If you ask the vegetarian, they would likely say it was the meat-eater. If you ask the Bible, it says the vegetarian was *weak in faith*. They are the individuals who feel limited in their diet on the basis of spiritual reasons. The carnivorous Christian are strong in their faith and wanted the meat. Christianity teaches that we are not limited in our selection of food.

- Timothy 4:5, “*For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude;* <sup>5</sup> *for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.”*
- Acts 10:14-15, “*But Peter said, ‘By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.’* <sup>15</sup> *Again a voice came to him a second time, ‘What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.’”*
- Matthew 15:11, “*It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man.”*

A brother or sister in Christ can choose to be vegetarian based on spiritual reasons, for they are *weak in faith*. They are more than free to do this, but they must not impose this on others. Who are they to judge the other servants of the Lord?

Romans 14:5-9, “*One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.* <sup>6</sup> *He who observes the day, 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.* <sup>7</sup> *For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself;* <sup>8</sup> *for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord;*

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*therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. <sup>9</sup> For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living."*

The Jews also had a tendency to carry their traditions of special days into the church family. Even though there was not a Passover in the assembly, the tradition of observing it was rooted deep in the heart of the Jewish converts. The same applied to Pentecost, Hanukah, Purim and other "holy days" from which originated in the Jewish tradition. The Jewish Christians viewed the Gentiles with contempt when they did not share their zeal for the traditional holidays.

The Gentile groups also had their own pagan-originated "holy days". They often held to beliefs that there were "lucky" and "unlucky" days of the week. The pagan converts demonstrated contempt for the others who shared not their passions for their traditions.

Both Jewish and Gentile converts would attempt to hang onto their holidays by sanctifying their traditions and forcing others to honor them. This caused great division in the church. It did not have to be that way if only they would appeal to the weaker brethren. Both were carrying out their traditions through the perspective of God; and both were exploiting the privilege through the abuse of the people of God.

### We will all give an account to God.

Romans 14:10-12, "*But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. <sup>11</sup> For it is written, 'AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD.'* <sup>12</sup> So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God."

Paul said something similar in Philippians 2:9-11, "*For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*" He was quoting Isaiah 45:23 in both cases and the theme was **everyone will give an account to God.**

It seems that we tend to forget we will all appear before the throne seat of Christ on the Great Day of Judgment. Perhaps it would be good to revisit this reality.

- Acts 17:30-31, "*Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, <sup>31</sup> because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.*"
- 2 Corinthians 5:10, "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*"
- Acts 10:42 "*...this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.*"
- Matthew 16:27, "*For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.*"
- Romans 2:16, "*...on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.*"

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- Galatians 6:7, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.”

Regardless of what *Kumbaya* verses that you have sung around campfires in the past, it does not nullify that we have a God of judgment. He will judge us if we do not take serious His commandments. How we treat each other in pursuit of our own causes is being heavily scrutinized by our God. If He discovers that our actions against His church, either intentional or through neglect, are hostile, then judgment will fall on us!

In our fellowship with each other, we always run the risk of abusing one another if we are not careful. In light of this, Paul exposes two focuses to contemplate in regards to this. We must always remember we are held accountable in two ways:

- 1) We will be held accountable for the sin of *Stumbling Block*.

Romans 14:13-18, “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a **stumbling block** in a brother’s way. <sup>14</sup> I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. <sup>15</sup> For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. <sup>16</sup> Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; <sup>17</sup> for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup> For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.”

Typically when acknowledging accountability to God, we tend to apply it to others such as murderers, kidnappers, robbers, pedophiles, adulterers, liars and dictators. Paul was not speaking to outsiders, but insiders. He was addressing the first-century Christians to not be a stumbling block to our fellow man, particularly our fellow saint.

According to this, the brother who has no problem eating meat is in the position of being a stumbling block to the vegetarian. The one who celebrates a “holy day” is in a position to offend the non-celebrator of the same. Paul was not saying that the carnivore Christian could not consume meat, for he could. He was not saying the person could not celebrate his “holy day”, for he had the right. **He was saying that the brother better beware of being a stumbling block to the others who do not feel the same.** The brother had a RIGHT to eat meat. The brother had a RIGHT to celebrate his “holy day”. He also reserves the RIGHT to forfeit that RIGHT for the sake of the kingdom of God.

### Practical Application:

I have a confession to make. I have never had a Christmas tree in our home for my entire married life. I do not like the origins of the custom. That is me. I have a RIGHT to not have a tree in my home if I choose not to. There are many that share the same beliefs. We all possess the same RIGHT. We are *weak* in that way. There is **not one** “holy day” the Bible commands the Christian to participate in.

There are many others that do have Christmas trees in their homes. They have the Right to do so. If they want to celebrate the custom of Trick or Treat, the Easter Bunny, Santa or whatever family tradition of their desire, then go for it. You have that RIGHT.

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What happens when the strong people have no problem with bringing a Christmas tree into the place of worship? There is going to be a problem called division. The *strong* brothers, the ones whose conscience are not phased with that will argue that the weak need to get over it. The weak will say you are violating their consciences. Who is right and who is wrong in that case. According to Romans 14, the “holy day” individuals have become a **stumbling block**. This is because they brought their “holy” day into the assembly of the holy ones.

That is one of the characteristics which drew me to the churches of Christ, for they do not allow the true holy day, the first day of the week, to be intermingled with our personal holidays. We do not allow a politician to use the pulpit to promote his agenda, for we are here to worship the Lord. We do not allow the dimension of unlimited musical instruments to come before the simplicity of the instrument called the heart. We do not allow the complexity of the New York Times best-selling books to come before the simple truths of the Bible. We keep it simple and stumbling block free.

The same applies to meat. In Iowa as well as many congregations of the Lord’s church, there have been hog roasts. There is a congregation within an hour from here which holds an annual fall hog roast for their assembly. In India there are many converts to Christ that do not eat meat or even swine. This was a result of growing up in a Hindu and Muslim culture. One of the worst things I could do in the church in India would be to host a hog roast for a congregation. If I chose to do so, then would I not be a **stumbling block**? Of course I would. If I persisted in forcing my RIGHT on them, would that properly serve the kingdom? God will judge all who become a stumbling block to their brother or sister in Christ just like He will judge the murderer, the adulterer, the liar and the cheat. He will not be made a fool of, particularly in His own household!

## 2) We will be held accountable to pursue *Peace*.

Romans 14:19-23, “*So then we pursue the things which make for **peace** and the building up of one another.*”<sup>20</sup> *Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense.*<sup>21</sup> *It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.*<sup>22</sup> *The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.*<sup>23</sup> *But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.”*

Jesus said in Matthew 5, “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*” This is one of the great truths when it comes to the church family. It is not enough to avoid being a stumbling block, but we must also be peace-seekers for the sake of the kingdom. Paul already commanded, “*If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.*” (Romans 12:18) Did you not believe that this included those in the church family?

- Jesus said in Mark 9:50, “*to be at peace with one another.*”
- 2 Corinthians 13:11 states, if we “*live in peace*” then “*the God of love and peace will be with you.*”
- Titus 3:2 states we are “*to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.*”
- Galatians 5:22 includes peace among the fruit of the Spirit.

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- James 3:18 states, “*the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*”

It is to be the Christian’s goal to strive for peace. When we fail to make that an intent of our actions, then only chaos follows. Become a peacemaker for the congregation and God will always be pleased.

### Conclusion:

We will be held accountable for being a stumbling block for our brother and to be a peacemaker. God will judge each of us individually for our deeds in this area of our life. We must make our best attempts to not let our personal traditions come before your brother’s personal relationship with God.