

**BOOK OF ROMANS  
HARMONY IN THE CHURCH  
ROMANS 14:1-15:7**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Sadly, throughout **CHURCH** history there have been **CHURCHES** that have had **infighting** and some have even **split** over **DIFFERENCES OF OPINION** over things that cannot be considered **BIBLICAL DOCTRINE**. (*Exp.– I was raised in an independent Baptist Church that had some families leave the Church over the choice of the color of the carpet to be purchased for the Church.*)

Surely there has to be something of more significance in our **CHURCHES** today than the color of the carpet we are going to walk on. Some **CHURCHES** have closed and others are having a difficult time surviving because they are too busy **FIGHTING** each other over **TRIVIAL MATTERS**. As the **APOSTLE PAUL** warned the **GALATIAN CHURCH** in *Galatians 5:15*, “*But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.*”

**SATAN** is a master at getting us **DISTRACTED** from our **TRUE MISSION** in this world. (That is because he is a **THIEF** and that is one of his **TACTICS**, his **WILES**!)

**SATAN** loves to use this **STRATEGY**! Because if **BELIEVERS** can be **SEDUCED** into paying attention to **DISTRACTIONS**, their **CHURCHES** can be robbed of the things that really matter!

**BELIEVERS** should be able live in **HARMONY** in the **CHURCH**. But how can we live in **HARMONY** when there are controversial issues that divide us?

**PAUL** gave the **CHURCH** at **ROME** some practical, step-by-step instructions on how to be in **HARMONY** with one another in *Romans 14:1-15:7*. This was written on our behalf as much as it was for theirs.

It appears that this **CHURCH** was divided on some **NONESSENTIAL** details of the **CHRISTIAN** life.

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There were some in the **CHURCH** who had some very **STRICT CONVICTIONS** concerning things like **PARTICULAR DAYS OF WORSHIP** and **TYPES OF DIETS** and they considered those who disagreed with them to be too liberal. Others, however, had an equally **STRONG CONVICTION** that **IN CHRIST** they were **FREE FROM SUCH CONSTRAINTS** and they considered the others to be too narrow-minded.

**PAUL** says that the solution to all of this is to **STOP CONDEMNING ONE ANOTHER** and start **ACCEPTING ONE ANOTHER** in that which is not clear in the **SCRIPTURES**.

**I. WE ARE TO HOLD BACK JUDGMENT ON DISPUTABLE MATTERS. (14:1)**

Here we see that the **BIBLE** forbids us to **PASS JUDGMENT** on **MATTERS** that are **DISPUTABLE**. A **DISPUTABLE MATTER** is an issue on which **SCRIPTURE** is **NOT CLEAR**. We might call them **GRAY AREAS**.

The **DISPUTABLE MATTERS** to which **PAUL** speaks about directly here are concerning **DIET** and **DATES**. Some **BELIEVED** that certain days like the **SABBATH** or other **RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS** were to be considered **MORE SACRED** than others. They also held to certain **DIETARY RULES** like **NOT EATING MEAT** – probably because the meat in the marketplace had a good possibility of having been **OFFERED TO IDOLS**.

The other group **BELIEVED** that **ALL DAYS WERE THE SAME** and that if you **GAVE THANKS TO GOD** for the food there was no problem with eating it and enjoying it. So, who was **RIGHT** and who was **WRONG** in these things? **PAUL** says that neither group is wrong because these **ISSUES** are **NONESSENTIAL TO CHRISTIAN FAITH** and **PRACTICE**.

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If the **SCRIPTURES DO NOT SPEAK CLEARLY** on an issue it is because **GOD HAS GIVEN US FREEDOM TO CHOOSE** in this area. There are many things that **BELIEVERS ARE FREE TO DO** or **FREE NOT TO DO**, but the **ONE THING WE ARE NOT FREE TO DO IS TO PASS JUDGMENT ON DISPUTABLE MATTERS.**

**II. WE ARE TO AVOID LOOKING DOWN ON THOSE WHO DON'T SHARE OUR CONVICTIONS. (14:2-4)**

**PAUL** says that the one who is **STRONG IN THE FAITH** and therefore **UNDERSTANDS** that he is **FREE FROM LEGALISTIC CONSTRAINTS IN DISPUTABLE MATTERS** must not look down on those who **DON'T BELIEVE** they have such **FREEDOM.**

He also says that those who are **WEAK IN THE FAITH** and therefore feel that they must follow certain rules **MUST NOT CONDEMN THOSE WHO DON'T FOLLOW THEIR RULES.**

Understand that the other person is **NOT OUR SERVANT, BUT GOD'S.** And so **THEY ANSWER NOT TO US, BUT TO GOD!** And furthermore we see that **GOD HAS ACCEPTED US BOTH.** Therefore, we dare not **LOOK DOWN** on the **ONE WHOM GOD HAS ACCEPTED.**

Of course, it is **MAN'S TENDENCY TO LOOK DOWN ON THOSE WHO HOLD DIFFERENT VIEWS THAN HE DOES.**

So the next time we are **TEMPTED TO LOOK DOWN** on someone either because they **DON'T SHARE OUR FREEDOM** or because they **DON'T SHARE OUR STRICT CONVICTIONS** we need to remind ourselves that **WE ARE NOT ANY BETTER THAN THEM,** nor are they any better than us.

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We need to remind ourselves of what the **APOSTLE PAUL** had to say about himself in **1 Corinthians 15:9**, "*For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle*" and in **Ephesians 3:8**, he said that he was "*less than the least of all saints,*" and in **1 Timothy 1:15** he referred to himself as the **chief** of sinners. If that was true of the **APOSTLE PAUL** then it is certainly true of us and so **WE HAVE NO RIGHT TO LOOK DOWN ON ANY OF OUR BROTHERS OR SISTERS.**

**III. WE ARE TO REALIZE THAT WE MUST LIVE FOR THE LORD ALONE. (14:5-12)**

We are **NOT** on this earth for the purpose of **EXERCISING OUR FREEDOMS.** Nor are we here for the purpose of **ADHERING TO STRICT RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS.** We are here for one purpose and one purpose only— **TO LIVE FOR THE LORD!**

If we **EXERCISE OUR FREEDOMS,** we are to **DO SO FOR THE LORD.** If we **ADHERE TO STRICT RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS,** we are to **DO SO FOR THE LORD.** If we live, we **LIVE FOR THE LORD.** If we die, we **DIE FOR THE LORD.** And if we ever **LOSE FOCUS** of that purpose then we are in serious trouble.

Now understand, some people may be **OFFENDED** if we are more concerned with **PLEASING THE LORD** than we are with **PLEASING THEM,** but at least we will have fulfilled our purpose.

If we can **PLEASE PEOPLE** and **PLEASE THE LORD** at the same time, that is wonderful. But, if we can't, we need to make sure that we **PLEASE THE LORD** because of the **JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST.**

Paul said in **2 Corinthians 5:9**, "*Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.*"

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He also said, in *1 Corinthians 10:31*, “*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*”

**IV. WE ARE TO MAKE SURE WE DON'T PUT OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF OTHERS. (14:13-18)**

It is true that in **CHRIST** we have been **SET FREE FROM THE LAW** and **LEGALISM**, however, we must not **FLAUNT** our **FREEDOM** in the faces of those who are **WEAK IN THE FAITH**.

Also those who have **STRONG CONVICTIONS** are not to beat others over the head with those **CONVICTIONS**. We are to **EXERCISE OUR FREEDOMS** and **CARRY OUT OUR CONVICTIONS** in ways that do not cause our **FELLOW BELIEVERS TO STUMBLE**.

This section is primarily addressed to those who are **STRONG IN THE FAITH** and have **FREEDOM IN DISPUTABLE MATTERS**. **FAITH** results in **FREEDOM**. **THE STRONGER THE FAITH, THE GREATER THE FREEDOM. THE WEAKER THE FAITH, THE SMALLER THE FREEDOM**.

It is important to notice that **PAUL** says that **BOTH GROUPS HAVE FAITH**. In other words **BOTH GROUPS HAVE SAVING FAITH** and are, therefore, true **CHILDREN OF GOD**. It is just that **SOME ARE STRONGER IN FAITH THAN OTHERS** and those who are **STRONGER IN FAITH** must be careful about **EXERCISING THEIR FREEDOMS** in the presence of those who don't have such freedom.

The danger is that those who are **WEAK IN THE FAITH** may be tempted to **PARTICIPATE IN THE FREEDOMS** of those **STRONG IN THE FAITH** when they themselves do not have that **FAITH**.

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This is dangerous because if anyone **BELIEVES SOMETHING TO BE WRONG** then **IT IS WRONG FOR THEM** even if it is not something that **GOD'S WORD FORBIDS**.

It is a **SIN** for us to **VIOLATE OUR CONSCIENCE**. We must be, as **PAUL** says in *verse 5*, “*fully persuaded.*” Because “*whatsoever is not of faith is sin*” (v. 23). So if the **EXERCISE OF OUR FREEDOM** causes a fellow believer to violate their conscience and sin we have destroyed our brother for whom Christ died. (*Vs 15*)

**PAUL** includes himself in the group who are **STRONG IN THE FAITH** and have the **FREEDOM** to eat anything, but he says that it is better to **VOLUNTARILY RESTRICT ONE'S FREEDOM** than to **CAUSE OTHERS TO STUMBLE BY EXERCISING IT**.

In *1 Corinthians 8:13* he puts it this way: “*Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.*”

Let me share a word with those who may have had an **OBSTACLE** placed in their way by someone. The greatness of our lives is often determined by the size of the **OBSTACLES** we have had to **OVERCOME**. If we can face an **OBSTACLE** and **OVERCOME IT**, we become **BETTER, STRONGER** people because of it.

That doesn't mean that we can put an **OBSTACLE** in someone's way and justify it by saying we are just trying to make them **STRONGER**. What this does mean is that if someone has put an **OBSTACLE** in our way, then, with **GOD'S** help, we are to **FIND A WAY OVER IT, AROUND IT, OR THROUGH IT!**

**V. WE ARE TO SEEK TO DO WHAT LEADS TO PEACE AND MUTUAL EDIFICATION. (14:19-21)**

What is **GOOD** can be **BAD** if it leads to **DISHARMONY** and **DOES NOT BUILD UP THE CHURCH**.

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In *Romans 12:18*, PAUL wrote: *“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.”* He says, *“if it be possible”* because he knows that it is not always possible to please people.

You know the old saying: *“You can fool some of the people some of the time, but you can’t fool all of the people all of the time.”* Well it is also true of **PLEASING PEOPLE**—*“You can please some of the people some of the time, but you can’t please all of the people all of the time.”*

But the point is we need to do our part—the part that depends on us!

It is much **MORE DIFFICULT TO BUILD UP** than it is **TO TEAR DOWN. WE ARE TO BE BUILDERS!**

**VI. WE ARE NOT TO IMPOSE OUR PERSONAL CONVICTIONS ON SOMEONE ELSE. (14:22-23)**

Understand that our **PERSONAL CONVICTIONS** are just that – **PERSONAL!** If they were meant to be corporate **GOD** would have put them in **HIS WORD**. But **HE DIDN’T. HE GAVE THEM TO US PERSONALLY!**

If our **FAITH** is strong enough to allow us **LIBERTY** in certain areas of our life and we can **EXERCISE THAT LIBERTY** before **GOD** with a **GOOD CONSCIENCE**, we should praise the **LORD** for that!

However, if we **FLAUNT** our **LIBERTY** before a **WEAKER BROTHER** and **CONVINCE THAT WEAKER BROTHER TO VIOLATE HIS CONSCIENCE, WE HAVE CAUSED HIM TO SIN**, because he did not **EXERCISE LIBERTY** that belonged to him. He was trying to live in our **LIBERTY!**

**VII. WE ARE TO YIELD OUR PERSONAL PREFERENCES FOR THE COMMON GOOD. (15:1-7)**

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PAUL is saying here that we should not insist on having our own way. Insisting on doing things our way is the world’s way, not the **CHRISTIAN WAY. PAUL** holds up **JESUS CHRIST** as the ultimate example of **SOMEONE WHO**, rather than **PLEASING HIMSELF, GAVE UP HIS PERSONAL PREFERENCES FOR THE GOOD OF MANKIND!**

*Back in the summer of 1986, two ships collided in the Black Sea off the coast of Russia. Hundreds of passengers died as they were hurled into the icy waters below. News of the disaster was further darkened when an investigation revealed the cause of the accident. It wasn’t a technology problem like radar malfunction – or even thick fog. The cause was human stubbornness. Each captain was aware of the other ship’s presence nearby. Both could have steered clear, but according to news reports, neither captain wanted to give way to the other. (They must have been Baptists!) Each was too proud to yield first. By the time they came to their senses, it was too late. If we continue with a similar attitude, we will share in their fate.*

**CONCLUSION:**

So, let’s be mindful of these seven things we’ve looked at tonight! They are important in the lives of **BELIEVERS**—Both those that are **WEAK IN FAITH and STRONG IN FAITH**. What’s good for us as individual **BELIEVERS** is good collectively to us all as **CHRIST’S CHURCH!**