

Romans 14- The Weaker Brother

As most of you know we have been going through the Gospel of Mark in our afternoon service. I hope that has been as much of a blessing to you as it has been to me. I did promise that every fifth week though I would bring a message from somewhere else in the word of God because I understand the Gospel of Mark is a long study that is going to take us still yet some time to go through. So, I'm trying not to overwhelm you in this study.

That said, I have to tell you though every time the fifth week comes up I'm a little disappointed not to be continuing in Mark. I have just really enjoyed it immensely and every week we are getting closer to the reason that he came- his death and resurrection to set me free from my sin and my shame.

So now for something completely different I suppose. Let's turn in our Bibles this afternoon to the book of Romans. If the Lord wills, I have every intention of actually preaching through this book sometime after we finish the Gospel of Mark. We might do a couple of subjects between the two studies, but this book has been playing on my mind as one that we will need to tackle. It will be a lengthy study well over a year, but it is a needed study. The book of Romans as it has been said is the crown jewel of theology in the New Testament.

We studied Ephesians seemingly not that long ago, a much shorter book and that is like Romans Light. So, this is a book we need to look at fully.

Today, however, I want you to look with me to the 14th chapter and today I'm going to endeavor to do something that I will not do at a later date when we go through this book. Today, I'm going to attempt to look at the entire chapter. So, this is not going to be an in-depth exposition. Today our main goal in preaching

through these verses is to help us in not becoming the weaker brother that we have presented for us in this passage or to be a stumbling block to the weaker brother.

Let's begin in verse 1 and let's just see how the chapter unfolds for us,

Rom 14:1 Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.

The chapter in our verse sets up two kinds of Christian's those that are strong in the faith and those that are weaker in the faith. But it might surprise you what the definition is of the stronger one in the faith and that which is the weaker one.

What do I mean by that? You see we often think of who is strong in the faith as the one who is rigid in nature. Knows what he believes. In fact, some who believe they are very strong in the faith approach the word of God as if they know it all and anyone who doesn't agree with what they feel the Bible teaches on clothing, women working, facial hair, tattoos, holidays, Bible versions and anything else you can imagine is the weaker Christian.

We tend to often think of the one who gives more liberty as a weaker Christian. However, when we examine what Paul is writing here in this chapter, we find that quite the opposite is the case.

Let's consider the background to this chapter. Christianity at this time was experiencing an explosion into the Gentile cultures. Remember for many years as you go through the book of Acts Christianity was Judaism part two. The early Christians didn't think of themselves as anything but Jewish. They were after all continuing on in the faith following after a promised Messiah.

Simply put, the early Jewish Christians did not stop being Jews. They continued to keep their traditions of holidays. They continued to follow

after the Sabbath. Some even continued to make sacrifices during certain parts of the year. Now they understood the fulfillment in what Jesus was to those things, but they continued on in doing these things because that is what Jews did. No where in the New Testament do you find the Apostles preaching stop living like a Jew.

Then though, the Gentiles came into the fold and the Gentiles came into the fold because God promised they would in the Old Testament and Jesus told the Apostles to go to them with the message of the cross as well.

The New Testament in large part describes Paul's journey as the Apostle to the Gentiles as he is often thought of, but understand Paul wasn't the only person taking the word of God to the Gentiles. There were others as well like Barnabas and Mark and other Apostles. Christianity was going all over the place. We just have a glimpse of it in the scripture.

The Gentiles though didn't grow up circumcising. They didn't grow up keeping a Sabbath. They grew up worshipping many gods, gods that had human like flaws and dispositions. They grew up making sacrifices to idols and even practicing ritual fornication. When the Gentiles were saved it was like a culture shock because many of the things they used to do as part of worship were now considered out right sin. They had to leave a lot of things behind.

Furthermore, when the Gentiles received the word it was also a culture shock to the Jews. Many had a hard time with it. They wanted them to keep the Jewish laws like they did. They thought the only way to serve Jesus was to first be Jewish. But that is not what God required. In fact, this thinking was really a Jew who was weaker in the faith.

The strong Jewish believer was the one though that understood that Gentiles weren't required to keep the holidays like Pentecost. The strong Jewish believer was the one that understood the

Gentiles didn't have to keep a Sabbath. They understood there was no need of circumcision. They understood the Gentile believer was going to read the Bible in Greek and not Hebrew.

The weak Jewish believer is the one that said this is our faith. They need to look like us, celebrate like us, eat like us. You get the point? If they're not like us, then they just aren't doing it right and we need to fix them. *You see the weaker brother always thinks he is the stronger.*

By the way, on the flip side for the Gentiles this mindset of thinking was a reality as well. You see the stronger Gentile believer realized that there was only one God. That all the idols out there were nothing more than mythology and the meat that was sacrificed to them and then sold in the markets was no different than meat that was never sacrificed to them at all. Because meat is meat no matter how you slice it.

The weaker Gentile brother believed that they would be in sin if they even accidentally sat down at dinner and someone served them a steak and they ate it without knowing that it had been once sacrificed to Apollos. The weak Gentile was the legalistic Gentile and was ready to correct his stronger brother, not knowing the true condition of himself.

So, to recap what I have said so far, the weak Christian in either case whether it was Jew or Gentile was the one who was bent on legalism and everyone doing it their way. The strong Christian was the one who understood the freedoms they had in Christ and worshipped with liberty.

We might be some 2000 years since Paul wrote this, but times have not changed. The legalist still sees the one who grants liberty as weak and in need of correction.

So that is the background of verse one. And our verse presents two brothers- one who is strong in the faith and understands liberty and one who is

weak in the faith who is rigid. Paul says the stronger Christian should welcome the weaker, but don't quarrel over these things. Sometimes in life we just have to let things go. That is what Paul is saying here. Let it go.

Let's read on,

Rom 14:2 For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.

Here we have a common problem in early Christianity and played out in two parts. Paul said the weak person eats only vegetables. This is not a comment on someone who desires to be a vegetarian for health's sake. This is a Jew who is living in a Gentile city and will not eat meat that isn't kosher, so he doesn't eat at all. This is also a Gentile who will not eat meat because he is scared it might have been sacrificed to an idol. So, because they want to keep their faiths rigidly they eat only the vegetables.

However, they are in a city and worshipping with other Christian's who find it quite tasty to walk down Market Street and Idol Avenue eating a bacon and chicken liver shish kebab. To the rigid guy who denies himself meat to "stay strong in the faith" can you see how this would drive you up the wall. The audacity to think that a Christian could walk down Market eating such a thing! They might even wonder if they are Christian at all!

And these bad opinions of one another goes both ways! You see the one who understands his liberty after being hammered on a couple of times from the weaker ones running their mouths all the time about how they are not worshipping God right begins to really dislike the true weaker Christian that is like an annoying Chihuahua every time they post a picture on Facebook eating bacon shish kebab telling them how wrong they are. Oh wait, they didn't have Facebook back then. They probably wrote an article instead for the Roman Christian Banner outlining the history of bacon and idols. I jest, but I hope you get the point.

So then, since we are one in Christ and he didn't call us to a spirit of division Paul now calls for tolerance both ways. Tolerance among the brotherhood you say? Yeah, tolerance.

Rom 14:3 Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.

So, the one that eats who is constantly being judged by the weaker is told not to dislike the one who is weak and the one who is weak is told to quit judging the other. In other words, let it go. You'll both sleep better.

I hope you are seeing the practical guide here for us brothers and sisters. We may not be arguing today over meat sacrificed to idols, but legalistic Christians still seem to be trying to correct everyone else in everything they don't agree with on social media and papers and those that understand their liberties become pretty intolerant over the criticisms and want to run the other way altogether. Paul would say to the legalist, stop, and to the one at liberty to love his brother or sister because God saved you both and neither one of you deserved it.

Let's read on,

Rom 14:4 Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

These are words written to the weaker brother. That is the one that was passing judgment in verse three. Again, that is the nature of the weaker brother to pass judgment on others. Paul says you have no right to do that.

Just like in life, it's not my job to give a performance review of someone that is not my employee. That would be weird if we were to walk into Starbucks with folder of performance reviews on the employees and give them to the

manager. We all recognize you just don't do something like that.

Likewise, it is not my job to give a performance review of my brother and sister in Christ concerning such things because they are not employed by me. They are employed by God.

And please understand, we aren't talking about matters of salvation here folks. Somethings we are called to make a judgment about the doctrine one preaches.

Here we are talking things that should be about culture and Christian liberty. What we eat. What we drink. What we wear. What version of the Bible we carry. To all these things we should not judge one as disobedient or a lesser Christian because they don't do things the way we do them. The judging belongs to God. Let him do his job.

Rom 14:5 One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

Holidays and Sabbaths that is the subject of what is going on here. The Jew was raised to celebrate a strict Sabbath which is and forever will be on Saturday folks. The Bible never speaks of a Christian Sabbath on Sunday. Not ever.

The weaker Jew would think everyone should be keeping the Sabbath or other Jewish holidays. The stronger Jew understood, Jesus nor the apostles taught the Gentiles should keep a Sabbath. Just as the Jews were required to keep Passover or the Day of Atonement. None of that was expected of the Gentiles.

Likewise, the weak Gentile would say don't even remotely have anything to do with any of the holidays that were celebrated in the past that might have something to do with an idol because we don't want to accidentally worship another god.

Folks I want to remind you that you can't accidentally worship the one true God of heaven and earth and you can't accidentally worship an idol. It's inconceivable. If you pick up a quarter on the ground in front of a statue of Zeus, you are not bowing to Zeus.

Worship takes purpose of heart. It is not accidental. Idols are nothing and as long as we understand they are nothing they will always be nothing. This is the same principle as eating meat that was once offered up. Since idols are nothing it doesn't matter.

So instead of the weaker getting mad over the stronger Christian over his keeping or not keeping of a holiday, Paul says this.

Rom 14:5 One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

Paul says whatever you do, whether you celebrate, or don't- the key is for you to be persuaded in your own mind. Now what does he mean by that? He means you want to keep the Jewish Sabbath fine. Do it yourself and don't worry about those that don't. The key is that you think that you are doing what is right before the Lord. You are persuaded that it is the right thing to do.

You see when it becomes sin on our part is when we believe that we should keep the Sabbath, but we don't because our motive is to be disobedient to God. On the flip side, the one who doesn't believe that we are required to keep the Sabbath and keeps it to satisfy someone else instead of God is also keeping it for the wrong reason.

I watch this scene played out every year at Christmas on Facebook among my Christian friends. I've been on every side of this. I've been the weaker Christian over this sad to say.

I now am at a point where if one thinks they shouldn't have anything to do with Christmas,

then great as long as they are persuaded in the mind that is right then treat it like any other day of the year.

Likewise, I'm also to the point if someone feels compelled to celebrate, then as long as they are doing it to give praises to God then okay. You are not going to accidentally worship some old German god you have never heard of by having a Christmas tree in your home while singing Joy to the World. Not going to happen.

For the one who doesn't think they should celebrate then they shouldn't and for the one who is persuaded they should, should not- not celebrate because they are trying to please man rather than God. God's not happy with that.

So, what I'm trying to tell you is I don't care whether you do or don't as long as God is glorified and please don't worry if I do or don't because I'm seeking to please God as well and not man.

Let's read on,

Rom 14:6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.

Here is just a recap of what we have read so far. Nothing new here. Whether we eat or not we do it because we are seeking to glorify God. Whether we celebrate a holiday or sabbath do it to the glory of God. But don't go against your beliefs if you think it makes God unhappy.

Again, we read,

Rom 14:7 For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

The goal of our Christian living is not to make ourselves happy or anyone else for that matter. The goal of our Christian living should always be to glorify Christ.

Paul in 1 Corinthians says,

1Co 10:31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

That is indeed our purpose in life. Glorify God in what we do or what we don't do.

Now I need to pick up the pace so let's finish reading the paragraph and I'll make some comments.

Rom 14:8 For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

Rom 14:9 For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.

Rom 14:10 But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Rom 14:11 For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

Rom 14:12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

When we are saved which is the purpose that Christ came as we see in verse 9, we belong to the Lord. We are his servants. We are accountable to God.

Verse 10 speaks about judgment. There are times judgment is needed in a body to deal with things that are clearly sin. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. Christ gave us instructions for discipline. Judgment in a body is needed at times.

This verse is speaking about judging people on their service- not for sin. Judging service is not for us to judge. When someone is convinced they are serving God then we might disagree with them, but it isn't my job to judge.

Why? Because this is the job of Christ when he will judge us for rewards.

Christ doesn't judge us for sins because he already paid the penalty for those, but he will judge us for our service and those things what were done for the wrong reasons they are going to fade away. Things done for the right reasons are going to shine before God.

Now that Paul has explained our liberties, he now turns toward our responsibilities with those liberties. This is the other side of the coin.

Let's keep reading,

Rom 14:13 Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

Now we have already had a bit of discussion about the fact that if I believe something is sin and I do it anyway in rebellion to my conscious then it is a sin because we are not doing what we believe that God is wanting us to do.

For instance, I'm just throwing this one out there. Someone might be fully convinced that smoking is a sin. They may reason, if the wages of sin are death and smoking can cause death then it must be sin. Others might say all things in moderation. There is a difference in dependency and enjoying a cigar on a special occasion. Just like there is a difference in eating and overeating.

For the one who believes it is a sin it would be a sin for him to smoke and for the one who believes that a cigar is okay the greatest wrong he could do would be to entice a brother to violate his beliefs by dangling a cigar in front of him.

Or you might understand that the Bible allows the reasonable consumption of alcohol, but to the brother who struggles with alcoholism in the past it is better for him to never touch a drop and

it would be wrong of me to offer that brother a drink at my table or to drink in front of him. That would be a stumbling block in the faith.

Rom 14:14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

Rom 14:15 But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.

This is the respect of another person. Here you have the weak Brother who just can't get past this thought of one eating the bacon shish kebob as being sin and the one who knows that even though it is okay to eat it- it is not okay to just taunt the weaker brother with it and entice him to partake violating his own consciousness in the process.

There are many things we are at liberty to do, but in the right crowd we might set aside our liberty so as not to be an offense to others.

Rom 14:16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of:

This is how we are perceived by those who are outside of the faith. How do you think it looks on social media when you post something that we think we are praising God and another person who doesn't think you have that liberty comes along to correct you and then you engage in this war of words for the world to see. That doesn't persuade anyone to Christ. People look down on that for good reason.

Don't cause others to stumble in the faith because we are trying to push liberty on them where they aren't ready for it. Let the word reveal that hopefully in due time.

Rom 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy

in the Holy Ghost.

Rom 14:18 For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

Rom 14:19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

This is our ultimate goal. Live peaceably among men and our brothers and sisters in Christ. Stop fighting. Lift each other up in the word and love instead of tearing each other up because we think we are the great defender of the faith.

Rom 14:20 For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.

This verse is speaking about liberties. All liberties we have. Whether it is meat or holidays or how we dress or anything of that nature. All things that are done for glory then they are good, but it is never good to take our liberties to cause someone who is weaker in the faith to fail.

Let's read on,

Rom 14:21 It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

This verse is some of those liberties. Eating meat in and of itself is okay. Drinking wine in and of itself is okay. Other things done in a pure conscious in and of itself are okay, but never okay if they are being done to purposefully cause issues with another.

It doesn't mean that we have to stop eating, drinking, and so on to satisfy the weaker brother all the time, but there is a time and place for everything.

Now our last two verses,

Rom 14:22 Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.

Rom 14:23 And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

Verse 22 calls the believer to be happy in his liberties. Verse 23 cautions again about chasing after liberties that we feel we don't have.

Whatever is not of faith is sin.

So, for our practical application if when the end of the year comes you feel like you can't say as much as Merry Christmas and it not be sin, then don't say it. To do so would be sin.

If, however, you faithfully feel there is no sin in putting up a tree and saying Merry Christmas then do it for the glory of God. But don't shove it down the throat of those who don't.

And one last word for those that don't- don't hate the ones that do and enter into arguments because in doing so your showing yourself not to be the stronger brother, but the weaker.

With that I will end....