

Sermons through

# Romans

Acceptable to God, Approved by Men  
*Romans 14:14-18*

*With Study Questions*

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*Romans 14:14-18*

**I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 15 Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. 16 Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men (Romans 14:14-18).**

## **Introduction**

A not too well known German theologian by name of Rupertus Meldenius, of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, put a phrase on a Christian tract during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). It was a harsh and bloody time which included immense religious tensions. The phrase became quite popular with numerous great theologians. The great church historian, Philip Schaff entitled the phrase “the watchword of Christian peacemakers”.

What is this phrase? In Essentials Unity, In Non-Essentials Liberty, In All Things Charity. Drawing a line between essentials and non-essentials is not always an easy task and probably should not be done thoughtlessly, prayer-lessly (and probably not individually). Suffice it to say that Christians should never silently suffer heresy or immorality. Yet assuming we are talking about differences between those in the faith, which the context of this passage demands, a charitable heart needs to prevail.

**I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean (Romans 14:14).**

## Nothing Unclean

The year my father was born (1919), our country ratified the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Constitution. Prohibition outlawed the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcoholic beverages. One of the major strategies in this political endeavor was to give a pejorative label to the alcohol. "Demon rum" was a term which caught on and served well for the successful campaign. It took our country about 14 years (probably less) to arrive at the conclusion that the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment was a bad idea and it was repealed with the 21<sup>st</sup> amendment.

I mention this because it seems weaved into our natures to blame objects and/or systems for our own failures. There was a time when the church viewed phones with suspicion, fearing that the pastor would not visit, but merely call church members. The same could be said for the writing of checks rather than putting cash (or even coins) in the offering. And some will remember how computers would allegedly be the means by which the Beast of Revelation would bring us into submission. Today we feel this way about iPhones or the internet.

Now let's be clear. There are certain environments and elements that can be more or less detrimental to our spiritual well-being.

**Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm (Proverbs 13:20).**

**Those who linger long at the wine, Those who go in search of mixed wine. 31 Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it swirls around smoothly; 32 At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper (Proverbs 23:30-32).**

Yet, at the same time, Jesus was a friend of sinners and made and drank wine (Matthew 11:19). So the real problem isn't the wine or the sinful companion or the phone, computer or internet. All of creation may have been corrupted by the fall (Genesis 3:17, 18), but it doesn't follow that the thorns, thistles and herbs are to be blamed for our own failures. The true problem is my own sinful heart.

**To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled (Titus 1:15).**

In the Old Testament God put forth dietary regulations designed to be lessons in holiness (separating Israel from the other nations), but the New Covenant would be an international entity and the types of things that would separate the church from the world would no longer be foods, fabrics or borders. God had declared all things **“clean” (Mark 7:19; Acts 10:11-15)**. That is, nothing (no element or environment) in and of itself is defiling to our souls.

Yet, what we learn in this verse is that, depending on our own weaknesses, it may be unclean to us. In the context of our passage, the elements, or practices, in question were the eating of certain types of foods (either due to a religious history of avoiding those foods or because of a history of cultic sacrifices of those meats or drinks<sup>1</sup>) or the observance of certain days.

One might even add circumcision to this list of **“doubtful things”** when considering how Paul granted the circumcision of Timothy (16:3) in sensitivity to those he was reaching out to. Yet in another sense (when circumcision became a ceremonial work necessary to salvation) Paul wrote against it in the most aggressive manner imaginable (Galatians 5:12).

In summary, nothing in and of itself is unclean or defiling to the well-being of our souls. Yet, depending upon our own weaknesses, the engagement in almost any activity can be an avenue to our own destruction.

I had a room-mate years ago who made a commitment not to go to ‘R’ rated movies. He was fully convinced that an ‘R’ rated movie would have a corrupting influence in his mind and heart. Because he was **“fully convinced in his own mind” (Romans 14:5)** of this, it would be a sin for him to do this, even though there is no passage in the Scriptures which directly addresses that issue. It’s been said:

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<sup>1</sup> It may be that some specific practice associated with wine troubled some of the Romans (e.g., being offered to a pagan deity as a libation). Or Paul may simply have been using this as an expression to indicate that in the matter of diet he was ready to go to any lengths to avoid giving trouble to weaker believers.

Morris, L. (1988). *The Epistle to the Romans* (p. 491). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

**...to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean – “and therefore, though you can eat of it with out sin, he (the weaker brother) cannot.”<sup>2</sup>**

But let us be reminded that the passage is not (at least here) concerned with what I view as unclean or defiling to my own spiritual well-being, but my sensitivity to that disposition in my Christian brother or sister.

**Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died (Romans 14:15).**

### **Destroying a Brother**

By grieving and destroying, Paul is not suggesting a contradiction to what he had earlier written, that **“God is able to make him stand” (Romans 14:4)**. As if my poor behavior can overcome the power of Christ’s blood to redeem the soul of another! Yet he uses very strong language to address our own insensitivity. It’s as if he said, “Christ died for this person, but you won’t stop eating for their well-being. Is your love so petty?” It’s as if I gave my child the right to use my car and they used it to run over their sibling.

We study a passage like this with the recognition that meats, days and wine are not currently heated issues (especially since Paul is not addressing the morality of killing animals, drunkenness or the Sabbath, but OT dietary issues or cultic practices). But let us not lose the general disposition which is to govern our hearts; that there are things we have a perfect right to as Christians, which we must be willing to give up for the sake of others. It is stated emphatically in a parallel passage:

**And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. 12 Thus, sinning against your**

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<sup>2</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 255). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

**brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble (1 Corinthians 8:11-13).**

We fool ourselves if we think we can be loving and serving Christ, while ignoring or neglecting the well-being of others. We may pride ourselves in saying we don't care what others think, it is only what God thinks that matters. But what God thinks, when we are inconsiderate of the weakness of our siblings in Christ is taken up in the next short verse.

**Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil (Romans 14:16).**

We have great liberty in Christ to enjoy those things He has given us in this life. But if that liberty cares not for others, it will rightly be spoken of as evil.

**...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17).**

### **Righteousness, Peace, Joy**

It is truly a sad thing when a church loses its way. When the central nervous system of the body of Christ is governed by anything but Jesus and Him crucified, the prognosis is paralysis followed by death. There is no church immune to this danger and we must ever **"contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).**

Notice the mild and encouraging chastisement of Paul. In all of their bickering regarding eating and drinking, perhaps they were losing sight of the soul of Christ's kingdom. Here we read of Paul equating the kingdom of God (at least in its visible manifestation) to the church. He reminds us that the heart of the kingdom is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

There may be a temptation to slice these three words up too finely, but I think it is safe to suggest that the **"righteousness" *dikaiosyne*** includes the imputed righteousness of Christ—a righteousness that is not **"my own...but that which through faith in Christ, the righteousness**

**which is from God by faith" (Philippians 3:9).** At the same time there is a righteousness in which we should seek to walk. A righteousness where we should **"do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).**

Similarly **"peace" *eiene*** most certainly includes "peace with God" having been "justified by faith" (Romans 5:1). But true peace with God will necessarily translate to peace with one another. For Christ **"Himself is our peace" that He might create "in Himself one new man" in those who trust in Him (Ephesians 2:14-16).**

And the collateral blessing from these heavenly benefits is **"joy in the Holy Spirit."** The world offers a shallow joy. Job 20:5 teaches...

**...that the exulting of the wicked is short, and the joy of the godless but for a moment (Job 20:5).**

We read of Moses that...

**...when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin (Hebrews 11:24, 25).**

But when the hearts of the faithful treasure that which is deep and eternal, it yields a...

**...joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith-the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1:8)**

**For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men (Romans 14:18).**

### **Acceptable to God, Approved by Men**

Paul completes this thought by reminding us that living in such a way as to serve Christ is not necessarily in conflict with the approval of men-especially other Christians. It may be true that faithful living may produce persecution, trials and martyrdom (Matthew 5:11, 12). But these

types of hardships for the faithful are generally (as with Christ) politically or religiously motivated (think of the Pharisees and Pilate).

In a more personal sense we read of Jesus increasing **“in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52)**. Let us take to heart the words of Paul to Titus:

**Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, 7 in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, 8 sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you (Titus 2:6-8).**

## **Conclusion**

It requires a prayerful wisdom for a Christian to know when to speak, when to remain quiet and when and how to lovingly engage perceived error. But we must seek to avoiding exercising our liberty in Christ in such a war as to grieve our brothers and sisters in Christ. A prevailing disposition must ever be compassion, thoughtfulness and charity. When we pursue these things, we are walking in love.



## Questions for Study

1. Discuss the “watchword of Christian peacemakers”. How is that applied in your life or in the life of today’s church (page 2)?
2. Are certain items evil in and of themselves? Explain (page 3)?
3. Is it possible for a person to be doing the wrong thing even though it is not directly prohibited in Scripture (pages 4, 5)?
4. Can we serve Christ while neglecting others? How so (pages 5, 6)?
5. Define and discuss righteousness, peace and joy (pages 6, 7).
6. Give examples of how one can be acceptable to God and approved by men. What must we never do in order to achieve acceptability by men (pages 7, 8)?