

That We Might Bear Fruit For God

Lesson 16

The Christian's mind renewed in attitude toward brethren in the Church, (Romans 14:1-15)

By F. M. Perry

"(1) Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. (2) One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. (3) Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him. (4) Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (5) One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. (6) 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. (7) For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; (8) for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. (9) For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. (10) But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. (11) For it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.' (12) So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God. (13) 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. (14) 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. (15) 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." (Romans 14:1-15 NASV).

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Questions for study.

1. The King James version translates Romans 14:1 as, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations." Does the dialog between brethren in the church sometimes resemble "doubtful disputations?" Who is addressed by Paul in his request to "accept the one who is weak in faith?" Discuss. (Romans 14:1-4).
2. Does Paul urge Christians to observe certain special calendar days of the year for the Lord? What is Paul's inspired recommendation concerning observance of special days for the Lord? What is his inspired recommendation concerning "eating for the Lord?" Discuss. (Romans 14: 5-6).
3. With what attitude should a Christian approach a Christian brother who has sinned? Should Christians hold contempt for certain egregious sinners? Discuss. (Romans 14:7-12).
4. How do Paul's admonitions in Romans chapter 14 relate to a Christian's personal spirit (conscience) and soul (volition and intellect)? (Romans 14:13-15).

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God wants to utilize Christians as vessels to express His righteousness in their personal relationships with other people. Beginning in Romans, chapter 14, Paul developed the theme, "the righteousness of God revealed," by instructing Christians how God's righteousness should be revealed in their personal relationships in the Church. The Holy Spirit through Paul set the theme with the command, "Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions." The King James Version translates this verse as, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations."

Paul admonished Christians to "get along" with one another in the church, and not to engage in "doubtful disputations," or not to pass judgment on disputable matters of opinion, matters about which the opinions of one another may differ. Why was the Holy Spirit concerned about Christians passing judgment on the opinions of their brethren in the church? As we read on in chapters 14 and 15 of the Roman letter we find that the Holy Spirit was instructing Christians how to escape certain terrible problems that could arise in the Christians' "walk" should they engage in "doubtful disputations." In Romans 14:3 Paul intimated that the passing of judgment on the opinions of another sometimes is simply an expression of contempt for the other. He said, "Do not regard with contempt him who does not eat." A Christian should never regard his brother with contempt. Yet "doubtful disputations", or the passing of judgments about strongly held opinions,

can lead to feelings of contempt for each other.

It appears that Christians, as human beings, have a proclivity to disrupt their Spirit led activities by unnecessarily passing judgments on disputable matters and becoming embroiled in "doubtful disputations." The instructions given here through Paul were for the purpose of helping Christians "reckon" as dead their old fleshly self which desires to exercise passions in disputes with brethren, and helping Christians "present" their new spiritually minded self unincumbered from such fleshly passions.

After writing in Romans 14:1 that Christians should not pass judgment on the opinions of other Christians, Paul gave examples of what he meant. The first example concerned the opinions formed among brethren about the practice of eating. The opinion of some was that it was perfectly proper as Christians to eat "all things." The opinions of others was that only "vegetables" should be eaten. Later statements in chapters 14 and 15 have given us some insight into reasons why disputes about "eating" had arisen. Perhaps some Jewish Christians could not conscientiously bring themselves to ignore the dietary laws of Judaism which had prohibited the eating of many kinds of meat. Perhaps some Gentile Christians were afraid that they might eat meat that had been offered to idols and they could not bring themselves conscientiously to do that. Perhaps those, who felt at ease eating all things, knew that God did not require them to observe the dietary laws of Judaism. Or perhaps they knew that idols were not real gods and that they could not be harmed by idols. They could not bring themselves to throw away good meat just because it might have once been offered to idols. (The eating of things sacrificed to idols was the subject of certain Scriptures which Paul wrote in his First Corinthian letter chapter 8.) Whatever the reasons, there were differences of opinion among the Christians concerning this matter of "eating," and Paul used the "eating opinions" as an example of differing opinions among Christians which, apparently, had caused "doubtful disputations."

Paul told Christians to accept, or to receive the one who is weak in faith. Who is the one who is weak in faith? How is he to be identified? In the

example Paul said, He who is weak eats vegetables (or herbs) only. In Paul's example the vegetarian was the one who was weak and the one who was to be accepted or received in Christian fellowship. Those who had faith that they might eat all things were the ones who were to do the accepting into fellowship. This was one example of whom Paul meant when he said, accept the one who is weak in faith.

However, don't accept him to doubtful disputations, said Paul. Don't do it for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. What are these "doubtful disputations" that Christians must avoid? They were represented by the Greek word DIALOGIAMOS. Other meanings of this Greek word were "disputing," "doubting," "diverse reckoning," "dissensions," "imagination," "speculation," and "evil thoughts." There were no good Christ-like qualities in the meanings of this Greek word. They were human qualities. At best, the word meant simply human reasoning and debate. At worst, the word meant evil disputes and dissensions. So Paul said to accept the one who is weak in faith, but do not start human reasoning, debate, and dissension over his practices.

Going on with the first example, Paul said not to regard the vegetarian with contempt, and not to let him judge the rest of the Christians, for God has accepted all. Paul summed it all up later in Romans 15:1, "Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God."

In Romans 14:4 Paul used another example to illustrate why Christians are to accept one another, the example of the master/servant relationship. Paul said that the servant is accountable only to his own master, not to anyone else. No matter how anyone else might judge the relationship, the master's judgment is the only judgment that counts with respect to his servant. The servant stands or falls only in the judgment of his master. And the master can make the servant stand, even with the servant's shortcomings, no matter what others might think.

In this example it is clear that Paul spoke of God as the Master of us all, and each of the Christians as servants. Servants are not to judge each other. The Christian servant who is weak in faith stands or falls only in

the judgment of God. And God, in His infinite mercy, is able to make any Christian stand. Praise God for that!

2. Does Paul urge Christians to observe certain special calendar days of the year for the Lord? What is Paul's inspired recommendation concerning observance of special days for the Lord? What is his inspired recommendation concerning "eating for the Lord?" Discuss. (Romans 14: 5-6).

Romans 14:5-6. "(5) One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. (6) 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. "

Another example of something about which the Christians of Paul's day had differing opinions was mentioned by Paul in Romans 14:5. Apparently, different opinions concerning the "observance of days" became the fuel for "doubtful disputations" among some brethren. The disputes came about because one Christian observed certain days as special on his religious calendar (regards one day above another) while another Christian did not observe such special days (regards every day alike). This may have come about because of the fact that the church was made up of both Jewish and Gentile Christians. Or it may have involved the observance of many secular holidays.

Jewish Christians may have continued to observe as special days the various feast days and holy days they had observed under the Law of Moses. Jewish Christians may have had no desire to abandon their observance of the Sabbath day (Saturday) as a day on which no work was to be performed. Some Christians may have desired to observe certain secular holidays that other Christians did not observe. Paul did not go into detail concerning what it was, about the "observance of days," which caused "doubtful disputations." Paul did not indicate which side of the dispute in this example belonged to the "weak brother." He simply made it clear that to have such disputations was wrong.

He did not label either side of the dispute as wrong as long as the observance of the day was "for the Lord." Thus Paul continued to stress that the "Spirit led life" must be "for the Lord." He did not label the lives of either side as not being "Spirit led lives" as long as they did not pass judgment upon the opinions of each other. But Paul made it clear that the Holy Spirit did not lead Christians to disputes concerning differing opinions.

We might conclude, then, that we Christians are all at various stages of spiritual growth in our "Spirit led lives." While we "grow" through life from one set of opinions to another concerning such things as "observance of days" and "eating of food," we are at all times servants of the Master, part of the body of Christ, the fellowship of Spirit led Christians.

3. With what attitude should a Christian approach a Christian brother who has sinned? Should Christians hold contempt for certain egregious sinners? Discuss. (Romans 14:7-12).

Romans 14:7-12. "(7) For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; (8) for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. (9) For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. (10) But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. (11) For it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.' (12) So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God."

After all, as Paul has taught in the Roman letter, we, as Christians, do not live for ourselves, or die for ourselves. We "presented" our new man, God's new creation in us, to God. And now we are "walking" as led by the Spirit of God. We are vessels for God's mercy to be poured forth on the earth. We do not "work." Christ "works" in us. The "love" we have for one another is a gift from God, poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We are not our own. As Paul said in Romans 14:8, "for

if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord, therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's."

In Romans 14:9 Paul reminded us that Christ died and lived again for this very purpose, that He might be Lord of all God's people, whether dead or living. So we see, in the "Spirit led life," Christ uses us and we must make no provision for the "doubtful disputations" of the flesh. Such things just hinder Christ from working in us. This judging of each other in matters of opinion is completely outside our realm of activity as vessels of God's mercy. We are led to love one another and to make no provision for human judgment of the opinions of others.

"Why do you judge your brother?" asked Paul. "Why do you regard your brother with contempt?" The Spirit leads us to love even our enemies. The Spirit certainly does not lead us to set at nought our brother. Don't we know that we are all "in the same boat?" Don't we know that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God? Don't we know that we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God, having earned for ourselves in these sorts of purely human pursuits (such as "doubtful disputations") the wrath of God? Don't we know that we are all without excuse when we try to stand in the flesh, in our old man of sin?

For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God. (Romans 14:11-12).

We must not wait until the judgment to bow our knees and praise God. We must be doing that now. Don't we know that when we engage in "doubtful disputations" about the opinions of men that we are not bowing our knees to God and we are not giving praise to God. In such disputes we are outside the path of the "Spirit led life." The message of Romans, indeed the message of the whole Bible, is to bow the knee to God beforehand, now, voluntarily, in our lives; give praise to God now with our lives by letting the Spirit lead us.

If we give sway in the flesh to such things as "doubtful disputations" in

human judgments of each other, we are right back under law again. If we continue in the fleshly, human way, we will finally bow our knees to God anyway, and we will praise God anyway, but then it will be too late. Do we want to live only in the flesh, only for ourselves, to be judged by God's law? We are doomed if we have to stand before God's judgment seat that way. We will be without excuse and have no reward but the wrath of God. But if we have "put on" Jesus Christ and have made no provision for the flesh, when we stand before the judgment seat of God we will have an Advocate, Jesus Christ to speak for us. We will say (if we dare to say anything), "I am not my own; I belong to Him".

4. How do Paul's admonitions in Romans chapter 14 relate to a Christian's personal spirit (conscience) and soul (volition and intellect)? (Romans 14 13-15).

Romans 14:13-15. "(13) 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. (14) 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. (15) 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."

In Romans 14:13 Paul turned his discussion to the effect of "doubtful disputations" on the consciences of Christians. The consciences of individual Christians are almost always involved in doubtful disputations" based on human judgments. How do consciences become involved in such things? Paul said, "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 ... to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean."

Sometimes the judging of one another's opinions result in placing a stumbling block in a brother's way. Because of the disputation a Christian may be induced to accept something of which he is not fully convinced. He may be induced to take a course which violates his conscience. The urging of one to violate his conscience is tantamount to

placing a stumbling block in his way. Only God has a right to place "stumbling blocks" before people. Only God has the wisdom and ability to bring about good results through the use of "stumbling blocks." It is always sinful for a Christian to place a "stumbling block" or to cause another to violate his conscience.

In Romans 14:14 Paul's reference to things that were considered "unclean" seems to indicate that the problem of "eating" indeed may have involved food which some Christians considered "unclean" and, therefore, considered unfit to eat. Some Jewish Christians may have considered pork to be unclean while Gentile Christians did not. Other Christians may have considered meat offered as sacrifice in idol worship, yet later sold on the market, to be unclean and unfit to eat.

Our attitude toward our brethren should be determined by our Lord's attitude toward us. Christ's love for us does not allow Him to hurt us. That is, all His actions toward us work together for our good. He died for all of us. Our "walk" should be according to love for our brethren resulting in all our actions working together only for the good of the brethren.