

"Receive The Weak"

Introduction. In our consideration of fellowship, we must of necessity consider whether or not doctrinal differences and sinful practices are included in Romans 14. Are all differences that brethren have equal in nature? Must we tolerate sin and error? The boundaries of Romans 14 must be examined to see if we can have differences in matters of faith and still continue in fellowship. There has been no other passage put forth to justify differences in matters of faith; this assertion stands or falls on the interpretation of Romans 14.

I. ***The Broader Context Of Romans***

- A. The gospel was declared to produce "*obedience of faith among all the nations*" (1:1-7).
- B. The gospel revealed the righteousness of God and it brings all to salvation by faith (1:16-17).
- C. There is to be no toleration for continued sin (6:1-23).
- D. There is to be no "*provision for the flesh*" (13:11-14).
- E. We must mark those causing divisions and offenses contrary to doctrine (16:17-19).

II. ***The Basic Divisions Romans 14***

- A. Introducing the problem (Romans 14:1-2).
 - 1. One brother was "*weak in faith.*"
 - a) His conscience forbade him from eating meat.
 - b) He was probably from a Jewish background.
 - c) The concern was not just the kind of meat, but offering the meat to an idol.
 - (1) There has been a lot of discussion over the fact of the definite article in Romans 14:1. The idea is that if the definite article is in the original text, then Romans 14 can include matters of doctrine.
 - (2) However, too many people base far too much on the definite article without the skill or the expertise to do so, or based on ulterior motives. Context shows that "*faith*" is referring to conscientious scruples.
 - 2. One brother had "*faith to eat all things.*"
 - a) He understood that the old regulations are not now binding.
 - b) Therefore, he did not feel restricted in what he could do.
 - c) They were instructed to "*receive*" one another.
 - (1) This was not for the purpose of "*passing judgment on his opinions.*"

(a) Faith.

- i) "*The faith*" is that body of teaching or doctrine which we must obey and follow in order to be saved. It is indicated in this manner many times in the New Testament (Acts 6:7; 13:8; 16:5; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Colossians 1:23; 2 Timothy 4:7; Jude 3). Therefore, it is necessary for salvation (John 8:32; James 1:21; 1 Peter 1:22-25).
- ii) "*The faith*" is identifiable, knowable, teachable, and duplicatable (Jude 3; Ephesians 3:4; 2 Timothy 2:2; Matthew 28:18-20). "The faith" or the doctrine of Christ is also sufficient (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3-4; 1 Peter 4:11). "*The faith*" is a firm conviction resting upon clear and satisfactory testimony from God's revelation. When we "*walk by faith*" (2 Corinthians 5:7), we are led by faith in God to do what the word of God clearly requires of us.
- iii) Does the Lord allow us to believe false teaching? Those who believe error are deceived and will be damned if they do not repudiate it (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 1 Timothy 1:3). We have no more right to teach error than we do to believe it. We cannot condone what we cannot teach as truth (Ephesians 4:15).

(b) Opinion.

- i) Opinion is an impression resting upon human judgment, without clear and satisfactory testimony. An opinion may very well be a strong impression, but it is based upon a deduction, assumption and inference from a passage or passages of scripture.
- ii) No opinion nor matter of "personal faith" is necessary to salvation. Opinions contains matters of which God has not spoken. Alexander Campbell called opinions "Persuasions without proof."
- iii) One man's opinion may be right or wrong, but it does not matter because it does not matter to God (Romans 14:1, 5, 14). How could these instructions be given if the matters under consideration were matters of essential truth?

(2) The phrase was not referring to matters lacking clarity.

- (a) Many men have publicly declared that Romans 14 justifies unity in doctrinal diversity.

(b) Note that the KJV rendering ("doubtful disputations") was not meant as a "gray area." Other versions render it as "decision of scruples" (ASV), "passing judgment on his opinions" (NASV), "disputes over opinions" (RSV) and "quarreling over opinions" (NRSV).

- B. Instructions to the weak (Romans 14:3-12).
 - 1. The herb-eater was told that God receives the meat-eater.
 - 2. The problem was with a scruple of conscience, not law.
 - 3. The weak of conscience was not to condemn the strong.
 - 4. God received the meat-eater in his practice.
- C. Reasons for the weak to receive the strong.
 - 1. God received him while eating meat.
 - 2. He was a servant of God in the action.
 - 3. God was able to make him stand in judgment.
 - 4. The matter depended on the full assurance of one's own mind.
 - 5. No man has a right to reject his brother.
- D. Instructions to the strong (Romans 14:13-15:2).
 - 1. Reaffirms the fact that the practice is inherently good.
 - 2. The strong was not to put a stumbling block before the weak.
 - 3. The souls of brethren are more important than liberty.
 - 4. The strong must seek after matters which edify.
 - 5. Private conscience is always allowed before God.
- E. Responsibilities of the strong brother.
 - 1. He was not to despise the weak brother.
 - 2. He was not to put a stumbling block in the way.
 - 3. He was to seek for peace and the edification of others.
 - 4. He was not to destroy God's work for liberty.
- F. The nature of the strong brother's action.
 - 1. God received him in the action.
 - 2. It was done with full assurance of mind.
 - 3. The action was "good."
 - 4. He was called "strong" together with Paul.
- G. Could the same be said of the one in sin?
 - 1. Could we receive the homosexual?
 - 2. Could we receive the adulterer?
 - 3. Could we receive the social drinker?
 - 4. No sinful action is included in Romans 14!
- H. Could the same be said of the teacher of error?
 - 1. Could we receive the justifier of abortion?
 - 2. Could we receive the justifier of adultery?
 - 3. Could we receive the justifier of immodest apparel?
 - 4. No sinful tolerance is included in Romans 14!

Conclusion. We cannot allow the justification and tolerance of error to continue. To do so puts our own soul in jeopardy. We must “contend earnestly” for the proper bounds of fellowship and for the proper use of Romans 14. Our final article in the subject will explore the possibility of doctrinal unity today.

Adapted By Kyle Campbell