

Mutual Edification

Romans 14:1–23

Key Verse: 14:8

“If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord”

Today's passage is about Paul's another practical advice for the Christians in Rome. In chapter 12, he first taught how to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. In chapter 13 he taught how to live in society. As Christians, we should live as obedient citizens, love neighbors and spiritually alert persons who abstain from wild living. Now in this chapter 14, Paul addresses one of the major practical issues among the believers in Rome. Some of them used to be immersed in traditional Judaism, and some used to be idol-worshipping Gentiles. Even though they'd become Christians, their backgrounds were so different that they found it hard to get along. They judged others based on their own backgrounds and principles. So in today's passage, the apostle Paul encouraged Christians in Rome in some very practical ways to build a loving Christian community. We may not have the same specific struggles these early Christians had, but in these passage, we can find some important principles that still apply to our struggles in our Christian community. We may have a time together to think about the principles. May God open our hearts and speak to us personally through His living words today.

First, accept one another (1-12). Look at verses 1 and 2. "Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. One man's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables " In this verse Paul mentioned the major theme of this section: **acceptance**. There were two kinds of Christians in Rome. One was legalistic Christians, and the other, gospel-centered Christians. In this verse, the phrase "whose faith is weak" refers to the legalistic Christian Jews. They became Christians, but they were not free from the Jewish rules and laws and traditions, especially from the regulations about eating food. Even though they accepted Jesus as their Savior, they were still in the Old Testament. In the book of Acts 15, there were sharp dispute and debate among early Christians after the Apostle Paul's first missionary journey. So there was a council at Jerusalem. After much discussion, they agreed not to make difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God (Acts 15: 7-11). However, the legalistic Christian Jews did not eat animals without a split hoof, thinking that they were unclean. They also didn't eat birds such as the eagle, the vulture, the red kite, the horned owl, and bats. (Lev 11:1-19). Looking at them, the gospel-centered Christians despised them, saying, "You have no gospel faith, so you are not free. Even though you believe the gospel, you have not grasped the freedom of the gospel." Those who had gospel faith in Jesus and ate everything freely were the strong Christians. These strong Christians looked down on the legalistic Christians, thinking that they were still too immature to grasp the secrets and freedom of Christianity. On the other hand, the weak Christians who only ate vegetables condemned the strong Christians and did not accept them.

Another example of the conflicts is the day of worship. Look at verse 5. "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind." In Paul's time, the day of worship was a big issue. Some considered one day as the Sabbath day. Others considered every day as the Sabbath. This problem came from the Old Testament background. To the people of Israel, there were 3 major festivals: the Feast of the Passover, the Feast of Harvest, and the Feast of Tabernacles. (Ex 23:14-17) In addition, they had many kinds of special days of worshiping God. But since the gospel of Jesus came, the observance of many historical and traditional days of worship was largely ignored. On the other hand, Christians gradually began to meet on Sunday to worship God. This did not have any Biblical background. But since Jesus Christ rose again on Sunday, they were willing to keep the Sabbath on Sunday. Later, keeping the Sabbath on Sunday became a tradition of Christian churches. But in Paul's day, there were two kinds of people. To one kind, one day was enough to observe the Sabbath. The other kind wanted to keep all the traditional and historical days as special days of worship.

Those kinds of the problems are small, compared to great and wonderful salvation we received by his grace. However, because of the issues, Christians in Rome had difficulties in the ministry. In reality, it was not easy for anyone to accept those whose cultural backgrounds were different. How could Paul help them to handle these kinds of problems in Rom?

Let's look at verses 3 and 4. "The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand." First of all, Christians should accept each other because the sovereign God has already accepted them. God saved each individual with the sacrifice of his one and only son Jesus. He called them as his servants. As the sovereign master, God makes them stand or fall. Christians stand because God is able to make them stand. In a sense, we do not have a power to make others stand or fall. We have no right to despise those who are weak in faith. We have no right to condemn those who are strong in faith. Only our Master Jesus can judge us. As Christian fellows, we have to accept and respect others as God's servants.

Second, Christians should accept others because they live for the Lord. Clear life direction and purpose to live for the Lord enables us to overcome minor issues. Look at verses 6-8. "Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord." Paul urges them to do everything in the Lord. The phrase "do it to the Lord" is repeated six times in verses 6-8. "Paul urges them to do everything in the Lord. The phrase "do it to the Lord" is repeated six times in verses 6-8. "Do it to the Lord" means, in this particular case, "in the Lord," or, "for his name's sake." When they claimed they were right, they had to be sure that

they were doing so in Jesus, or for Jesus' name's sake. Jesus should be the focal point of their thought world. Do it to the Lord" means, in this particular case, "in the Lord," or, "for his name's sake." When they claimed they were right, they had to be sure that they were doing so in Jesus, or for Jesus' name's sake. Jesus should be the focal point of their thought world. Food or day matters do not have impact on our eternal salvation. We should not argue and complain each other because of the peripheral or side issues. Out of thankful heart and love, we have to live for his name's sake.

Third, Christians should accept others because God alone is the Judge. Look at verses 9-12. "For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God." So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God." Jesus died and rose again, and he became the Ruler of the living and the dead. Jesus is our Judge and the Lord of all. Therefore, we cannot condemn or look down on our brothers because one day we have to stand before God's judgment seat. Every knee will bow before God; every tongue will confess to Him. At the time of God's last judgment, we will see God's shining glory, and all men of all languages must come and bow down on their knees before his throne to be judged according to their deeds. (2 Co 5:10) At the time of God's last judgment, those who judged and condemned others will be the most accountable for their deeds. Therefore, we should not be exclusive by judging and condemning others. We must accept our fellow Christian brothers as God has accepted us. Despising or condemning other Christians seems to be a light matter. But that is not the case. If we don't accept others, it is the evidence that we are not accepting God and his precious children.

Sometimes it is really difficult to accept others who are totally different from us: it is a kind of spiritual battle. The Christians gathered in Rome had a diversity of cultural backgrounds. If they could overcome their diversity of backgrounds, they could become a big Christian army force that would march out to the whole world with the gospel of Jesus. If not, they would remain as a handful of Jewish immigrants and some Gentiles in Rome just trying to survive. Therefore the Apostle Paul gave them the clear direction to accept each other and build up a spirit of unity in Christ.

To build up the body of Jesus Christ and serve our campus mission, we must accept our fellow Christian brothers unconditionally. If we do not accept our weak or different brothers, we are not living for Jesus' name's sake, if we do not accept others, we are not living for the glory of God, not to mention doing the will of God. We must lay our judgmental spirit down and accept others. When we can accept any kind of fellow Christian brothers with the mind of Christ, God is pleased and we can grow as spiritual men.

Second, act in love (13-23). In verses 1-12, we learned about our attitude toward others. We should accept each other. In verses 13-23, Apostle Paul give another important advice for Christians: **careful act in love**. As a Christian, we are free from the

bonds of sin and death. We are free to do anything. We are free in deed in Jesus. However, Apostle Paul advises Christians to act in love. Look at verse 13. "Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister." In this verse, Paul again urges not to pass judgment on one another. Instead, he asks Christians not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of other fellows. The best way of acting in love is to actively serve them and show our love for them. However, in this world, we have limitations to show our love. So the next best way is not to put any stumbling block in the way of others. In the verse 13, "stumbling block" and "obstacle" mean bad influence. In Christian life, influence is more important than anything else. Look at verse 14. "As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean." Paul was sure that no food is unclean in itself. During his earthly ministry, Jesus clearly declared all foods clean (Mk7:17–19). In Act 10:15, God said to Apostle Peter, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean". God made the world and everything in it. God made all the animals and all kinds of fish in the sea for men to eat. So no food is unclean in itself. This is what Paul believed on the basis of Genesis teaching. But if anyone regards something as unclean, we must agree that it is unclean. Even if we are convinced about a certain truth, if it can make our fellow brothers stumble, we should not claim the truth we believe; we have to wait patiently until our fellow brother comes to understand the Bible truth concerning the matter of clean and unclean. We must be understanding of our fellow brother's spiritual condition. Also, we should not distress our fellow Christian brother because of what we eat; otherwise we are no longer acting in love(15). Careful consideration and love for others make healthy Christian community.

Let's read verses 17 and 18. "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval." The kingdom of God is not a matter of human activities such as eating and drinking; it is revealing God's righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. If we fight for the matter of eating and drinking, we cannot experience the kingdom of God. So we must serve God and our fellow brothers to reveal his righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit through our daily lives, instead of insisting on our opinions. We should not destroy the work of God for the sake of trivial issues. It is better for a man not to do anything that causes someone else to stumble.

Let's read the verse 19. "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification." In this verse, the Apostle Paul tells us to make every effort to act in love and to be a good influence. As we know, Jesus spent only three years in his public ministry. But he gave us a good influence through his obedience to God's will. Plainly speaking, the church of Christ is based on Jesus' death and resurrection and on the second coming of Jesus Christ. But the life of the church of Jesus Christ is based on the influence of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus bore the weaknesses of his disciples and loved them to the point of death. We may imitate the love and care of Jesus so that we do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

How can we act in love and be a good influence? Look at verse 21. "It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall." Paul again encourages Christians not to do anything that will cause our brothers to fall, whether it is eating meat or drinking or doing something else. (Lk 17:2) To be a good influence is hard. But without being a good influence, we cannot be called the children of God. To act in love or to be a good influence is not easy. To be a good influence, sometimes we have to keep the secrets of faith between ourselves and God only, so as not to distress our weak brothers (22). Sometimes when we act in love and try to be a good influence, we are greatly misunderstood and badly criticized by wicked people. What is worse, we fall into doubt because of others' criticism. However, we must have faith in God when we are doing good, so that we may overcome our doubt and self-condemnation. When we act in love and try to be a good influence, we must do it with faith, because everything that does not come from faith is sin (23). Sometimes, we do the work of God, but what we prayed and worked for does not seem to bring a good result. We wonder if we did something wrong. However, if we did it by faith, we can commit it to God. So whatever we do, we must do it by faith.

Conclusion: In this passage we learn that we must accept those whose faith is weak and not condemn those whose faith is strong because the sovereign God saved and called other believers. As Christians, we must do everything to the Lord. We have to let our judgmental spirit go because only God is our judge. Finally, we have to make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. We may not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up (Gal 6:9). May God bless us to be a source of blessing to others.