

# 113. The Book of Romans 14:1-4

*Paul's Epistle to the Romans*  
A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier

(1-28-26)

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This evening in our study in Romans we'll be entering into Chapter 14 where Paul continues to give some final exhortations regarding the way Christians are to conduct themselves for Jesus as lights in a dark world—

## Romans 14:1–3 (NKJV)

<sup>1</sup> Receive one who is weak in the faith, *but* not to disputes over doubtful things. <sup>2</sup> For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables. <sup>3</sup> Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.

The issue that Paul is addressing here is—UNITY.

Unity in the Body of Christ is not only important—it's essential for victory over the enemy.

Satan knows that only too well, that he can't defeat us unless he first divides us—which is why his main strategy against the Church has always been, "*divide and conquer!*"

There is strength and victory in unity, which is why Satan wants to destroy the unity in our churches through petty bickering over non-essential doctrines. Jesus warned us that "*A house (marriage, family, church, country) that is divided against itself will not stand.*" (Mark 3:25)

And yet most of Satan's success against the people of God doesn't come from *outside* the church—but from those inside the Church—in the form of division.

Some of this division is the result of '*tares*' planted among the '*wheat*' (unbelievers who are not spiritually minded and therefore are always murmuring and complaining about things which lead to division).

Sometimes division in the Church stems from immaturity and carnality—

## 1 Corinthians 3:1–4 (NKJV)

<sup>1</sup> And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. <sup>2</sup> I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able; <sup>3</sup> for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men? <sup>4</sup> For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?

With many others division results from pride and the need to be '*right*' about everything (even with regard to non-essential doctrines like: the timing of the rapture, the gifts of the Spirit, God still have a plan for Israel or are they done...etc).

This kind of spiritual pride leads to division over non-essentials rather than focusing on what really matters in the Christian life—Jesus and reaching the lost. Again, Satan's strategy has always been—"*divide and conquer*"

because he knows when we're *unified* we're strong and victorious—but when we're *divided* we are weak and defeated.

**As Chapter 14 opens up**, Paul focuses on something that had divided the Christian Church in Rome—LEGALISM.

One of the main problems with legalism is that—people want to make their *convictions* about spiritual and moral things a *universal* mandate for all Christians to adhere to. This gives them a sense of self-worth by making them feel spiritually superior and leads to them looking down on others that don't follow their example (just like the Pharisees).

The legalism that Paul addresses in Romans 14 has to do with "*diets and days*."

**Romans 14:1–3 (NLT)**

<sup>1</sup> Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong. <sup>2</sup> For instance, one person believes it's all right to eat anything. But another believer with a sensitive conscience will eat only vegetables. <sup>3</sup> Those who feel free to eat anything must not look down on those who don't. And those who don't eat certain foods must not condemn those who do, for God has accepted them.

Again, the issue here is *legalism* which seeks to be right with God based on externals and persecutes those who want to live by grace—

**Colossians 2:16-17 (NKJV)**

<sup>16</sup> So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, <sup>17</sup> which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

Legalism connected with *salvation* is heresy—legalism connected with *sanctification* is immaturity. Legalism in a church leads to division which fractures that church and leads ultimately (if not dealt with), to the destruction of that church—

**Galatians 5:15 (NIV)**

<sup>15</sup> If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

Division fueled by legalism has always been a major problem among God's people in both the Old Testament (Numbers 16 and the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram) as well as in the New Testament Church age.

Almost every local church mentioned in the New Testament had divisions to contend with—no wonder the psalmist wrote, "*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity*" (Psalm 133:1).

Let me say it again—the devil loves to divide the Church because he knows that a *divided* church is a defeated church, which is why Jesus prayed to His Father on the night before His crucifixion—"*Father I pray that they might be one even as we are one.*" (John 17:11)

In Romans 14 Paul was addressing those who were "**strong in the faith**"—that is, those who understood their spiritual liberty in Christ and were not enslaved to non-essentials like diets and/or the observing of holy days.

It's interesting that those who are legalistic in their faith often think of themselves as being more mature and spiritual in their walk with God than other Christians.

However, in reality, Paul tells us that they tend to be the most immature and carnal in their faith because—mature Christians live by grace and not law. So, when Paul talks about those who are "**weak in the faith**"

(Romans 14:1)—he’s talking about immature believers who felt obligated to obey legalistic rules concerning what they ate and when they worshiped.

The problem was (as so often is the case), those in the church who were “**weak in the faith**”, because they thought they were ‘*strong in the faith*’—were judging and condemning those Christians who enjoyed their freedom in Christ and were living by grace.

This, apparently, had become such a source of irritation and conflict that the mature believers in Christ didn’t even want these immature, proud, judgmental, ‘know-it-all’s’ in their churches anymore.

Look, Paul had dealt with people like this his whole ministry and he knew firsthand how frustrating they could be—but throwing them out of the church was not the answer.

Therefore, he admonished those stronger in the faith to:

**Romans 14:1 (NKJV)**

**<sup>1</sup> Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.**

In other words, “***Don’t exclude them from your churches, but rather receive them—but not with the intent of changing their convictions by debating or arguing with them.***”

Now, in Romans 14 verses 2 and 3 Paul addresses one of the biggest and most controversial issues in the first century church—eating meat sacrificed to idols.

**Romans 14:2–3 (NKJV)**

**<sup>2</sup> For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables. <sup>3</sup> Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.**

Some of the members thought it was a sin to eat meat sacrificed to an idol (because they believed it made them one with the pagan deity)—so they ate only vegetables at the weekly church ‘*love feast*’ (potluck).

Other believers were convinced that it didn’t matter that the animal had been sacrificed to a pagan idol, they weren’t worshipping the idol, and besides it was the best meat at the best price in town—so it would be a sin not to partake!

Now, if each Christian had kept their convictions to themselves, there would have been no problem—but they began to criticize and judge one another convinced that the other was wrong and carnal and that they themselves were right on the issue and therefore more spiritual.

Satan loves to divide believers from one another and get them fighting over the non-essentials of the Christian faith—because it destroys our witness to the world.

**John 13:34-35 (NKJV)**

**<sup>34</sup> "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. <sup>35</sup> "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."**

Now certainly there are doctrines that are essential and *must* be contended for (Jude 1:3)—such as the divinity of Christ, the inspiration of Scripture, a person is saved by faith alone in Christ alone apart from works, etc. The

problem is when Christians start contending for non-essential ‘gray areas’ of doctrine causing them to divide and break fellowship with one another. Unfortunately, this happens all the time.

Spurgeon accused Joseph Parker (another pastor of a large church in London) of being worldly because he went to the theater—and Parker accused Spurgeon of being carnal because he smoked cigars.

Moody almost fell over when he saw Spurgeon smoking—but Moody was over 300 pounds and Spurgeon looked at him and said, “*At least I eat in moderation!*” Often conflicts are cultural in nature—stemming from where a Christian was born and how they were raised—for example:

In America if we all went out after church and had a cold beer—that would be considered carnal and even sinful, but Christian women in America don’t think anything of wearing make-up.

However, in Germany the reverse is true. There are many Christians in this country who sincerely believe that going to the beach is wrong because it promotes lust and immorality—but many others were born and raised near the beach and have no problem at all.

Some Christians have a strong conviction that going to the movies is wrong (even if they’re “G” or “PG” rated) because it supports all the immoral garbage coming out of Hollywood. Then there are those who believe that Christians shouldn’t celebrate Christmas or Easter because of their pagan origins.

I talked to one of our Calvary pastors who told me about a man in his church who thinks that using computers and the internet is sinful because they’re going to be used by the Antichrist when he comes on the scene—concerns he constantly communicated to this pastor through text messages!

All of these are a matter of personal convictions, which I personally don’t have a problem with—as long as you don’t try to impose your personal convictions on everyone else! When it comes to personal convictions on non-essentials, we are not to play Holy Spirit but to love one another and realize that our unity in Christ is more important than my convictions on non-essentials.

Augustine said, “*On essentials—unity; on non-essentials—liberty; in all things—charity.*”

**Romans 14:3 (NKJV)**

<sup>3</sup> Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; **for God has received him.**

In other words, “***God has received him into His family—who are you to reject or judge him?***”

What too many Christians fail to realize is that in these cases of judging and dividing over non-essential doctrines and practices—in God’s eyes the division is more offensive to Him than the petty issues Christians have divided over.

Let me give you 3 tests to help you determine if you should be involved with something that is considered a ‘gray area’—these come out of 1Cor.6 and 1Cor.10

**1. The Utility Test—will it profit me and be helpful in my race for Christ.**

**1 Corinthians 6:12a (NKJV)**

<sup>12</sup> All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful...[watching the ballgame instead of coming to Bible study]

2. The Authority Test—will it enslave me by bringing me under its authority or control.

**1 Corinthians 6:12b (NKJV)**

<sup>12</sup> ...All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. [having a glass of wine with dinner]

3. The Charity Test—will it hurt or cause another Christian to stumble.

**1 Corinthians 10:23-24 (NKJV)**

<sup>23</sup> All things are lawful for me...but not all things edify. <sup>24</sup> Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. [exercising my freedom in such a way that another Christian is stumbled]

**Romans 14:4 (NKJV)**

<sup>4</sup> **Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.**

God is the Master and each Christian is His servant—and it is wrong for anyone to interfere in this relationship—besides, we don't know the whole story. You might see someone come out of church on a Sunday morning, light up a cigarette in the parking lot and say to yourself—*"How sinful for them to do something like that—how can they even be saved!!"*

But what you don't know is that a month earlier they were smoking dope and crack cocaine—God is working in their life! God is making them *'stand in the faith,'* He is working on them—and therefore, it's wrong to judge them when we don't even have all the facts!

That's what Paul is essentially saying here—stop judging and looking down on the weaker brethren, God loves them and is working through His Holy Spirit to mature them in Christ—*"In His time"*—not on our timetable.

Look, there are times when the Holy Spirit will lead you to speak to another Christian about carnal behavior in a spirit of love and concern—that can be used by God to grow them in their walk with Him. But then let the Holy Spirit take it from there—don't try to make them a 'clone' of yourself, setting yourself up as the standard and model for all Christians to follow and emulate.

It is encouraging to know that our success in the Christian life does not depend on the opinions or attitudes of other Christians—God is the Judge and He is able to make His children stand in the faith—

**Romans 14:4 (NKJV)**

<sup>4</sup> **Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.**

The word **"servant"** here suggests that Christians ought to busy themselves serving the Lord because if they did—they wouldn't have time to judge or condemn other Christians. I'm a firm believer that troublemakers are idle Christians who have nothing better to do with their time than to gossip and sow discord and division in churches.

People who are busy winning souls to Jesus and serving Him have more important things to do than to spend their time criticizing and gossiping about others.

### 1 Corinthians 4:3–5 (NLT)

<sup>3</sup> As for me, it matters very little how I might be evaluated by you or by any human authority. I don't even trust my own judgment on this point. <sup>4</sup> My conscience is clear, but that doesn't prove I'm right. It is the Lord himself who will examine me and decide. <sup>5</sup> So don't make judgments about anyone ahead of time—before the Lord returns. For he will bring our darkest secrets to light and will reveal our private motives. Then God will give to each one whatever praise is due.

### Matthew 7:1 (NLT)

<sup>1</sup> "Do not judge others [their motives], and you will not be judged.

And yet the Lord goes on to tell us in John's gospel chapter 7—

### John 7:24 (NKJV)

<sup>24</sup> "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

There are things we must judge as wrong—but it must always be with '*righteous*' judgment—in other words, things that God has clearly said are wrong and sinful in His Word—

### 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NKJV)

<sup>9</sup> Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

**Word of Warning**—don't take what Paul says in this section of Romans 14 about '*diets*' and '*days*' (and other non-essential doctrines)—and treat them like they are *essential* doctrines (as in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and other Scriptures).

We need to understand that these principles apply only to matters that are morally *neutral*.

When it comes to the moral absolutes in the Bible—we cannot make them a matter of personal conviction—such as, "*I can live with my girlfriend because it's my personal conviction, because we love each other, that it isn't wrong.*"

Once again, the issue that Paul is addressing here is non-essential, gray areas of the faith.

When it comes to non-essential, gray areas the Bible admonishes us to let our *conscience* be our guide.

But it also admonishes us to respect the conscience and convictions of other believers who you don't agree with because they are trying to honor God in their lives also.

Next time we'll look at what Paul has to say about observing special '**days**'—primarily what the Bible says about Christians observing the Sabbath.

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