

LESSON 4

Love That Welcomes

Welcome anyone who is weak in faith, but don't argue about disputed matters. One person believes he may eat anything, while one who is weak eats only vegetables. One who eats must not look down on one who does not eat, and one who does not eat must not judge one who does, because God has accepted him.

— Romans 14:1-3

We love by receiving the brother God has already received, because the welcome we offer him is never the first one he was handed.

Introduction

OUR PREVIOUS LESSON ASKED US TO BRING OUR WEAKNESS INTO THE OPEN and boast about it. This lesson sits us down next to somebody else's. This is the harder assignment. Paul opens with the same root he had been building all through the Corinthian letter. *Welcome anyone who is weak in faith*, Romans 14:1. Weakness is easy to admire on the page. It is harder to sit beside on a pew.

Paul had already set the terms in the previous paragraph. *Do not owe anyone anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law*, Romans 13:8. He closes that chapter by telling the Romans to *put on the Lord Jesus Christ*, Romans 13:14. A debt that never gets paid off, and a Lord who has to be worn. Romans 14 shows what those two things look like during a normal week, when the brother across the aisle keeps a rule we laid aside years ago.

Food and days were the two things the Romans were fighting about, and God had left both matters open by the time Paul wrote. We keep our own list. Most of us can name the brother whose scruples strike us as narrow and the one whose liberty makes us uneasy, and we may have never had either man at our table. Paul never settles the disputed thing itself. He settles what we owe the man with whom we disagree.

Romans 14:1-3 – A Welcome Already Granted

Welcome anyone who is weak in faith, but don't argue about disputed matters, Romans 14:1.

The verb is *proslambanō*, and it asks for more than the English lets on. It means to take a person to yourself, into your own circle and your own house.¹⁷ Tolerance can be practiced at a distance. This verb puts a man inside our house. Then comes the limit. Do not receive him in order to work on him. The welcome is not the opening move of an argument about the thing his conscience will not let him do.

Who is weak here? We call a brother weak when his conscience will not allow him to exercise a liberty he actually has. Something in his upbringing or his old religion has fenced it off, and he cannot cross that

Two Errors, One Reason

Romans 14:1-3 - Paul hands each side its own warning

THE COMMAND	
"Welcome anyone who is weak in faith, but don't argue about disputed matters." Romans 14:1	
THE STRONG He understands his freedom and uses it without a second thought. MUST NOT LOOK DOWN <i>exouthenō</i> to treat as nothing, to count a man at zero "One who eats must not look down on one who does not eat," Romans 14:3	THE WEAK His conscience will not let him use a liberty he actually has. MUST NOT JUDGE <i>krinō</i> to pass judgment on, to hand down a verdict "and one who does not eat must not judge one who does," Romans 14:3
"because God has accepted him," Romans 14:3 The same verb as the command in verse 1. At verse 10 both warnings come back as questions, in reverse order.	

Neither one is asked to change his mind. Both are asked to open the door.

fence with a clear heart. We call him strong when he understands the freedom and uses it without hesitation. Neither word says anything about sin, and neither man is being graded on his devotion.

Both of them are in danger, and Paul names the danger for each.

One who eats must not look down on one who does not eat, and one who does not eat

must not judge one who does, because God has accepted him, Romans 14:3.

When we are the strong ones, our temptation is contempt. The word means treating a person as nothing, counting him at zero.¹⁸ When we are the weak ones, our temptation is the verdict. We watch the liberty and read it as compromise. Then Paul cuts under both of them with five words. *God has accepted him.* It is the same verb he used in verse 1. The welcome Paul commands us to extend, God has already given, and He did not wait for the dispute to be settled first.

Romans 14:4 – Whose Servant Is He?

Who are you to judge another's household servant? Before his own Lord he stands or falls, Romans 14:4.

The picture is a household. The man under evaluation belongs to somebody, and that somebody is not us.¹⁹ A servant answers to the master who owns him, and outside opinion moves nothing in that house. So the question is never whether we have a view. Most of us have one. The question is whether anyone asked for it.

Then Paul says: *And he will stand, because the Lord is able to make him stand.*

He Will Stand

Romans 14:4 - one verse, four beats, and the last one is a promise

THE QUESTION	HIS OWN LORD	THE TURN	THE REASON
"Who are you to judge another's household servant?" <i>oiketēs</i> A servant of another man's house. He is not ours.	"Before his own Lord he stands or falls." <i>stēkei · pīptei</i> The verdict is rendered in another house.	"And he will stand," <i>stathēsetai</i> Paul does not leave it open. He predicts the outcome.	"because the Lord is able to make him stand." <i>dynatei · stēsai</i> The standing is God's work, not the brother's.
A RARE WORD FOR GOD'S POWER <i>dynatei</i> Romans 14:4 - the Lord is able to make him stand <i>dynatei</i> 2 Corinthians 9:8 and 13:3 - the only other two <i>stēsai</i> Jude 24 - to make you stand in his presence			

Both sides are watching the other for a collapse. Neither one is holding him up.

He could have stopped at telling us to mind our own business. Instead, he predicts the outcome. The brother we have been quietly watching for a collapse will be on his feet at the end, and the reason has nothing to do with how carefully anyone supervised him. The verb is *dynateō*, a rare word the New Testament uses only three times, and in all three instances it describes

God's power rather than a man's.²⁰

Jude puts the same standing verb to work in his closing sentence. *Now to him who is able to protect you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of his glory, Jude 24.* Both parties in Romans 14 are certain the other one is headed for a fall. Both of them are wrong about who is holding him up.

Romans 14:5-9 – Both of Them Belong to the Lord

One person judges one day to be more important than another day. Someone else judges every day to be the same. Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind, Romans 14:5.

A borrowed conviction will not carry weight. Paul wants each of us settled in our own mind, which means none of us is asked to pretend, and none of us is asked to fake a scruple we do not have. Watch the next verse. *Whoever observes the day, observes it for the honor of the Lord. Whoever eats, eats for the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; and whoever does not eat, it is for the Lord that he does not eat it, and he gives thanks to God,* Romans 14:6.

Opposite practice. Identical motive. Both men aim at the same Person, and both give thanks over the plate.

For none of us lives for himself, and no one dies for himself. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord, Romans 14:7-8.

Count how often the Lord turns up across verses 6 through 8. Six times in three verses. Paul is driving a nail, and the head of it is ownership. Then he tells us what it cost to make that ownership real. *Christ died and returned to life for this: that he might be Lord over both the dead and the living,* Romans 14:9. He went into death and came back out of it in order to hold both sides of it. A brother purchased at that price is not ours to manage.

Six Times, One Owner

Romans 14:6-9 · opposite practice, identical allegiance

"Whoever observes the day, observes it for the honor of the Lord"	Romans 14:6	DAYS
"Whoever eats, eats for the Lord, since he gives thanks to God"	Romans 14:6	FOOD
"whoever does not eat, it is for the Lord that he does not eat"	Romans 14:6	FOOD
"If we live, we live for the Lord"	Romans 14:8	LIFE
"and if we die, we die for the Lord"	Romans 14:8	DEATH
"whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord"	Romans 14:8	BOTH
"Christ died and returned to life for this: that he might be Lord over both the dead and the living." Romans 14:9 The lordship was purchased. He went into death and came back out of it in order to hold both sides.		

Six times in three verses. Paul is driving a nail, and the head of it is ownership.

Romans 14:10-12 – One Seat, and It Is Not Ours

But you, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God, Romans 14:10.

Look at those two verbs. They are the same two Paul used in verse 3, one to each party, and here they come back as questions with the order reversed. Verse 3 said do not do it. Verse 10 asks who we imagine we are.

The judgment seat is a *bēma*, the raised platform where a Roman official heard a case and handed down a decision.²¹ The word for our standing in front of it is built on the same root as the promise back in verse 4. The Lord is able to make our brother stand, and He will do it in the one place where standing counts.

So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God, Romans 14:12.

Of himself. The brother whose conscience is tighter than ours will answer for his own record, and so will the one whose liberty makes us uneasy. Each of us will have our own record open, and nothing in it concerns anybody else. Finally, Paul names what is really at stake. *For if your brother or sister is hurt by what you eat, you are no longer walking according to love, Romans 14:15.* He never does settle the question of the meat. He settles the walking.

Looking to Christ

Food and days had both been used against the Lord Himself long before the Romans took up the argument. Mark records one of those occasions in his second chapter.

While he was reclining at the table in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who were following him, Mark 2:15.

Levi had been sitting at a tax booth when Jesus called him Mark 2:14. Now his house is full, and the guest list is the entire community of Levi's friends. *When the scribes who were Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Mark 2:16.*

They asked nothing about His doctrine that day. Their complaint was the guest list. His answer went straight past what they had asked. *It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick. I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners, Mark 2:17.* The word standing behind "those who are well" is the ordinary word for the strong.²² The strong have no use for a physician, and that is exactly their trouble. Notice that He declined to settle their dispute. He named what He had come to do, and He kept eating. Paul says it outright a chapter past our text, using the verb Romans 14 opened on. *Therefore welcome one another, just as Christ also welcomed you, to the glory of God, Romans 15:7.*

Nobody in Levi's house had earned a seat, and nobody in your congregation has earned one either. The Lord who had every reason to turn down the invitation walked in and sat down, and He is the One now

asking us to move over for a brother whose conscience is not shaped like ours.

The Table Was the Objection

Mark 2 · the two things Romans 14 fights over were both used against Him

THE SAME TWO MATTERS Food, Mark 2:16. Days, Mark 2:24. Both charges land in one chapter.	
THE OBJECTION WHAT THEY SAW <i>"Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"</i> Mark 2:16 Levi had been sitting at a tax booth an hour before. They raised no question about His doctrine that day. They objected to His table.	THE ANSWER WHAT HE SAID <i>"It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick."</i> Mark 2:17 ischyontes is the ordinary word for the strong, and the strong have no use for a physician.
<i>"Therefore welcome one another, just as Christ also welcomed you, to the glory of God."</i> Romans 15:7 The same verb that opened Romans 14:1 and answered it at 14:3.	

Nobody at that table had earned a seat. He walked in and sat down.

Conclusion and Application

There are five things we can home from these twelve verses. God has already welcomed the man whose scruples do not match ours. That man is somebody else's servant, and his Master intends to keep him on his feet. Two Christians can do opposite things on the same day and be aiming at the same Lord. Every one of us has an appointment at a judgment seat where we answer for ourselves alone. And the Lord who commands this welcome extended it first, at a table where the guests were the scandal.

So put the questions to yourself. Who in this congregation have you quietly filed as too narrow? Who have you filed as too loose? When did you last argue a disputed matter with somebody you had never once invited into your home? Is there a liberty you have been exercising in front of a brother who finds it hard to watch?

Welcome anyone who is weak in faith, Romans 14:1. That welcome reached us before we handed it to anyone. Passing it along is what love does with it.

For Discussion

1. Romans 13:8 calls love a debt that never gets paid off. How does that verse change the way the command in Romans 14:1 sounds?

2. Define *weak* and *strong* as Paul uses them in this chapter. What is neither word saying?
3. The verb translated *welcome* means to take a person to yourself. What does that ask for beyond leaving a brother alone?
4. Paul assigns a different temptation to each party in Romans 14:3. Name both of them. Which one is yours?
5. What reason does Paul give at the end of verse 3 for the command he just gave, and what does that reason settle?
6. In Romans 14:4, who is responsible for keeping the servant on his feet? What should that do to our worry that a brother is about to fall?
7. Romans 14:6 says two men with opposite practices have the same motive. How would we learn to see that in each other?

8. Count how often *the Lord* appears in Romans 14:6-8. What is Paul establishing by repeating it that many times?

9. In Mark 2:15-17, what were the scribes objecting to, and how did Jesus answer them? What did He decline to do?

10. Name one brother or sister whose conscience differs from yours on a matter of preference. What would welcoming that person look like before our next class?

Looking Ahead

Lesson 5 – Love That Strengthens, 2 Timothy 2:1-7

Romans 14:4 promised that the Lord is able to make a brother stand. Next week, we'll see where we go for the strength to do the standing.

You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, 2 Timothy 2:1. The form of the verb points at strength received rather than strength mustered, and the place Timothy draws it from is grace. That is the same well Ephesians 4:7 and Romans 12:6 have already sent us to.

Then Paul hands him a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer, and tells him to think it over.

Read 2 Timothy 2:1-7 before the next class. Watch how much of the paragraph concerns what we pass on to somebody else rather than what we keep for ourselves.

¹⁷ *Proslambanō*, in the middle voice, “to take to oneself, receive into one’s home or circle.” BDAG, s.v. προσλαμβάνω. The verb stands at Romans 14:1 and 14:3, and twice at Romans 15:7, where Paul names Christ as the One who did it first. He uses it again at Philemon 17, asking Philemon to receive a runaway household servant the way he would receive Paul himself.

¹⁸ Two verbs divide the two parties. *Exoutheneō*, “to treat as of no account, disdain, despise,” is assigned to the man who eats. *Krinō*, “to pass judgment on,” is assigned to the man who abstains. BDAG, s.v. ἐξουθενέω; s.v. κρίνω. Both verbs return at Romans 14:10 in reverse order, now as questions put to the reader, which brackets verses 3 through 10 as a single argument.

¹⁹ *Oiketēs*, “house slave, domestic servant,” a member of the household rather than a hand in the field. BDAG, s.v. οἰκέτης. The verbs that follow are *stēkei*, “he stands,” *piptei*, “he falls,” and *stēsai*, “to make stand.” Jude 24 uses *stēsai* of God setting His people on their feet in His presence.

²⁰ *Dynateō*, “to be able, be strong, be powerful,” occurs three times in the New Testament: Romans 14:4; 2 Corinthians 9:8; 2 Corinthians 13:3. BDAG, s.v. δυνατέω. The occurrence at 2 Corinthians 13:3 stands one verse above the sentence that closed Lesson 3, and the occurrence at 2 Corinthians 9:8 falls inside the text of Lesson 13.

²¹ *Bēma*, “tribunal, judgment seat,” the raised platform from which a magistrate rendered a decision; the same word describes Pilate’s seat at Matthew 27:19 and Gallio’s at Acts 18:12. BDAG, s.v. βῆμα. Paul places believers before it again at 2 Corinthians 5:10. The quotation in Romans 14:11 is drawn from Isaiah 45:23.

²² *Ischyontes*, from *ischyō*, “to be strong, be in good health,” stands behind “those who are well” at Mark 2:17. Luke’s account of the same saying uses *hygiainontes*, “those who are healthy,” Luke 5:31. Paul reopens the strong-and-weak question with a different pair of words at Romans 15:1.