

# **How Far Should We Go To Maintain Unity With Other Christians?**

## **Romans 14**

**Do you have friends that have stricter boundaries or rules than you? Like they don't play cards, drink alcohol, etc.?**

**Do you have friends that have less strict boundaries or rules than you? Like they don't play cards, drink alcohol, etc.?**

**(1) Theater. Some Christians think they should never patronize a commercial theater. Others believe they can, but they should be selective, just as with their literature.**

**(2) Cosmetics. This is not the issue it used to be, but it is controversial in certain parts of the world.**

**(3) Alcohol. The use of alcohol is a significant issue among American Christians today. Ironically, while there is growing medical evidence of its harmful physical and social effects, more Christians are exercising their freedom to partake.**

**(4) Tobacco. Traditionally, the Mason and Dixon Line has been the dividing line between the use and non-use of tobacco among many evangelical Christians.**

**(5) Card playing. Because of its association with gambling, Christians are ambivalent about using traditional cards. The controversy can also include similar games, as was mentioned above.**

**(6) Dancing. For some Christians, this is a litmus test, especially among youth.**

**(7) Fashion. Some Christians view trendiness as worldliness.**

**(8) Bible translation used. Your translation can be a quick acceptance or rejection in some Christian circles.**

**(9) Music. Today a heated controversy goes on regarding appropriate Christian music.**

**(10) Material wealth. Judging people on how they spend their money.**

**How do you make up the boundaries that you do or don't have?**

**The early church was very diverse with Jewish and Gentile Christians. They had very little in common, and Paul explained how to get along.**

**What Does The Bible Say?**

Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong. 2 For instance, one person believes it's all right to eat anything. But another believer with a sensitive conscience will eat only vegetables. 3 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.

(Romans 14:1–3 NLT)

**Accepting each other's differences is our only option.**

5 In the same way, some think one day is more holy than another day, while others think every day is alike. You should each be fully convinced that whichever day you choose is acceptable.

6 Those who worship the Lord on a special day do it to honor him. Those who eat any kind of food do so to honor the Lord, since they give thanks to God before eating. And those who refuse to eat certain foods also want to please the Lord and give thanks to God. 7 For we don't live for ourselves or die for ourselves. 8 If we live, it's to honor the Lord. And if we die, it's to honor the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. 9 Christ died and rose again for this very purpose—to be Lord both of the living and of the dead. (Romans 14:5–9 NLT)

**The word “Lord” is found seven times in these verses. We do not have the right to “play God” in another Christian’s life.**

10 So why do you condemn another believer? Why do you look down on another believer? Remember, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11 For the Scriptures say, “ ‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bend to me, and every tongue will declare allegiance praise to God.’ ” 12 Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God. 13 So let’s stop condemning each other. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall. (Romans 14:10–13 NLT)

**We do not judge our brothers and sisters in things the Bible does not directly speak!**

**Making boundaries is what Lordship is all about. Please make sure we put Christ first in everything; however, we decide how.**

**Remember, this is not talking about sins mentioned in the Bible.**

14 I know and am convinced on the authority of the Lord Jesus that no food, in and of itself, is wrong to eat. But if someone believes it is wrong, then for that person it is wrong. 15 And if another believer is distressed by what you eat, you are not acting in love if you eat it. Don't let your eating ruin someone for whom Christ died. 16 Then you will not be criticized for doing something you believe is good. 17 For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Romans 14:14–17 NLT)

10 Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. (Romans 12:10 NLT)

**Honor others by respecting their beliefs on putting Christ first, even if you do not see their observances as making sense.**

## **How Can You Obey?**

**First, genuine acceptance of one another is the only option available to believers. (Romans 14:1)**

**Second, individual Christians can disagree over customs and social habits, and both be perfectly right with God. (Romans 14:6)**

**Third, we must submit to the Lordship of Christ and refrain from judging others because we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account of ourselves to him. (Romans 14:12-13)**

**These three elements are essential to maintain Christian unity amidst our fantastic diversity.**

**So how far should we go to maintain unity with other Christians? As far as we have to go. There is no end as long it is not over actual sins.**

### **Additional Notes:**

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at [www.crosswaveschurch.com/host](http://www.crosswaveschurch.com/host). Cross Waves has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

### **Additional Notes:**

This week's Deep Dive Into The Bible is from Michael S. Heiser, *I Dare You Not to Bore Me with the Bible*, ed. John D. Barry and Rebecca Van Noord (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press; Bible Study Magazine, 2014), 87–89.

### **Verses used in Deep Dive Into The Bible:**

14 All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’). (Isaiah 7:14 NLT)

18 This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 1:18 NLT)

43 See, I am standing here beside this spring. This is my request. When a young woman comes to draw water, I will say to her, “Please give me a little drink of water from your jug.” (Genesis 24:43 NLT)

8 “Yes, do!” the princess replied. So the girl went and called the baby’s mother. (Exodus 2:8 NLT)

25 Singers are in front, musicians behind; between them are young women playing tambourines. (Psalm 68:25 NLT)

3 How pleasing is your fragrance; your name is like the spreading fragrance of scented oils. No wonder all the young women love you! (Song of Solomon 1:3 NLT)

8 Even among sixty queens and eighty concubines and countless young women, (Song of Solomon 6:8 NLT)

19 how an eagle glides through the sky, how a snake slithers on a rock, how a ship navigates the ocean, how a man loves a woman. (Proverbs 30:19 NLT)

3 Let the king appoint agents in each province to bring these beautiful young women into the royal harem at the fortress of Susa. Hegai, the king's eunuch in charge of the harem, will see that they are all given beauty treatments. (Esther 2:3 NLT)

8 As a result of the king's decree, Esther, along with many other young women, was brought to the king's harem at the fortress of Susa and placed in Hegai's care. (Esther 2:8 NLT)

14 That evening she was taken to the king's private rooms, and the next morning she was brought to the second harem, where the king's wives lived. There she would be under the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch in charge of the concubines. She would never go to the king again unless he had especially enjoyed her and requested her by name. (Esther 2:14 NLT)

14 This is my request. I will ask one of them, 'Please give me a drink from your jug.' If she says, 'Yes, have a drink, and I will water your camels, too!'—let her be the one you have selected as Isaac's wife. This is how I will know that you have shown unfailing love to my master.'" (Genesis 24:14 NLT)

16 Rebekah was very beautiful and old enough to be married, but she was still a virgin. She went down to the spring, filled her jug, and came up again. (Genesis 24:16 NLT)

43 See, I am standing here beside this spring. This is my request. When a young woman comes to draw water, I will say to her, “Please give me a little drink of water from your jug.” (Genesis 24:43 NLT)

### **Explore:**

### **Believers Leave Judgment to God in Matters Not Clearly Spelled Out in Scripture (Romans 14:1-12)**

In this passage Paul dealt with disputes between believers that had the potential to create division in the church. These disputes did not center around major beliefs or doctrine related to salvation, but rather around people’s convictions concerning

certain debatable matters. Paul identified those on one side of the disputes as the weak (verse 1) and those on the other side as the strong (15:1).

Those Paul deemed weak were those who were not firmly established in the faith and did not feel the freedom to eat certain foods such as meat, while others believed they could eat anything (verse 2). Unless God personally convicted them of such eating, there were no restrictions. The weak in faith likely referred to Christians who remained committed to observing certain aspects of the Law, especially those that dealt with diet and specific holy days. This dispute had led to quarreling, disunity, and unfair judgments. Instead of arguing with one another, Paul instructed them to accept each other without passing judgment.

The one who felt the freedom to eat was despising or looking down on the one who chose to abstain (verse 3). The one who

chose to abstain was criticizing the one who felt free to eat. Each was putting himself in a position reserved only for God. Meanwhile, God welcomed all who believed, regardless of their stance on this particular issue. Verse 4 contains a rhetorical question that further supports the notion that it is God, and God alone, who is to judge. It is God's power that enables one to stand in the Judgment, not as a result of eating or not eating, but solely because of the work of Christ on his or her behalf.

In addition to disagreements over certain foods and beverages, some felt they should observe certain special days such as the Sabbath, Jewish festivals, and the new moon. Others, however, did not (verse 5). Neither position was explicitly right or wrong, and Paul simply taught that each should examine his own heart to determine how he felt the Lord would have him respond.

After all, both positions, when done with the right heart and motive, could be used to honor the Lord (verse 6).

In verses 7 and 8, the apostle pointed out that our lives are not our own. We belong to the Lord and should seek to honor Him in the way we live and even in the way we die. The apostle's mention of Jesus and His resurrection in verse 9 would serve to remind the dissenting parties that Christ's death was for all, regardless of which side of the issue they chose.

Paul asked more rhetorical questions in verse 10 regarding their judgment of one another. The truth was clear; everyone will stand before the judgment seat of God and God alone. To further illustrate this reality, Paul used Isaiah 49:18 and Isaiah 45:23 to re- mind readers that every person will one day bow and give an account of his or her life to God (and not to one another).

**Explore:**

Jesus Christ is the Sovereign Lord of all. Judgment should be left to Him in matters not clearly spelled out in Scripture.

Encourage parents and grandparents to discuss this key truth at home.

**Explore:**

**Believers Consider Others' Spiritual Well-Being as More Important Than Their Own Rights (Romans 14:13-23)**

The opening sentence of verse 13 provides both a conclusion to verses 1 through 12 and an introduction to verse 14. Paul challenged his readers to make every effort to build up one another spiritually, being careful not to cause others to stumble in their walk with God. The apostle encouraged them to remember that the practices one feels free to enjoy are not the main issue, but rather to live in a way that does not cause spiritual damage to a fellow believer.

Verse 14 also reveals Paul's conviction that there is no food or special day that is holy or unholy in and of itself. For the

individual, however, whose conscience renders something unclean, it is unclean (verse 14). The moment another believer stops giving thought to others and their personal convictions, they stop acting in love. And further, lest they act in judgment toward that “weaker brother,” they should remember that Christ died for both the strong and the weak (verse 15). In the spirit of love, we are to promote one another’s spiritual good and not just our own desires or agenda.

It is important that we make choices and decisions that work to strengthen and build up others. When Christ-followers parade liberty in front of those who may disagree with them, the actions will be viewed as wrong. It is not enough to act according to one’s conscience, one must also do it in a way that will not be misunderstood (verse 16). In verses 17-18, Paul appealed to the kingdom values of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit as the things that bring honor to God and strengthen

human relationships. After all, the kingdom of God is not merely a matter of eating and drinking.

Believers are to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit when deciding about matters not spelled out in Scripture. Even when we feel the freedom to make certain choices, we should watch out for the welfare of our fellow believers who do not enjoy that freedom. Paul warned the believers one final time of the danger of allowing issues such as food and drink to divide believers. He asserted that such division would destroy or tear down the work of God (verse 20). The “strong” should never try to influence the weak to violate his or her conscience. It is disobedience to do what one “thinks” is wrong. It would be better for the strong to avoid eating or drinking certain foods and beverages if doing so could cause the weak to stumble (verse 21).

The real issue for Paul was the believer’s faith (verses 22-23).

While he was not asking the strong to give up his meat, he did

want him to recognize that faith and one's response to it is what truly matters. After all, whatever (eating or not eating) is not done out of faith is sin. For help in determining whether or not we should participate in certain practices that are not clearly dealt with in Scripture, see [bit.ly/ LibertyPrinciples](http://bit.ly/LibertyPrinciples).

### **Explore:**

Why was eating some foods and observing certain days such an issue in the church? To begin with, many Jews still adhered to strict food regulations in accordance with the Law even after their conversion. Some would go so far as to avoid or end fellowship with those who did not adhere to the same strictness.

While the reason for some of them being vegetarians is uncertain, many scholars believe the possible offering of the meat to idols led these devout Jews to avoid anything that could be misconstrued or tainted by another's sin. Other scholars

perceive such dietary regulations to be certain ascetic practices adapted from pagan religions. Paganism and idolatry taught that strictness in such areas would demonstrate your belief and commitment to the “gods.” For Paul, the foods themselves were neutral. The problem was not in keeping such regulations. The issue was regarding the expectations and regulations that these same individuals would try to place on other believers. Further, for Paul, the observance of special days such as the new moon and Jewish festivals was another “disputable matter” that required toleration from each side. Some, however, wanted to require the keeping of such days for everyone.

**Explore:**

**Believers Follow Christ’s Example by Placing Others’**

**Interests Ahead of Their Own (Romans 15:1-7)**

In verse 1 of chapter 15, the apostle identified himself as one of the “strong” or those established in the faith. It is the obligation of the strong to bear with or endure with those who are “weak,” or not as firmly established in their faith. This bearing with means patiently putting up with and supporting those who are weaker in the faith. The strong are not to act only out of selfish pleasure or personal tastes. The strong or established believer’s aim should be to conduct him or herself in such a way as to help in the building up of others, the opposite of putting a stumbling block in their way (verse 2).

Paul urged believers to please others, following Christ’s example of putting the needs of others ahead of His own (verse 3). This expression of love was to be expressed in serving one another. In the greatest example ever, Jesus was willing to endure shame and humiliation for the benefit of those who would put their trust in Him and for the glory of the Father. Christ never misused His freedom to take advantage of others but instead always used it to

serve others. What a difference it would make if believers lived and sacrificed in the same way.

Whatever was written was a reference to the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures (verse 4). For Paul and fellow believers, the Scriptures served as a source of both instruction and encouragement. As believers learn from the past, they are motivated to endure and be comforted in the present, with anticipation of the future.

Knowing that endurance and encouragement comes from God, Paul prayed for the Roman believers (verses 5-6). He prayed specifically that God would give his readers a spirit of unity as they followed Christ together, a type of harmony that transcends the differences he had been addressing. It is an accord that will occur in spite of the differences. This type of harmony also enables both “sides” to come together with one mind and one heart to glorify God.

Now that Paul had put the issues in their proper perspective, encouraged them toward unity in spite of these differences, and prayed for the same, the apostle one last time encouraged both parties to accept one another in unity (verse 7). This can be accomplished in the same way Christ was willing to receive each of us. When believers think about how Christ received us, it becomes a small matter for us to choose to receive each other in spite of our differences.

### **Question 1 of 5**

Why is it important that Jesus was virgin birth?

### **Question 2 of 5**

Is it possible for something to be wrong for one believer but all right for another? Explain your answer.

### **Question 3 of 5**

Why does it glorify God for Christians to live in harmony?

### **Question 4 of 5**

Think of a believer who does not think it is right to participate in something you feel free to enjoy. How can you love and accept that person this week?

### **Question 5 of 5**

Think of a believer who participates in some- thing you do not feel comfortable doing. How can you love and accept that person this week?