

ROMANS

With this lesson, we begin our study of Romans Chapters 14 and 15. Following Paul's instructions regarding our transformation into citizens of heaven and how we are to act in this world as God's ambassadors, he turns our attention to how we are to treat other Christians. Our next two lessons will focus on our behavior as Christians—as followers of Christ—toward other believers.

Read Romans Chapter 14 from the Contemporary English Version (CEV) below, or from your favorite version.

Romans 14

Don't Criticize Others

¹Welcome all the Lord's followers, even those whose faith is weak. Don't criticize them for having beliefs that are different from yours. ²Some think it is all right to eat anything, while those whose faith is weak will eat only vegetables. ³But you should not criticize others for eating or for not eating. After all, God welcomes everyone. ⁴What right do you have to criticize someone else's servants? Only their Lord can decide if they are doing right, and the Lord will make sure that they do right.

⁵Some of the Lord's followers think one day is more important than another. Others think all days are the same. But each of you should make up your own mind. ⁶Any followers who count one day more important than another day do it to honor their Lord. And any followers who eat meat give thanks to God, just like the ones who don't eat meat.

⁷Whether we live or die, it must be for God, rather than for ourselves. ⁸Whether we live or die, it must be for the Lord. Alive or dead, we still belong to the Lord. ⁹This is because Christ died and rose to life, so that he would be the Lord of the dead and of the living. ¹⁰Why do you criticize other followers of the Lord? Why do you look down on them? The day is coming when God will judge all of us. ¹¹In the Scriptures God says,

"I swear by my very life
that everyone will kneel down
and praise my name!"

¹²And so, each of us must give an account to God for what we do.

Don't Cause Problems for Others

¹³We must stop judging others. We must also make up our minds not to upset anyone's faith. ¹⁴The Lord Jesus has made it clear to me that God considers all foods fit to eat. But if you think some foods are unfit to eat, then for you they are not fit.

¹⁵If you are hurting others by the foods you eat, you are not guided by love. Don't let your appetite destroy someone Christ died for. ¹⁶Don't let your right to eat bring shame to Christ. ¹⁷God's kingdom isn't about eating and drinking. It is about pleasing God, about living in peace, and about true happiness. All this comes from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸If you serve Christ in this way, you will please God and be respected by people. ¹⁹We should try to live at peace and help each other have a strong faith.

²⁰Don't let your appetite destroy what God has done. All foods are fit to eat, but it is wrong to cause problems for others by what you eat. ²¹It is best not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else that causes problems for other followers of the Lord. ²²What you believe about these things should be kept between you and God. You are fortunate, if your actions don't make you have doubts. ²³But if you do have doubts about what you eat, you are going against your beliefs. And you know that is wrong, because anything you do against your beliefs is sin.

In this lesson's study, let's examine the two "don'ts" that Paul addresses in Chapter 14 relative to our behavior towards other followers of Christ. Specifically, these are: (1) don't criticize others, and (2) don't cause problems for others—both of them referring to followers of Christ. He addresses the first problem, i.e., Christians criticizing other Christians, in Romans 14:1-12. He addresses the second problem, i.e., causing problems or hindering other followers, in Romans 14:13-23.

Consider the following questions.

1. Read Romans 14:1-4. Why does this passage admonish us against criticizing each other? Specifically, are we to criticize someone for how weak or how strong their faith is, or for what they eat or don't eat?
 - a. ANSWER: Paul tells us not to do this because "God has already accepted" both of these circumstances. If they are both acceptable to God, then who are we to judge.
2. In Romans 14:5-8, Paul talks about some followers holding up certain days as special while other followers holding up different days as special—or not recognizing the special days of another. Christ told the disciples that it wasn't important what people ate or drank; rather, what was important came from their heart. What do the following verses tell us about the special days foods Paul is writing about?
 - a. 1 Corinthians 10:25-27
 - i. ANSWER: "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it." Further, "eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience."
 - b. 1 Timothy 4:3-5
 - i. ANSWER: All food, and the special days that "God created," are "good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer."
3. Paul goes on to tell us not to judge one another in Romans 14:9-12. Read the following verses and note what they tell us about judgment and the believer.
 - a. John 5:22-30
 - i. ANSWER: Christ will be our judge; God has "made it so." If we believe in God and in his only son Jesus we will have "eternal life and will not be judged." The passage goes on to tell us that we will have "crossed over from death to life."
 - b. 2 Corinthians 5:10
 - i. ANSWER: We, as followers of Christ, will appear before the judgment seat of Christ, the Bema seat--where rewards are given for work done in the body. This will not be a condemning judgment; rather, it will be one of giving awards, if any have been earned while we were in our bodies on earth as followers of Christ.
 - c. 1 Corinthians 3:11-15
 - i. ANSWER: Believers will be judged on their works done in service to Christ. We will also experience loss at that judgment, since only those works that are not wood, hay or straw will survive the judgment. Even though all that we may have done is burned up in judgment, we "will suffer loss but yet will be saved." We cannot lose our salvation, but we can lose some or all of rewards in heaven.
4. Paul now moves to discuss another important lesson for believer, i.e., that we are not to hinder, nor we are not to cause problems for fellow believers. In Romans 14:13, Paul addresses the problem of judging one another. He is addressing believers, and he is telling us to stop judging other believers. The situation that he was addressing then is as relevant as it is today, i.e., fellow believers judging other believers by all of the wrong standards. What standard does the Bible tell us that we are to judge fellow believers? Read Matthew Chapter 7:15-20. How are we to judge one another?
 - a. ANSWER: We are to judge others by the fruit that their faith produces, and by no other measure. We are not to judge people by the clothes that they wear, nor by their wealth, nor by their friends, nor by anything that they eat--we are to judge others based only on their works, the fruit that their salvation produces.
5. Paul goes on to tell us that when we judge people by the wrong standards, we cause them to stumble in their walk with Christ. Read Romans 14:15-19. What does Paul tell us that God's Kingdom is really all about?
 - a. ANSWER: He tells us that it's about three things: 1) pleasing God, 2) living in peace, and 3) His Kingdom is about true happiness—the happiness we experience from the inside out, and not the outside in.
6. In Romans 14:20-21, how does Paul instruct us to live as true followers of Christ?
 - a. ANSWER: We are to live in a way so that none of our actions would cause problems for other followers of Christ. We can only do this with a humble heart and as servants of Jesus. Once we put ourselves in the role of being a judge we lose that humility and servant's heart, and worse, we'll cause a follower of Jesus to stumble.
7. In Paul's concluding remarks in Romans 14:22-23 what is Paul telling us that we must do in order to live a life pleasing to God?
 - a. ANSWER: We are to keep our personal beliefs, feelings, emotions, between God and our ourselves. And if you doubt something, yet continue to practice it anyway, you are sinning. We are to be firm in our faith and our convictions, but we are not to use that to strong-arm others into believing as we do. We are to be humble servants who, in love, live and work in peace with other believers; and we are not to be critical of them.

Paul pulls no punches as he lays out for us how we are to act—and how we are not to act—toward fellow believers. It is a trap that we can easily fall into, i.e., judging other believers, being critical of them, and putting ourselves in a pious position over others. None of these behaviors reflects a true Christian's heart. In our quiet time during the days ahead, let us focus on Galatians 5:22-26 and living so that the "fruit" that comes from our spirit-filled walk with Christ is evident to everyone.

May God bless you as you continue to study His Holy Word with us.

In Christ,

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