

Introduction:

- We begin Romas 14 tonight, and what we find is that the theme remains the same as that of chapter 12 and 13. That theme is love your neighbor as you love yourself. More specific is the call to unity when the church is made up of members who are so different from each other. Paul sums up this difference by saying that some have weak faith while others have strong faith. He repeats this call again in: *"Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God."* Romans 15:7, NKJV
- What should stand out to us in these passages are Romans 14:13; 14:19; 15:5 which speak to the issue of 'one another.' The 'one another' connects us. These exhortations are directed at two groups of believers: those who are weak in the faith and those who are strong in the faith.
- Paul brings up three issues to make an "overall point:"
 - One, the strong eat all kinds of food while the weak only veggies. 14:2
 - Two, the strong make no distinction among the days while the weak value some days more than others. 14:5
 - Three, the strong drink wine while the weak do not. 14:21, 17.
- The 'weak' were mainly Jewish Christians who held back from eating certain kinds of foods, who observed certain days out of continuing loyalty to the law.
 - Since Romans chapter one Paul has been relating these two concepts.
 - His concern is that the 'strong' would work towards the mutual edification of the body of Christ.
- This entire chapter and part of chapter 15 is dealing with the dangers of divisions in the church due to the differences between those who are strong in faith and those who are weak. So how are we to treat each other when we have these differences?

I. What Does It Mean To Be Weak In Faith?

- A. The weak bothers avoid eating meat and drinking wine.
 1. We must take note: *"For instance, one person believes it's all right to eat anything. But another believer with a sensitive conscience will eat only vegetables."* (Romans 14:2, NLT)
 2. *"It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else if it might cause another believer to stumble."* (Ro 14:21, NLT)
 3. Paul is saying to the strong: there are times when you do not eat meat or drink wine for the sake of the weaker, who do not eat meat or drink wine.
 4. So what we see is that the weak avoid meat and wine and the strong are able to eat or drink anything that they want.
- B. The second thing we see in this passage is that the weaker brothers practice of "not eating" is not sin, but a God exalting.
 1. Notice that Paul does not say that they have no faith, he says they are of weak faith.

2. The practices of the weak faith are still faith driven. "But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin." (Romans 14:23, NKJV) Paul does not accuse the weak of sinning nor does he compare them to the Judaizers and their legalism.
 3. They are acting in faith and faith is God centered, God exalting attitude of the heart.
 4. The other proof that they are acting in faith is found in vs. 6 "Those who worship the Lord on a special day do it to honor him. ... And those who refuse to eat certain foods also want to please the Lord and give thanks to God." (Romans 14:6, NLT) Paul is really commending the "weak of faith." What he is literally saying in this verse is this: "His behavior is God-directed and he feels deeply thankful, not resentful, as he abstains." Wow! That is pretty awesome to be said of someone weak in faith. Is this what we think when we think of those who are weak in faith?
- C. The "weak" are not legalists.
1. The weaker in no way believes he is justified by or accepted by God because of his behavior. Again, they are not like the Judaizers of (Gal. 5:1-3; 1:6-9) who trust in their works. Their faith is in God!
 2. Paul does not criticize them or call them legalists. We have to pay attention to that.
- D. The weak in some ways regarded meat and wine as unclean. But Paul's view: "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." (Romans 14:14, NLT)
1. Paul would not have brought this up if it were irrelevant.
 2. This was the view of the "weak" but it is not wrong.
 3. What does it mean to be weak in faith? It means to have convictions that are motivated by faith and are God exalting. Therefore we are to walk in unity not degrading.

II. Why Does Paul Call Them Weak?

- A. So what is weak about abstaining from meat and wine? We just saw that it is God centered, God exalting. It is full of gratitude and humility and is not legalistic. So how is it weak? And are you asking yourself, "Am I in the weak or the strong category?" Are you seeing that Paul is very impressed with the weak? He is thankful for them. He welcomes them. He does not despise/condemn them. vs. 3.
- B. So what is their weakness?
1. The weak see meat and wine as unclean because they believe eating meat and drinking wine will not glorify God as much as abstaining will. Something about it makes it less honoring of God, therefore, the weak decline consumption. We get this point of view at the end of verse 6.
 2. They believe that eating meat and drinking wine does not glorify God as much. Paul is not clear on the 'why' of this. What is crucial to know is that Paul thought they were

wrong in this. They lacked knowledge: *“But for us, There is one God, the Father, by whom all things were created, and for whom we live. And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things were created, and through whom we live. However, not all believers know this. Some are accustomed to thinking of idols as being real, so when they eat food that has been offered to idols, they think of it as the worship of real gods, and their weak consciences are violated.”* (1 Corinthians 8:6-7, NLT) For some there was a connection between former idols and their now new freedom. They see these idols as gods.

3. This is why Paul says: *“So you may eat any meat that is sold in the marketplace without raising questions of conscience.”* (1 Corinthians 10:25, NLT) “In other words, the fullness of faith to eat what you will to the glory of God is based on the fullness of knowledge that “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” John Piper
4. We must be sure to see how amazingly Paul’s distinctions are. Just as the weak in faith are not self-exalting in their abstinence, so the strong in faith are not self-indulgent in their liberty. This is what makes vs. 6 so crucial: *“The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.”* Paul sees both the weak and the strong as radically God-centered people. They are deeply grateful people. Their differences are in their convictions about what behaviors are “unclean”—what behaviors give more glory to God.

III. So How Are They To Relate In The Midst Of These Differences?

A. Instruction on how to do this

1. Welcome each other and accept each other. vs. 1 see also: *“Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory.”* (Romans 15:7, NLT)
2. Do not let non-essentials create divisive barriers. vs. 3
3. Paul is saying, “accept each other and build your lives on convictions greater than meat and wines and days you worship.” It is God who accepts you (3b) and God who will judge you (4).
4. And it is God who will make us to stand in that day. (4) Thank you Jesus!

Conclusion:

- “Therefore, welcome one another—receive and accept one another—into unity and harmony and fellowship, not on the basis of “divisive questionings” about non-essentials but on the basis of the glorious truths that God has accepted the believers from whom we differ most; God alone, not you or I, is the final judge; and God himself, will see to it that every believer perseveres in faith and stands upright and full of joy before the Judge on the last day. Dwell on these great truths, and accept one another with our differences in non-essentials.” John PiperK