

Gamma (Leaders Guide)

Romans 14

Study 22 NEW RELATIONSHIPS: To The Weak

1. vv.2-3, 5, 14, 20-21 What are the differences of opinion between the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’?

Verses 2-3 say the dispute had to do with eating. Some felt that as Christians, they could not eat meat.

Verse 5 indicates that some felt that they had to observe certain days as holy. In Col.2:16 Paul speaks of Christians who still held to Jewish/Old Testament feast days. That could very well be what is in view here.

Verses 14 and 20 indicate that some believed certain foods were “unclean.” This is a clear reference to Old Testament ceremonial laws about “clean” and “unclean” foods (See, for example, Lev.11 and Deut.14). These were part of the Old Testament regulations which qualified or disqualified you as fit for entering worship in the tabernacle or temple. Some of the people still followed the Old Testament dietary laws of kosher, etc.

Verse 21 indicates the drinking of wine seems to also have been a “scruple.” Some Christians evidently felt that believers should not drink at all.

What was the problem? It is interesting to compare this dispute to the one described in I Corinthians 8. That was a conflict between ex-idol worshippers and other believers over whether Christians could buy and eat meat left over after pagan temple services. In that situation, the “strong” would have been Christians who said, “there’s nothing wrong with eating it — idols aren’t real.” Thus the ‘strong’ probably were mainly Jewish Christians who had no background in idol worship. The “weak” would have been former idolaters (mainly Gentiles) who had once been entrapped in the pagan cults and now felt polluted when having anything to do with it. But here it appears that the roles are reversed. The “weak” are those who are following the Old Testament “clean/unclean” laws (14:2,3, 14,20), and who feel polluted when unclean meats are eaten or other Old Testament regulations are broken.

Some ask: “are these the ‘Judaizers’ of Galatians, who insisted that it was still necessary to obey the Old Testament law in order to be saved?” The answer must be, “No.” Paul refused to consider such people Christians at all (Gal.1:8). He did not merely call them “weak in faith.”

Therefore we have something different here. These are Christians accustomed to certain customs of eating and observance based on the Old Testament, and they have begun to look down on Christians who don't join them in such practices. Now Paul rather carefully avoids saying that all Jewish Christians are weak! Why? Many Gentiles, called "God-fearers" had also been part of synagogues before converting to Christianity. They too could have been "weak" in this sense

2. Is your character one that tends to want to rule all matters as being disputable or no matter to be disputable? (Share with Group)

3. v.3 What do you think is a "weak in faith" Christian? Why does Paul refer to someone like this as "weak?"

In v.3 Paul says, "the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him." Here Paul shows that the "weak" is a person who loses focus of the gospel — we are not accepted by God because of do's and don't's. We are accepted in Christ. So why does Paul refer to such people as "weak?" One commentator puts it well:

"As the discussion shows, he does not mean a person who trusts Christ but little, the man of feeble faith (cf. 4:19). Rather, the person he has in mind is the one who does not understand the conduct implied by faith... he does not understand that when the meaning of justification by faith is grasped, questions like the use of meat and wine and special days becomes irrelevant." — Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*

Paul is not saying that "weak" Christians aren't saved, nor even that they don't trust Christ. In fact, the "weak" are people who generally are the most fervent and diligent in trying to please Christ. Where they are "weak" is that there are remnants of a legalistic spirit still clinging to them. They have not worked out the implications of the gospel. If you are saved by grace alone, there is no need to feel you can somehow keep God's favor through rules and regulations.

A comparison with I Cor.8 really helps us here. With regard to a particular issue, one ethnic or social grouping could fall into being "weak" (like the Greeks in Corinth) while some other group

could be strong. But with regards to another issue, the roles could be reversed (like the Jews here). This helps us see the broader principle beneath the cases. The “weak” are any Christians who tend to promote and regard non-essential cultural and ceremonial customs as being critical for Christian maturity and effectiveness. For example, the older generation in a particular church might feel very superior to the younger folk who like contemporary music in their worship. They do not deny that the younger people aren’t Christians — but they could claim that it “displeases and offends the Lord” simply because it displeases and offends them. Thus they have taken an issue of taste or custom or culture and elevated it to an abiding, trans-cultural, mark of spiritual maturity.

4. Do you find yourself struggling more with “despising” others, or “passing judgment on others”? v3, v10 .? (Open Sharing with group)

5. What positive advice does he give both the strong and the weak, i.e., what course of action does he prescribe for each?

To the weak:

1. Keep your views to yourself. v.22 “So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God.” Here he tells the “weak” to recognize when some practice is in a “disputable” area, when it is among the dialogismoi. When something is not clearly forbidden or commanded in Scripture, don’t press or loudly display your views and practices on the subject. Keep them to yourself. We must not press this to an extreme — Paul is not saying that you cannot give your opinion if it is asked for! Paul is not saying that you can never make evaluation. After all, Jesus told us to watch out for false prophets, etc. Rather, Paul means that, once we recognize that this is a “disputable” area, we should mind our own business.

2. Get a more mature view of the kingdom of God. In v.14 Paul tells the weak that they are plainly mistaken about created things, and in v.3 he hints that they have not worked out the full implications of the doctrine of justification. In other words, Paul warns them against a legalism tendency. He brings this out in v.17, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” They must see that rules and

regulations about material things miss the point of the kingdom. The point is transformed character — joy, peace, wisdom, love.

3. Think through and get convinced about the rightness or wrongness of any practice. Verse 5 is quite interesting and important: “Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.” In other words, Paul says that we need to reflect upon and think out our behavior. First, we need to see whether the Bible really enjoins/forbids or leaves the conscience free in some area. Second, even if the Bible leaves us free, we may decide to abstain from some practice because it leads us as individuals to sin, or it leads others to sin. So determining all this takes thought! Paul is especially telling the weak to do this — because many people with a tendency to legalism are full of scruples because they haven’t studied the Bible or thought things out.

“Alongside this explicit instruction not to violate the conscience, there is an implicit requirement to educate it.” – John Stott, Romans

But they cannot practice in that area unless they have thought it out and are firmly convinced in their mind that it is right. Notice, Paul even gives some idea of how to think out whether a practice is can be done or not. v.6 “He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord, and gives thanks to God.” So the Christian must look at any practice and say, “Can I do this before Christ? Can I do it with an eye upon him? Can I do it in his name, thanking him for it?”

4. Until you are convinced something is right, avoid it. Why? Paul says several times, that if you are doubtful about something, it is important to avoid it. v.14b “If anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. v.23 “The man who has doubts is condemned if he eats.” Refer to the story above under question #4 about the girl who wore makeup. If a person proceeds to do something when the conscience is against it, it damages that person spiritually. Indeed, it is a sin to do something if you think it is a sin. Why? Even if you are mistaken about what God’s will is, it is a sin to put your will above his.

To the strong:

1. Accept the weak brethren. (v.1). The word “accept” (Greek, *proslambano*) means more than simply acquiescence. A better translation would be “to welcome,” for the word means to receive someone into one’s circle and into one’s love. This is very important, because the tendency of the strong is to become more distant to the “weak” who disapprove of their behavior. Paul insists that there be an effort to keep up the relationship, and to not let the difference come between them. This is restated in v.19, when Paul says, “Let us make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification.” In short, Paul says that the strong must not avoid or write off the weaker brethren, but seek to stay close to them.

2. Seek to respectfully convince him. Here we have an example in Paul himself. In v.14 he tells us that he is one of the “strong” — he can eat anything! Well, what does he do with the weak?

Notice that the whole of chapter 14 is, in a sense, a model of how the strong should approach the weak. He seeks to respectfully persuade the weak to re-examine their position. In v.14 and v.17 he reminds them about the nature of the kingdom of God. In other words, he is trying to help the weak become “convinced,” to think through, the broader more mature position. BUT, if the “weak” does come to a different position, Paul clearly shows a willingness to refrain from the offensive behavior. In v.5, Paul says that people need to carefully think through, Biblically and personally, their practice as Christians.

3. Refrain from a practice if weaker brethren are possibly stumbling. v.21 “It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.” We must be careful here. “Stumble” and “fall” do not mean just to bother the weaker brothers. A grumpy Christian could blackmail a whole church in that case. Some churches have Christians who are very weak, and who have an enormous number of scruples. They are constantly getting irritated and upset because other church members are offending their sense of what is proper Christian behavior. The strong do not have to refrain from anything that “upsets” anyone else. But if the “weak” have a very deep and settled conviction — if they are “convinced” — and if they clearly are being tempted to bitterness or spiritual confusion, then the strong out of love should refrain. A good example of this is worship forms. If a “strong” person can enjoy and use a variety of music/worship forms, but a “weaker” person can only utilize one, then the strong should defer to the weak.

Close is prayer for another , Check with your team who is coming for the quiz !