

August 13, 2023

“The Nature of the Kingdom”
Lesson 2

Romans 14:10-23

Intro

Paul's letter to the Romans addresses a church with two distinct groups: Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus. From things that Paul says, it appears that each group looks down on the other for the way it practiced life in God's kingdom.

Paul reminds them that they belong to God's kingdom for the same reason: faith in Jesus's blood sacrifice. He reminds them that all have sinned, Jews and Gentiles alike. This equality must be practiced intentionally to become a part of one's lifestyle, especially if it wasn't something that was a part of that person's life as they grew.

One area of contention was in what was eaten. Jews were raised on the Mosaic Law of what was clean and unclean. In a city like Rome, finding meat that was ceremonially clean was likely difficult. Also, much of the meat had been offered in sacrifice to pagan idols. For the Gentile Christians, they had never lived according to the laws of clean and unclean. To them, these laws would have seemed both strange and unnecessary. When we are with “our group”, differing practices don't affect us. But when we mix with another group which has a practice different from ours, whose rules should prevail?

Read Romans 14:10-23

1. vs. 10: Paul brings the real issue to the forefront

“Why do you judge?”

No one is a Christian based on what they eat

They are followers based on accepting Jesus' sacrifice and following His ways

Not accepting another for what they eat is judging their status in Christ

Paul reminds them that we will all be judged by God

This petty issue of food will not stand up well before God

2. vs. 11: Paul backs with up with a well-known phrase among believers today

“Every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.”

This places God as the Supreme Judge over all humanity, as is right

It also places all humanity in a lower position, which is also right

Those who are judging have put themselves as judges over their brethren

3. vs. 12: Paul finishes this section with this summary statement

“So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.”

This is a reminder—we all will have to give an account

It encourages us to think about all that we do and say, that they align with God's purposes

4. vs. 13: Because we will give an account, “stop passing judgment on one another”
If we have been doing this, it is time to change that pattern
Paul then changes from the “don’t” to the “do”
 “Make up your mind not to put and stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.”
We are to look at our actions toward others that they don’t cause problems for others
That is an action of loving concern for members of the body
5. vs. 14: Paul declares here, “in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself”
This goes directly counter to the Mosaic laws of clean and unclean foods
However, Jesus says differently in Mark 7:14-23
 There he says purity is about inner character, not foods eaten
 This has always been true scripturally; our hearts are the focus
Paul allows here that some may still consider some foods unclean
 “Then for that person it is unclean”
 Having practiced such things for a lifetime, it can be hard to let go of
6. vs. 15: Here Paul addresses the Gentile Christians
They have no “clean/unclean” past, so they eat what they want
Paul notes that if what they eat “distresses” a brother or sister, they shouldn’t do it
 Knowing what you are doing distresses a family member isn’t acting in love
 If our eating “destroys” someone’s faith in Christ, we have offended
We are called to have a higher regard for others’ consciences than for our own
 See I Cor. 8:7-13
7. vs. 16: The Gentile Christians know what is “good”
Christ set aside the rules of what is clean and unclean; they have understood this
But they are not to act without concern for those who haven’t understood this truth yet
That would allow their “good” actions to be spoken of as “evil”
8. vs. 17: Paul here again reminds both groups that God’s kingdom isn’t what they might think it is
It isn’t about the foods that are acceptable or unacceptable
 Those are exterior things
The kingdom of God is “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”
 Righteousness is that which is right and just
 Peace is harmony in loving, caring relationships
 It is working towards another’s benefit
 Joy coming from knowing that God is working all things out His way in His time
This verse is the only one in the NT where these three terms occur together
Paul is noting that these qualities can only occur and grow if they Spirit lives in us
The Spirit empowers us to love others, and so to surrender our own preferences to aid them
9. vs. 18: “Anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God”
Paul is referring to considering others’ needs above our own
This kind of love and sacrifice is at the heart of the gospel
 It is exactly what Jesus did in His life, and on the cross
Treating others with such love and deference gets noticed by others

These actions “receives human approval”

This indicates that people notice one who are truly living a Christlike life

10. vs. 19: Christians are here encouraged to “make every effort” to accomplish two things

Do what leads to peace / mutual edification

This means that Christians must put in effort to accomplish these things

All in the body are to be respected, included, and loved

Peace means edifying, or building each other up

Our aim is to make others stronger in their faith

11. vs. 20-21: These two verses basically say the same things as vs. 14

The opposite of “edify” in vs. 19 is “destroy” here

12. vs. 22: The word “believe” here is used about what believers are allowed to do

If what you do causes another to stumble, you are to keep it between you and God

If we cause another to stumble, we ourselves might eventually stumble (condemn himself)

13. vs. 23: Paul concludes by pointing out the potential for wrong thoughts and actions

If one believes that eating certain foods is wrong, he shouldn't do it

But if he eats because others are doing so, he is going against his conscience

If he does this, he is sinning, because he believes what he is doing is wrong

Application: The first 13 chapters of Romans sees Paul developing a consistent theme: no group has any preference in God's eyes. Faith in Jesus—not in biological lineage or doing better words—is what brings all sinners into God's kingdom. They all live a new life, empowered by God's Spirit, transformed in our thinking to love and serve one another.

We are called to exercise our faith in such a way to defer to one another on matters of conscience. We are to be patient with one another as we learn to use our freedom for the benefit of others and not ourselves. The concern of those with strong faith should be the welfare of those with weaker faith.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for our freedom in Christ. Help us to use it to build each other up in the faith, and never to tear one another down. Help us to be instruments of Your peace in this world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

