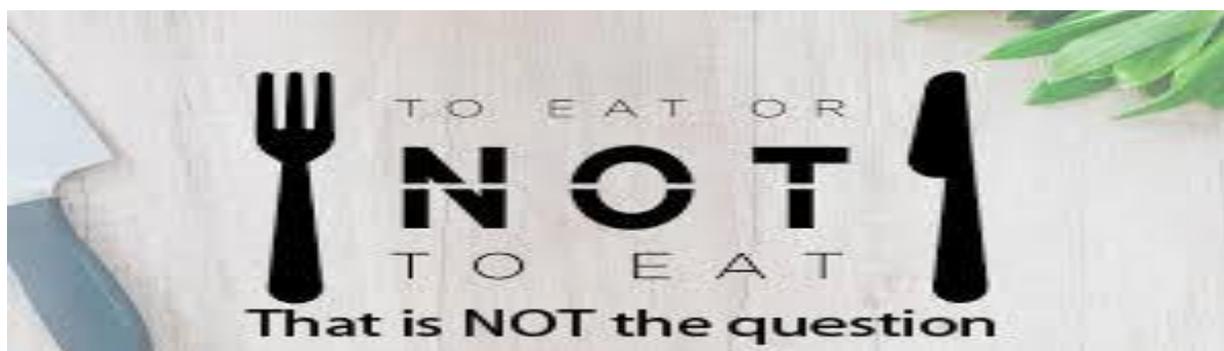


Ministry of Grace Church

Romans 14:1-8 – To Eat or Not To Eat Sermon Notes



Introduction

We're still looking at the book of Romans, Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome. He's been teaching us how to live the Christian life in a world that does not respect our beliefs. Having instructed us individually to submit ourselves to authorities and having challenged us to show genuine love to people around us, Paul now turns his attention to matters within the church itself. The specific issue he addresses here is that we should not be judgmental of other Christians.

When I was a very young Christian, God led me to a small Baptist church where Bible teaching by the pastor and Bible study by the church members were both high priorities. We met Sunday morning to hear preaching from the Word. The message was taken directly from the Bible and applied to our lives. Then we returned in the evening to hear more teaching, but the Sunday evening service was more like a Bible study than anything else. And it was taken directly from the pages of Scripture. We also gathered on Wednesday evening to hear a short message, more of a devotional actually. Then we broke into small groups for an hour of prayer.

But even that wasn't enough. In order to put our beliefs into practice, we would gather on another mid-week evening and walk two-by-two around the neighborhood to meet the people living around the church, to share the Gospel message, and to invite people to join us on Sunday morning. Today, the evening service, the mid-week prayer meeting and "calling" are only a distant memory. The most notable thing about that church was that there was not a critical spirit within that church, probably because we were all being regularly bathed by the Spirit through the Word. Today, when Christians meet on Sunday morning, the preaching seems to be more focused on social issues than on doctrine. In fact, doctrine has become a dirty word to many Christians today. Now, the Sunday morning message is intentionally kept short, so the people won't get bored. And – Bible study, if it exists at all, is done under the direction of external ministries, rather than an outreach of the local church itself.

The body of Christ in America seems to have drifted away from the fundamentals of the faith. We have become weak in our beliefs and lazy in our witness. We seem to have relegated our

relationship with God and the reading of His Word to a convenience rather than a requirement for contented living. Sunday morning church has become more about doing something because we are supposed to do it and less about being in the presence of Almighty God, giving Him worship and praise. As a result, we seem to have been filled with a critical spirit that promotes self rather than unity in the body of Christ. This is what Paul's teaching here is all about.

Romans 14:1-3

Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats must not view the one who does not eat with contempt, and the one who does not eat must not judge the one who eats, for God accepted him.

As I have pointed out previously, the Christian church at Rome was made up largely of converted Jews. Under the Jewish laws, they were forbidden from eating certain foods, and they were forbidden from doing any work on Saturday (the Jewish Sabbath). For Christians, however, these legal restrictions had been lifted. But just as Peter had a difficult time accepting Gentiles into the faith before receiving direct revelation from God indicating that it was OK (see Acts chapter 10), so these Jews found it difficult to accept the fact that Christians did not have to observe the same restrictions that they formerly were bound by.

What can and can't be eaten is not the issue that Paul is about to address. He starts off by telling the fellowship in Rome that it is good to receive Christians who are weak in the faith. These are people who are genuine converts, but who are either new converts or they have not had the privilege of sitting under the teaching of a mature Christian like the apostle Paul. We need to welcome people like this so that they can grow in their faith and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, we need to be examples to them of how to live the Christian life.

Therefore, Paul tells the church to accept these people into the congregation but not to do so just to have a theological discussion about what is proper to eat and what is not. Before we go on, let me point out that Paul is NOT saying that it is improper to have theological discussions with others, for this is right and even necessary. We should have these theological discussions, but we should do it while simultaneously paying to others the debt of love that we owe them. What Paul is saying is that it is not right to have arguments about items of minor importance. Disputing has become a significant issue within the body of Christ. So much so that church splits have become more the rule than the exception. Some disputes may be necessary, but most are frivolous and detrimental.

Some of the members of the church in Rome believed that Christians were required to follow all of the commandments. Others, like Paul, recognized the fact that Christians have been set free from the Law and that we are at liberty to eat all kinds of food without any legal restrictions.

So, what Paul is saying is that we should admit anyone into our fellowship who makes a confession of faith in Christ as Lord and Savior, but not to get into arguments with them about what food is permissible and what isn't. The point he makes here is that the more mature Christian recognizes that all foods are permissible, but those who are weak in the faith still think they have to refrain from certain foods.

But let's not get hung-up on food. Paul is using this as a metaphor for any secondary belief within the church that is not foundational doctrine. As I've said previously, understanding and adhering

to doctrinal fundamentals of the Christian faith are of critical importance and need to be fully studied and taught. Arguing about other aspects of the Christian faith is a waste of time and effort. Belief in who Jesus is (completely God and completely man at the same time), the offering of His sinless life to pay the penalty for our sins, His resurrection from the dead as proof of His deity, our own need to admit our sinful, lost state, and our confession of Christ as our Savior and Lord, these are foundational truths of the Christian faith.

Paul goes on to admonish those who are on opposite sides of this dietary issue to be very careful about their attitudes towards each other. He tells the ones who feel no prohibitions about what foods they eat not to “despise” those who think that only certain foods are acceptable. He also tells those who follow the Mosaic dietary restrictions not to “judge” those who feel free to eat all kinds of food. The two words, despise and judge, were intentionally chosen by Paul. You see, Gentiles tend to treat Jews as insignificant or unimportant (to despise them), and Jews tend to judge others because they themselves have for so many years been judged by the Law.

So what we see here is Paul’s discernment, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we all have tendencies which we have learned, which are not born out of love but out of prejudice. We Christians are not to pre-judge anyone out of our selfish prejudices, rather we are to treat all people with love. Remember the end of the previous chapter? Instead of condemning other Christians because they practice their Christianity in ways different than we do, we should join together to learn what the Spirit of God teaches us all through His Word of Truth.

Now, before we go on, let me address an issue that has sprung out of a misinterpretation of this verse. Paul is not saying that we should join hands with all people who call themselves Christian. Before we join any ecumenical movement, we need to ascertain that we are joining up with people who believe the same foundational doctrines of Christianity that we do.

Romans 14:4-6

Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person judges one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards the day, regards it for the Lord, and he who eats, eats for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who does not eat, for the Lord he does not eat and gives thanks to God.

This is one of those passages that none of us wants to have explained to us because we are all guilty of what Paul is correcting here. For centuries the Jews had been the keepers of God’s revelation to man (see **Romans 3:1,2**). Therefore, they felt like it was their duty to enlighten others regarding how God’s laws were being violated. According to Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, however, within the body of Christ the Law has been abolished and Jews and Gentiles are one and the same.

For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups* one and broke down the dividing wall of the partition by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might create the two into one new man, making peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, having in Himself put to death the enmity. (**Ephesians 2:14-16**)

Regardless of our backgrounds, all Christians are of the household of our Master and we are all his servants. We have no right to judge how obedient another servant is to our Master. That is a matter which is strictly up to our Master. When we confess that Jesus is our Lord, we are saying that we accept the fact that He is our owner and the supreme authority over us, and as our supreme authority we are committed to obeying Him in whatever He asks of us.

Now, there certainly are some things that we are supposed to judge about others. We are to judge whether or not a person is genuinely saved before admitting him or her into our fellowship and we are to judge them, and lovingly confront them, if they are blatantly living in sin. As to less weighty matters of obedience to our Lord and Master, it is up to God to judge, admonish, and chasten His servant-children, not us.

According to Paul, some in the Christian church in Rome believed that a certain day was to be set aside “as unto the Lord”, that is, it was to be considered as sacred above the other six. Others in the church believed that all days were to be honored the same. Clearly, in the Jewish faith it was a requirement to “keep the Sabbath day” by not performing any work at all. Instead they were to observe it as a day of rest. However, since the resurrection of our Lord was on Sunday, others in the church argued that Sunday was to be treated like a Sabbath day and no work was to be performed on Sunday. Still others argued that all days were holy to the Lord, and since we are no longer under the demands of the Law, it was permissible to work on any day of the week.

In a church that we previously attended, I had a member severely chasten me for mowing my lawn on Sunday, pointing out that we were to refrain from work on Sunday. Whereas I’m sure that his admonition was intended to assist me in being more Christ-like in my behavior, it nonetheless bothered me that this same person would always take his family to a restaurant on Sunday, thus requiring someone else to work on Sunday in order to serve him and his family. This contradiction of word and action made his comments to me seem more hypocritical than helpful. After all, if it is wrong to work on Sunday, how can it be right to cause someone else to work for you on Sunday?

As Paul will point out in the following verses, whatever we do should be done “as unto the Lord.” We should be focused on Him and His grace no matter what we observe or don’t observe, and we should do everything as if it was done for God and God alone. Remember, we are no longer under the Law as Paul said earlier:

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. (Romans 3:28)

He now makes his summary statement regarding what he has said in the previous four verses. Whether it is regarding one day as special or abstaining from certain kinds of foods, there is no right or wrong regarding these non-essential teachings. What is important is that the belief, or conviction, is focused on God, not on self. Unfortunately, our earthly flesh tends to make us believe that everyone should behave the way that we do with regard to the things that we have a strong conviction about. However, God does not give all Christians the same convictions.

What Paul says is that the spiritually mature Christian who believes that Sunday is a day sacred to the Lord, does so to honor God. And the spiritually mature Christian who believes that all seven days of the week are equally sacred, does so to honor God. Likewise, the spiritually mature Christian who believes that certain foods should not be eaten, does so because it honors God and

the spiritually mature Christian who believes that all foods are given by the Lord as acceptable, gives honor to God as he or she eats them. In each case what is done, or not done, is because of the conviction that it honors the Lord.

The crux of what Paul is saying is that the focus of all mature Christians should be on glorifying God. When we honor God in anything we necessarily lift Him up, which by its very definition means that we lower, or humble, ourselves before Him. It's a matter of where our focus is.

Romans 14:7-8

For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

In order to understand the meaning of this verse we first have to ask ourselves, "Who does "us" refer to?" If "us" refers to everyone, then this verse could be taken to mean one thing, but if "us" refers only to Christians, then it means something entirely different. So, let's look at the context. Reading from the first verse of this chapter through verse 10, it is abundantly clear that Paul is talking to members of the church. Therefore, the "us" is referring to those who have put their trust in the saving blood of Jesus Christ and have submitted to His Lordship over their lives. In other words, he is referring to Christians, whether Jews or Gentiles.

Now, what does he say about us Christians? He says that not one of us lives to ourself. Some interpreters would have us believe that Paul is teaching that Christians are to live primarily to serve others, thus supporting a social gospel that emphasizes the need for us to take care of each other. This type of interpretation almost always accompanies a works-oriented Christianity. However, if we look at how the Apostle Paul finishes this thought (in the next verse), we see that the focus is not on serving others (though this is part of Paul's teaching elsewhere), but on submitting ourselves to our Lord and Master. What Paul is specifically teaching in this verse is that none of us is to live to gratify our own desires or appetites; instead, we should make it our goal to do the will of God, to subordinate our will to His.

Paul also says that none of us dies to himself. What he means is that even in dying we are committed to doing God's will. We should do all we can to keep our body healthy since it is the temple of God, the Holy Spirit. You will remember that Paul told us that we are to offer ourselves to God as living sacrifices ([Romans 12:1](#)), placing not only the use of our lives but also the manner and time of our death in the hands of the Almighty.

What Paul is saying is, "If we should continue to live, it is our Lord's doing; therefore, we live in relation to Him, at His discretion. If we should die, it is our Lord's doing; therefore, we will die at His discretion. Either way it is the Lord who controls when we will die. We are not in control, He is!

Now, tie this in with what Paul has been talking about: whether or not to eat certain foods and whether or not to hold a particular day of the week more sacred than the rest. It doesn't really matter whether we believe some foods are forbidden or not, and it doesn't matter whether we hold one day more sacred than the others, as long as we hold these beliefs because God has convicted us about them. Notice I said, because God has convicted us about them. We do not have the freedom to behave however we please. Our convictions have to be based on what God's Word teaches us. These convictions must be based on a continual study of the Bible and a close daily

walk with Almighty God. An immature Christian who doesn't yet have a firm understanding of God or a close intimate relationship with Him will not have the same convictions that a mature Christian has.

Therefore, since this is a matter of conviction and not of doctrine, we should not judge our brother or sister in Christ for acting differently than we do. If we live to the Lord, we will follow what He wants for us and not be concerned about what a brother or sister is eating or how they treat a certain day of the week. Only when we are completely submitted to Him can we be completely living, or dying, for Him.

So What?

Does all this mean that we should ignore false teaching, or that we should support anything that "Christians" proclaim? I remember being in a church that spent considerable time in a business meeting arguing about whether or not there should be carpeting in the sanctuary. It became a heated discussion and caused hard feelings among many of the people in attendance; it was not edifying and did not serve to build-up the body of Christ. Instead of such trivial arguing, let's all keep our focus on Him!

Now, as result of what we have learned in these verses, I have a two-part question for you. Are you judgmental regarding your brothers and sisters in Christ, and are you submitted to your Lord and committed to obeying Him completely regardless of how other members of the household are behaving? If the answer to the first part is "Yes," then the answer to the second part is most definitely "No." If we are totally submitted to our Master, then we will be loving toward our brothers and sisters, not judgmental. That's what our Master wants from us!

If we do everything "as unto the Lord," we will neither be burdened with the requirements of the Law, nor will we have the freedom to sin as we please. Instead, we will behave as if He were right there with us at all times. So, let me ask you, "Do you live each day as if Christ were by your side at all times?" If you don't, you should, because He is!

Do you see your salvation as simply a free ticket into heaven? If so, you are missing one of the primary reasons for Christ's death on the cross. It was not done simply as a type of Christmas present, but as a purchase transaction to obtain those who would lovingly serve the desires of the Owner. Think about that!

The important matter is whether or not we are submitted to God's lordship over us and committed to doing His will, not what kind of food we eat or how we treat days of the week. If we have our gaze fixed on our fellow Christians and are judging what they do or don't do, then we don't have our gaze where it should be: fixed on our Lord and Master. If we are a living sacrifice, we are living for Him and we are submitted to His will. So - are you still on the altar or have you climbed off?

Let's pray