

Romans Lesson 18 Articles

Rom 14:10-12 We have no right to judge our brethren, for we will all have our works tested at the judgment seat of Christ—not the White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11–15, but the testing of the Christian’s works after the church is called home (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:10). We do not have to give an account of our brother’s life, so we have no right to condemn him today. Certainly all of us want to live lives that will stand the fiery test before Christ, lives that will win rewards for His glory.¹

Paul’s letters were not intended as abstract treatises on matters ethical and theological but pastoral notes addressed to real life situations in first-century churches. In Rome there were Jewish Christians who were reluctant to give up certain ceremonial aspects of their religious heritage. They were uncertain about how faith in Christ affected the status of Old Testament regulations. Others embraced the new freedom in Christ unencumbered by an overly sensitive regard for the past. Paul referred to the first group as “weak” (Rom 14:1) and the latter as “strong” (Rom 15:1). The terms are descriptive rather than judgmental, although as Stuhlmacher says, “the designation ‘weak in faith’ is based on the presupposition that strength of faith is the attitude which is really to be desired.”

The church at Rome was to welcome into its fellowship those Jewish believers who were finding it difficult to let go of their religious past, but not “for the purpose of passing judgment on their scruples” (TCNT). That would be an unworthy motive for bringing them into the fellowship. The church does not exist as a judiciary body to make pronouncements on issues that in the long run will prove to be of no real consequence. Those things are *adiaphora*, things that do not really matter.

Paul identified two classes of believers in Rome: the “strong,” whose faith allowed them to eat whatever they wanted, and the “weak” (the overscrupulous), who ate nothing but vegetables. The tendency of those who eat whatever they want is to look down on those who for reasons of conscience are unable to exercise the same freedom. Freedom in such matters tends to create an attitude of superiority. It is tempting to hold up for ridicule those whose lifestyle is more restricted than one’s own. In the broad spectrum of Christianity those to the right are often caricatured as hopelessly fundamental. The problem is that one person’s “overly scrupulous neighbor” is another person’s “libertarian.” It all depends upon where you happen to stand along the spectrum. The Christian is not to despise or treat with contempt those who are still working through the relationship between their new faith in Christ and the psychological and emotional pressures of a previous orientation.

On the other hand, the person who does not eat everything must not sit in judgment upon the one who does (cf. Matt 7:1). A natural consequence of the more restricted perspective is to condemn those who are enjoying greater freedom. What is wrong for me translates easily into what is wrong for everyone. But the fact that God has received them ought to temper one’s tendency to criticize. Since God has found room for them in the fellowship, any attempt on our part to exclude them will fail to meet with God’s approval. It is not up to us to judge the servant of another (cf. Jas 4:12). That prerogative belongs exclusively to that person’s own master. And that master is God. The strong as well as the weak will stand because the Lord is able to make them stand.³

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe’s expository outlines on the New Testament* (p. 406). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

² Mounce, R. H. (1995). *Romans* (Vol. 27, pp. 251–252). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.