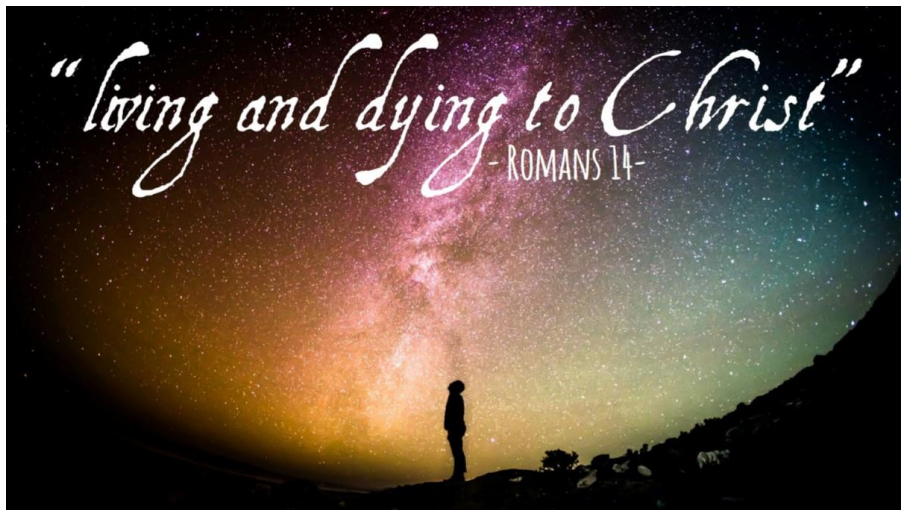


“living and dying to Christ” - Romans 14

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
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Romans 14

1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. 2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. 3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. 4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. 5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. 7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. 8 For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. 9 For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. 10 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. 11 For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God." 12 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. 13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way. 14 I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 15 Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. 16 Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. 19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. 21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. 22 Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.



14:1 - Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong.

In every body of believers there are varying degrees of spiritual maturity. Paul understood this and in chapter 14 of this letter he sought to direct the body of believers on the art of staying unified in such a situation. While certainly every individual will stand in judgement before God on his or her own merits, Paul knew just how important unity in the church was, and how difficult it can be at times to have it.

We all on some degree still battle with sin despite our rebirth. Sadly, temptation and shortcomings do not simply go away after we become a follower of Christ. We all, upon salvation, begin the long journey of discipleship. Each 'runner' in that race has had varying degrees of scriptural education, and some of us...*if not a lot of us*, have a difficult time keeping the "old man" dead. Some still carry baggage from their old lives and some still struggle between legalism and freedom under the grace given by Christ and taught by Paul. All of these folks still have a "rest" that awaits them...as the writer of Hebrews spoke about, and haven't yet experienced all of true Christian liberty.

Yet through it all, God desires peace and unity in the "family." Thus chapter 14 begins with the directive to "receive." It doesn't mean *agree*, for we will not always agree with the actions of every individual. It also doesn't mean merely to "put up with." There has to be more to the family relationship that we are called to live out. We are, *just as in all matters of life under the Son*, to receive each other as Christ does. We are to receive all these new brothers and sisters into the body and allow God the time to grow each of His children into a

spiritual adult. And make no mistake, this demands the patience of the rest of the body of believers, and a large dose of humility on our part individually. Being part of a church community can be difficult at times, can be a difficult challenge *a lot of the time*, and will stretch and challenge us all.

We are members of many types of communities...our families, our vocational groups, etc. But no "tribe" brings more reinforcement than the village we find in the church. This is where we find comfort in our sorrows, celebration in our wins, and advice in our decision-making. The Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. put it this way: "all life is inter-related. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality." That is perhaps truer now than at any point in our lifetimes. It seems most of the time we do not appreciate what we have until it's gone...

All of this will present itself in various stripes. We are not to meet visitors at the door and take away their cigarettes, any more that we are to berate them for clinging to their Old King James Bible. It is the call of the church to create peace, harmony, and order. Not at the expense of sound doctrine and holy living. But as Paul spoke elsewhere, the reality is that some folks just aren't ready for steak yet, as they are honestly just getting used to milk.

14:2-3 - For instance, one person believes it's all right to eat anything. But another believer with a sensitive conscience will eat only vegetables. Those who feel free to eat anything must not look down on those who don't. And those who don't eat certain foods must not condemn those who do, for God has accepted them.

This may come as a new information to you, but God did not cut each of us from some sort of corporate "Christian mold" or a cosmic "cookie cutter" someplace. God created each one of us to be expressly unique and to have a profoundly personal relationship with Him. Indeed, a personal relationship that must be lived out in a local corporate body...taking one's place in that body to complete it and fulfill it. However we all are on different places in our walk and that journey is not complete for any of us. We each have different callings and different levels of freedom in Christ. Not on issues of express declaration in Scripture, but in other issues of personal direction of the Holy Spirit for each of us individually.

As a pastor, there are mixed feelings when I speak on matters such as this. For my experience has universally been that those who *need* to hear this usually are forever obsessed with beating themselves up for their shortcomings and I need to continually talk them off the ledge. Then those who believe themselves to born again years ago, still languish in the world and the flesh and find in such passages as these a free pass...a 'get-out-jail-free' card and go on excusing themselves for still being a spiritual 'Peter Pan' and not growing up and living a Christ first, *Christ-only* life.

In this church that Paul was writing to were those redeemed out of heathen practices, and many of them used to sacrifice to false gods. It was in that day the practice to take the meat from such animal sacrifices and sell it in the markets. For Paul, such meat was just fine, for those "gods" to whom it was sacrificed didn't even exist! But for those who used to worship these gods, they just could not bring themselves yet to eat it. Paul was saying that either way such a situation was not something to get worked up about. Those who felt ok about eating such meat were not to ridicule those who did not, and those who did not were not to condemn those who did. While we may not have exact comparisons in our church society, the implications are broad and far reaching. For the persistent debates continue even today about the use of alcohol, movies, tobacco, secular music, dancing, etc. within the Christian ranks. Thus Paul's teaching is as pertinent today as it was 2000 years ago.

14:4 - *Who are you to condemn someone else's servants? They are responsible to the Lord, so let him judge whether they are right or wrong. And with the Lord's help, they will do what is right and will receive his approval.*

The bottom line in Paul's God-led position was that such extra-biblical issues were between the individual and the Holy Spirit. None of us are to act as "Holy Spirit juniors." We each are God's servants and ultimately answer to Him alone. Yet we know also that the scriptures are full of passages that seem to direct us to intervene...to effectively do just the opposite of what Paul is saying to us here. Many of those verses were even Paul himself doing the directing!

Titus 3:10-11 *"Warn a divisive person once, and then **warn** them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. ¹¹You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned."*

2 Thessalonians 3:15 *"Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but **warn** them as you would a fellow believer."*

1 Corinthians 5:11 *"But actually, I wrote to you **not to associate** with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one."*

Matthew 18:15-17 *"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."*

Like so many issues in our faith manifest, we are required to walk carefully and seek guidance and discernment in the dealings with our fellow church-mates. The alternative is that I as your pastor simply step back and open the door to hell for those I am called to shepherd. And then, to make this issue even more complicated, we can often inadvertently get in the way of what God is trying to do with an individual by propping him up when God is anxious to break him, or breaking him when God is trying to pick him up. We can claim we are acting out of love, but in reality, we are acting out of selfish motivation and a superiority complex.

We must be regularly reminded...*as Paul has done in the last couple of chapters of Romans*, that it is the church's call to maintain order and harmony **within** the church, not **outside it**. The passages I shared are in relation to express corporate direction to God's church as well as individual believers. Paul is speaking here in Romans about issues that are not so clearly laid out in the scripture. We are to lead and to unflinchingly preach the Word of God and the adherence to such. We are keep the church pure, even if we are unable to so effect the hearts of those who enter into it. There are issues of biblical consistency, honest lifestyle, and passionate service that are in consideration when serving within this church. But the church will not...*cannot*, make a person walk a true Christian life through rules and regulations.

One of the simple and clear "proofs" of our righteous standing in Christ is that we become like Him. Not as a lofty goal or a theory, but as a concrete reality. God is patient, and we should be also. However, even Christ warned that there is always an 'end' to that patience. In Luke 13 Jesus told a story: *"A man planted a fig tree in his garden and came again and again to see if there was any fruit on it, but he was always disappointed. Finally, he said to his gardener, 'I've waited three years, and there hasn't been a single fig! Cut it down. It's just taking up space in the garden.'* *"The gardener answered, 'Sir, give it one more chance. Leave it another year, and I'll give it special attention and plenty of fertilizer. If we get figs next year, fine. If not, then you can cut it down."* And in Matthew 7:19 Jesus said *"So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down*

and thrown into the fire.” Clearly, we must understand this chapter in light of the whole scripture, and see it as an impediment to an arrogant spirit, but not as a license to live as we please.

If He is indeed our master then we will “stand” through Him. Issues of spiritual endurance, “fruit that remains” (John 15:16), is the living proof of who we are. People will make all kinds of accusations and will try to take away your freedom and passion through a pride-filled “I am the baseline” mentality. But you can be assured of your position with God when you remain standing...remain faithful. The fruit of who you are says who you are. Your marriage, your peace or the lack of it, your service or the lack of it, your relationships, friendships, faithfulness, all tell the real truth of who we really are. How you live in this world...whether you are addicted to the stimulant of the world as many of us are now finding that we indeed are, speaks clearly of whether we are a resident of the kingdom or not.

14:5-6 - In the same way, some think one day is more holy than another day, while others think every day is alike. You should each be fully convinced that whichever day you choose is acceptable. Those who worship the Lord on a special day do it to honor him. Those who eat any kind of food do so to honor the Lord, since they give thanks to God before eating. And those who refuse to eat certain foods also want to please the Lord and give thanks to God.

Paul seems to do something very rare here. He says that that his trust need not be generated by them, but his trust is in God to deal with these matters. Paul’s overarching standard is the all-encompassing 1 Corinthians 10:31... *“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”* Paul is not attempting to run the lives of others. He calls upon us to be sure about where we individually and personally stand on these matters. “Let each of us be fully convinced in his own mind...”

“Don’t let anyone condemn you by insisting on self-denial. And don’t let anyone say you must worship angels, even though they say they have had visions about this. These people claim to be so humble, but their sinful minds have made them proud. But they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For we are joined together in his body by his strong sinews, and we grow only as we get our nourishment and strength from God.”
Col 2:18-19

14:7 – “For we don’t live for ourselves or die for ourselves.”

Having made his position clear, Paul is reminding us that we each stand before God and that we will answer to Him. He is reminding us that care must be taken in what we do, for none of us are an island. Our actions are either geared to glorify God, or us, or ultimately Satan. God desires that our faith-filled lives are lived in full view of God and man. We are being told not to live secret lives, sequestered off on some secret island operating as a special case with special rules, any more that we are to live as judge and jury of those around us. God gave us the church to operate as a unit, and a family, and a body of believers to serve the Kingdom and grow together, using our gifts to bless one another. It is flagrantly contrary to Scripture to adapt an “Elijah” attitude where we hole up in a cave and tell God that we’re the only one left who really loves Jesus.

14:8-9 – “If we live, it’s to honor the Lord. And if we die, it’s to honor the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. Christ died and rose again for this very purpose — to be Lord both of the living and of the dead.”

Paul emphasizes that God is in charge. He can and will take care of His own. Do we understand the magnitude of that truth? This means that God controls the outcome of our lives and even the very breath in our bodies. This does not mean that everything will go our way or that we will live a pain free existence. We often do stupid

things that He will allow and there are earthly consequences to our actions. But let us never believe that God is not in charge. As a pastor I often struggle with the belief that God “needs my help and intervention.” But God knows what is happening and can *and will* take care of any situation.

“The LORD has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry... The mountains quake before Him, The hills melt, and the earth heaves at His presence, Yes, the world and all who dwell in it. Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him. The LORD is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble; And He knows those who trust in Him.” Na 1:3-7

14:10-11 – *“So why do you condemn another believer? Why do you look down on another believer? Remember, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For the Scriptures say, “As surely as I live,’ says the LORD, ‘every knee will bend to me, and every tongue will confess and give praise to God.””*

Obviously, Paul *and God*, view this issue as a serious one. Under the Lordship of Christ we each live with the convictions He has placed on us individually, and will each answer for such. That which is of God will, like gold, survive the fires of both testing and judgment. The other things will burn like chaff. What will we have after all the possessions, the activities, the vocations and worldly pursuits are gone? We are currently receiving just a taste of that position and many of us have found that the answer is little or nothing, and should rightfully be quite concerned about our true spiritual state.

14:12 – *“Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God.”*

It is always easier to see the heart of others than our own. But God doesn’t judge us “on a curve” or in the shadow of our neighbor. Jesus died and lives again for each one of us personally. There is for each of us a “scheduled meeting...” where we will answer for our time here. Whether we handled His investment as a committed caretaker or in worldly fear or greed.

14:13 – *“So let’s stop condemning each other. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall.”*

Paul tells us directly not to “judge one another.” He takes our eyes off of the guy next to us, and puts them directly where they should be: on ourselves. God, speaking through the apostle Paul, tells us that we can’t and should not try to live to shepherd others in areas outside of biblical direction. He had clearly laid out the premise that we belong to God and answer to Him ultimately. What we should do is seek to never put our brother or sister in a place where they might “stumble.” But often we cause people to stumble in ways we are not intending or expecting, because they are watching what we are *doing* not what we are *saying*.

Paul brings our actual day to day living to the forefront and the responsibility of us all to never place a brother or sister in a situation where they could fall or even to see Christ in a poor light. So often we are taught and erroneously understand this to mean that we are to never drink a beer (even if we are personally free in Christ to do so) because we will cause other people to drink. Same with smoking or movies, etc. And while this is certainly a consideration, the truth is much more insidious. Our “stumbling” of others can certainly come through a presentation of a false idea of God and Christianity through an atmosphere of legalism and fear. But it can also come through a life presentation that says that it is ok to pursue and prioritize things of this world while relegating God and kingdom to the floor sweepings that remain. And make no mistake: *they are indeed watching you.*

14:14 – *“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.”*

If Paul attempted to teach this verse today, he would be branded a liberal or worse. But Paul never flinched from the truth whether he caught heat from the left or the right. He wanted men to never be caught up with the idea that Christianity was about rules and regulations rather about relationship and freedom. According to Paul, if you think it is wrong to drink alcohol, you should not drink alcohol. The same can be said about any of the areas of extra-biblical interaction with the things of this world. It's not *the thing* that is “unclean,” but our use of it if the Holy Spirit has told me “no.”

This makes a lot of us deeply uncomfortable for the field suddenly becomes a little muddy. It seems clear that I cannot draw upon a corporate rule book that can serve to make us into the perfect standard. We are therefore forced to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance on all questionable practices, and are clearly responsible, both personally and absolutely, for what we God tells us to do and how we are told to live.

14:15-17 – *“And if another believer is distressed by what you eat, you are not acting in love if you eat it. Don't let your eating ruin someone for whom Christ died. Then you will not be criticized for doing something you believe is good. For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”*

It may sound like Paul is contradicting himself here, but there is clearly a balance behind his words. Paul was making sure that we got a good picture of the *whole* scene before us. He covers “all the bases” and thus leaves us without excuse. We have effectively only two choices, obedience or the flagrant ignoring of the Word. He seems to promote balance while destroying any middle ground between.

If your brother or sister is “grieved” ...*which means “offended,”* by our freedoms, we need to avoid flaunting such in their presence. He is not calling us to become legalists in order to create an atmosphere of peace, or to toss our freedoms so that the baby Christian can feel righteous. In fact, one is hard pressed to interpret verse 16 in any other way than to stand firm on what God has told us individually in the areas of our freedoms. But if someone has a problem with alcohol, you don't offer them a beer when they come over for dinner. If someone has a lust problem, it might be a good idea to dress modestly in their presence. This is simply love in action! We are called to keep a perspective on this issue which always keeps the Kingdom and Christ in the forefront. How can we enjoy the freedoms that God has given us if we are not leading others to God, and the peace that comes with a personal relationship and obedience to that relationship?

14:18 – *“If you serve Christ with this attitude, you will please God, and others will approve of you, too.”*

What Paul is asking of us is to put others before ourselves and the expression of our individual freedoms. We, in our flesh, are apt to get all self-righteous and stubborn in this area and place our freedoms higher than they should be. God is not going to support our selfish theological reasoning's if they violate the “prime directive,” which is to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

By seeking the best for others around us we find favor with our Father as well as all men around us, both in the family of God and out. This is the harmony and peace that is preached throughout the Word of God! Our lives must be led by love. When it is, we will be less concerned by what we can do, and more concerned by how what we do affects others. Christian freedom is not doing what we want, but doing what HE wants, and what expresses Christ love towards others. Again we are reminded that scripture clearly teaches that if we do not love horizontally, we lie when we say we love vertically!

14:19 – *“So then, let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up.”*

What a difference we would make if we actually took this verse to heart and followed it! We are called to “pursue peace” as well as the things that will bless and “edify,” (“builds up and promotes growth”) others. But how often, in our selfish pride and hard heartedness, we can do just the opposite because we “feel” that we, standing isolated and alone, are the only thing that matters and worse, the only thing that we are responsible for! Are we our brother’s keeper? Apparently the answer unequivocally *yes*...

“There are six things the LORD hates—no, seven things he detests: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that kill the innocent, a heart that plots evil, feet that race to do wrong, a false witness who pours out lies, a person who sows discord among brothers.” Prov 6:16-19

14:20-21 – *“Don’t tear apart the work of God over what you eat. Remember, all foods are acceptable, but it is wrong to eat something if it makes another person stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else if it might cause another believer to stumble.”*

To have convictions is a good thing, but not at the expense of the work of God. The things that are ok for us cease to be ok when we partake contrary to the will of the Holy Spirit and contrary to loving others. In our world of self-entitlement, this has proven to be a very difficult pursuit for many of us. For we tend to live under the umbrella that “if it’s good for me, then it’s good for everyone.” Certainly this fellowship has a very long way to go to achieve this loving standard. The question is: “will we live our lives and our liberty under the lordship of Jesus Christ, or the lordship of the almighty me?”

Notice the words “do not destroy.” We are not to tear down but rather to “build up” or edify and bless each other. God is trying to do a great work in the lives of each of us. Let us not hinder that work by getting in His way, super-imposing our feelings and standards on others, or do anything that would “stumble” another individual. That will inevitably mean that I will at times need to acquiesce my desires in order to foster love and encouragement toward others God has placed in my sphere of influence. Jesus was even more emphatic than Paul in Matthew 18:6 when He says: “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

14:22-23 – *“You may believe there’s nothing wrong with what you are doing, but keep it between yourself and God. Blessed are those who don’t feel guilty for doing something they have decided is right. But if you have doubts about whether or not you should eat something, you are sinning if you go ahead and do it. For you are not following your convictions. If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning.”*

What is Paul saying here as he closes this subject? It is clear that he is telling us that we must certainly be aware of the circumstances in which we exercise the freedoms that we are given by the Holy Spirit. Our freedoms and even our very relationship with God is personal and individual in nature and design, but we cannot...we *must not*, be unaware that none of us live in bubble.

If we are partaking in things that we are not free to indulge in, then our heart will tell us. God will move through the conscious to condemn our actions. If we are convicted and fail to surrender to such, we are in sin.