

Study 15 – The epistle of Paul to the Romans, by Neville Clark 2017

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Reading: Romans 14

The Righteousness of God in Practice

We continue our consideration of Romans this evening, and in particularly this last section, which we have entitled “the Righteousness of God in practice.” The reason we have called it that is because this is the practical section of the epistle which runs from Ch 12 through to half way through Ch 15. The reason it is the righteousness of God in practice, is because of course the first 11 Chapters were all about the righteousness of God in doctrine, and this last section, therefore, is the practical application of the doctrine of the Atonement as it has been expounded in the first 11 chapters.

The Structure

As far as the structure of this last section is concerned, it breaks simply into 3 subsections. Ch 12, our social responsibilities, that is both in the ecclesia and in daily life. Ch 13, our civil responsibilities, that is those responsibilities in daily life, expanding the last half of Ch 12. And in Ch 14, our ecclesial responsibilities, in ecclesial life, expanding the first half of Rom 12. In fact, as I say, this section that we are dealing with this evening, runs from Ch 14v1 all the way through to Ch 15v13, but we are only going to look at Ch 14. I made the comment a few weeks ago when we looked at Ch 9, that Romans Ch 9 was my favourite chapter in all the book of Romans, and of course, that is true, even as I have studied up to Ch 14. However, as far as the need to understand chapters is concerned, I would suggest that of all of these chapters, Rom 14 is the most critical chapter to understand. It is not the most difficult by any stretch. It is not as difficult as some of the other earlier sections of the atonement, but as far as ecclesial life is concerned, it is a vital chapter to understand, and to understand well, and I think by the end of the class tonight, God Willing, you will see why I say that.

The Ecclesia made up of Jew and Gentile

Now as far as the ecclesia was concerned, back in the 1st century, there is something to appreciate. It was a very cosmopolitan ecclesia, made up, we think of about 50% Jews and about 50% Gentiles. In Ch 13, in our last class, various issues were brought up in that chapter, in relation to daily life, and those issues particularly affected the Jewish portion of the ecclesia. I mean, there was exhortation there for everyone, but it was the Jews that were most keenly affected by those issues. In relation to submission, for example, to governments, they had an enormous problem submitting to foreign powers. In taxation, they had a problem “rendering unto Caesar, what was Caesars.” And in loving their neighbour, they had a great problem defining who was their neighbour. So you can see the issues of Ch 13, whilst they affected the entire ecclesia, affected the Jewish portion more keenly than perhaps the Gentile portion.

When you come to Ch 14, everything is reversed. This is a chapter which deals with the issues of conscience where there was a group in the Ecclesia in Rome who had sensitivities about what sort of foods they might eat, about whether or not they should drink wine, about whether one day was more significant or more special than other days in the calendar. Now these are obviously Jewish predispositions. The Law of Moses categorised foods as clean or unclean. The Law of Moses made one day more special than another. So you’ve got half the ecclesia having come in from the background of Judaism which has been entrenched in their culture for 1500 years. They come to the truth, the veil is rent, the Law is done away, not so simple to forget all the tenets of your upbringing, and the culture that that upbringing has given you. You come into the ecclesia and the Law is done away with and only the principles of the Law are observed. It could be irksome, however, if people started to do things which in your opinion, held the Law in contempt. So there were sensitivities of conscience in the ecclesia, and I am speaking particularly about the Jewish portion of the ecclesia. Now I mentioned that Rom 13 was directed mainly at the Jews, and Rom 14 is directed mainly at the Gentiles, yet it is the Jewish conscience that is most active in Rom 14. How can it be directed at the Gentiles then, this chapter? Well the answer is, of course, that naturally enough, there was a clash in the ecclesia between what was necessary to observe in Christ, and what wasn’t. The Gentiles of course did not agree with the Jews, and they were inclined to insist on their rights, and that caused a problem in the ecclesia. Therefore, not only, but substantially, this chapter is directed to the Gentiles. So Ch 13, he has got the Jewish portion predominantly in mind, Ch 14 it is the Gentiles he predominantly speaks to.

The Times in which the ecclesia lived

Now that might all sound simple enough, but there is a context even behind this. We’ve talked about the demographics of the ecclesia, now let’s think a little bit about the times in which this ecclesia lived. The last

verses of Ch 13 told you something about the urgency that was facing these brothers and sisters. In Ch 13v11 we read, "That knowing the time that it is now high time to awake out of sleep. But now is our salvation nearer than when we believed, the night is far spent, the day is at hand, let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light." Things weren't altogether going well in the ecclesia, you see. Ecclesial life was becoming a little bit frayed at the edges. Brothers and sisters were no longer as careful with each other as they might have been when the ecclesia was a lot younger. The standards of conduct were slipping. Apathy was creeping in, people were beginning to indulge in practices which should have no place in ecclesial life. Look at the last half of Ch13v13. Why did the apostle have to say "cast off these works of darkness," that should have been done years and years ago at baptism, but things have started to creep back in, you see. And as Jesus said in Matt 24v12, "When iniquity abounds, the love of many shall wax cold." When iniquity abounds ecclesial relationships break down, conflicts arise, and the Apostle has to tell the ecclesia here in Rom, Ch 14v19, "Let us therefore follow after the things that make for peace, and things whereof we may edify one another." It wasn't a sure thing that this would happen. V20, "For meat, destroy not the work of God."

Conflict in the ecclesia

There was conflict in the ecclesia, you see and there were people standing on their rights, and pushing others toward a fear of compromise which inevitably would lead to the ecclesia polarising and enormous conflict between, most probably Jews and Gentiles. Now that of course could rupture the entire ecclesia, and that is why we have got this chapter. And it is no surprise, you know, that running throughout these chapters, Ch 12, Ch 13, Ch 14, is a singular theme which is the antidote to the entire problem. Come back just a page to Ch 12v9, you read it for the first time here, it is one verse in each chapter, and in Ch 12v9, he says, "Let love," the word agape it is, "let love be without dissimulation." The word 'dissimulation' is the Greek word *anupokritus* 'without hypocrisy,' unfeigned, sincere, let your love be sincere, so love he says, if it really is love, is completely sincere. Well that is where the word love occurs in Ch 12, come across to Ch 13v10, it occurs in v8,9 and 10, of course, but v 10 will do, "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the Law." He is writing that to Jews, particularly because it was the Jews, that if they ever could have in their 1500 year legacy, they would have fulfilled the law. Well he says, 'That's how you do it by exercising love,' so love, if it really is love would have our neighbour's best interest at heart, proven by v9, you won't commit adultery, you won't kill him, you won't steal from him, you won't bear false witness, you won't do any of those things if you really love your neighbour as yourself. So love is sincere in Ch 12v9, it is genuine in Ch 13v10, and so then you come to Ch 14v15, and you read it again, "If thy brother be grieved with thy meat now walkest thou not in love." Clearly if you know your conduct is going to antagonise someone and you do it anyway, you don't love them. You just don't love them. And 3 times you see, in three chapters the Apostle has to come back to the same point. Love is the missing ingredient, it has been usurped by individual liberty, and the reason there were problems in Rome, was not particularly because the Jewish portion of the ecclesia had scruples that the Gentiles didn't, but because the law of liberty had trumped the law of love. Personal freedom had overcome ecclesial responsibility. And as you will appreciate this was a problem not unique to the Romans, I am going to go out on a limb here, I think the principles that the Apostle discusses in this chapter would underline fully half of all the problems in the ecclesial world. Half of all the problems in the ecclesial world could be solved if we applied correctly the principles of Rom 14. That's why, I say, this chapter is so important and we must understand it.

Division in the ecclesia

The structure of the chapter is very simple, I am just going to speak here of Ch 14, as you will see on the slide, v1-13 I have called, Division in the ecclesia, v14-23, Unity in the Ecclesia. So the chapter essentially splits into two halves. But when Paul talks about division in the ecclesia in the first 13 verses, he speaks of the need for mutual respect and tolerance of individual consciences on non-fundamental matters. And that is a critical point to observe. There was conflict in the ecclesia in Rome. It was not about doctrine. There is nothing in the Statement of Faith in relation to Rom 14 as far as this conflict was concerned. It was about individual consciences, perceptions on the rightness or wrongness of certain non-fundamental activities. And in those 13 verses, v1-13, he is speaking to both groups, to Jews and Gentiles, equally.

V14-23 he talks about unity in the ecclesia. The need to exercise love as you read in v15, in their liberty of conscience, in order that the ecclesia might meet together in peace. He is speaking here to the Gentiles, particularly the Gentiles, as the group who was morally indifferent on many of these non-fundamental issues, and he is speaking to them in this last half of the chapter, because as we will see, the solution lay with them. They were the group that could solve the problem in a way the Jews just could not, hence, the last half of the chapter to the Gentiles. But when you come to Ch 14, he doesn't really talk about Jews or Gentiles. I mean you won't read Jew or Gentile in this chapter. You don't really find out that he has got those in mind until half way through Ch 15. Instead he uses two other different words to describe these groups of people. Ch 14v1,

“Him that is weak in the faith, receive ye.” Ch 15v1, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak.” He is going to talk about the “weak” and the “strong.” And if you are taking notes, it was the Jews that were the weak, it was the Gentiles that were the strong. Now we’ve got to explain what that means, but they were the two groups. There may have been some Jews who were strong, and some Gentiles who were weak, but most Jews would have been weak and most Gentiles would have been strong on the issues we are going to raise.

The weak and the strong

Now when we talk about weak and strong brethren today, we mean something very different to what Paul does in Romans. I mean if you heard that somebody was a weak brother today you might think that they were a bit apathetic, perhaps, a bit superficial, perhaps a bit worldly. Or if you heard they were strong, you might think, well, that’s somebody who must be a keen Bible student, who is a good attender and very diligent in the ecclesia and committed to the truth. Now that is not how Paul uses these terms, that is not what he means by these terms. In this ecclesia we would reasonably presume both Jews and Gentiles were strong in the truth, good attenders, extremely committed to what they believed. When we talk about weak and strong, therefore, in Rom Ch 14, we are talking about weak and strong in relation to the conscience.

A weak or a strong conscience

Weak and strong in relation to the conscience. What Paul is speaking about are brethren with weak and strong consciences on one issue or other. A weak brother directly defined here, is a brother who has a sensitive conscience on an issue and makes rules for himself to live by according to his conscience. In Rom 14, as I would say, for the Jews, they wouldn’t eat certain meats, they wouldn’t drink wine, they wanted to keep one day more special than another, particularly the Sabbath. You see, they may have a conscience about those things, they were not morally indifferent on those things at all. A strong brother would be one who has no attachment to a particular issue, he doesn’t see it as an issue at all, he could partake or he could refrain, he would be indifferent, it would be merely an issue of preference on the day, whether he did this or that activity, or not. And Rom 14 on the issues I have mentioned, food, wine, days, but that would be the Gentiles, they just didn’t see the issues that the Jews saw. So let’s think about this in terms of scripture as a whole. Think about the Law of Christ and all the things that we might do in life as far as the Bible is concerned. Well, for simplicity, and this is a bit of a simplification, I am going to consign every activity you could do into one of 3 areas. Things which are forbidden by scripture, like robbing banks. Things which are required by scripture, like baptism, and then by far the largest group of all, things upon which scripture is entirely silent. Now if things that are forbidden are the black and things that are required are the white, then, of course, this middle section is called the grey area. Not everything in the grey area might be an issue of conscience, I mean there might be morally indifferent things, like driving your car down the street, but many things in the grey area will be issues of conscience. A strong conscience would allow you to do those things, a weak conscience would not allow you to do those things, you see? A bit of a simplification, but you see the general point. In that grey area, of course, we have to make decisions on how we will conduct ourselves based upon biblical principles, and our conscience is going to guide us on what we should do. The issues in this grey area for the purpose of our discussion here are not wrong in themselves. I mean if it is a sin to do something in the grey area, then it is in the black area, it is forbidden by scripture.

Non-fundamental issues

We are talking about things which are not wrong in themselves and which brothers and sisters have latitude on, and will disagree on. It is critical for me to agree with you on whether the trinity is true or not, and if we don’t agree we are going to break fellowship. Non-fundamental issues, however, it is not critical for us to agree on. We don’t have to agree on them, and we might come to a different landing on these things, particularly in our personal lives. The only issue that is ever going to arise between us is when we come together in the ecclesia, we are going to have to work something out then. But these are non-fundamental issues that we are speaking about here. So one brother might a decision one way, another brother may make the opposite decision. And you see, it is the way we look at the issue that makes the difference, our understanding of our bibles, the background we have come from, our foresight perhaps, all of these things will play upon the kind of decision we make according to how we apply that issue in our lives. It becomes a matter of principle for us then, based upon an association of ideas. But here is the important point, once you have come to a landing on an issue, whatever that might be and you genuinely believe it to be wrong to do, then if you do do it, then it is a sin for you. What I am saying here is, we’ve got a particular issue, and I will give you an example in a moment, but we’ve got an issue, and it is not wrong of itself, you could choose to do it or you could choose not to do it, God doesn’t care in the terms of the issue of itself in an outright sense. If however, you come to a landing on that and you say, Well I don’t think that God would be especially happy if I do that thing here or there or in this way, and you become convinced by that, and you’ve got a good logical reason for believing and you do it any way, it is a sin, look at v 14, that is, it is a sin for you. “I know,”

he says, "and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself, but to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean, not to you, maybe not to me, but to him because he has developed a conscience on that issue. What if he goes and does it? V23, "And he that doubteth is condemned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith. Whatsoever is not of faith is sin. He has violated his own conscience, and therefore he has sinned, even though the issue of itself is not a sin, it is not forbidden in scripture. Jam 4v17, "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not to him it is sin." It is your enlightenment that makes the difference you see, because it is your enlightenment that creates your conscience, and at all costs, as far as God is concerned whenever you violate your conscience, you sin. If somebody doesn't have the same conscience as you and they do the very same thing, they may not sin, but you do. Not hard to understand, but, that's the point of scripture.

What is not of faith is sin

So let's be clear on two things, two brethren might look at the same issue and come to two entirely different conclusions. Both of them are perfectly sincere, and secondly we are talking here about non-fundamentals, we are not talking about doctrinal issues. If the Bible speaks explicitly on an issue, then it is a matter of doctrine, it is not a matter of conscience. Thou shalt not kill is not a matter of conscience, I mean, I understand that if you kill somebody you might have a conscience about that, but the point is, it is not a conscience issue, it is a prohibition, it is a doctrinal issue, you see? All right, well how do you know if you've got a conscience on a something or not? Well look at Rom 14v15, "If thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not in love. Now this word "grieve" is an interesting word, it is the Greek word λυπέω and it simply means to make uneasy or to cause him a scruple. That's how Thayer's Lexicon defines it. You are grieved, it doesn't just mean that you are upset, I mean you are upset, but you are uneasy, and you are caused to have a scruple. What is a scruple? We talk about people who are scrupulous or people who are unscrupulous.

What is a scruple.

A scruple is a feeling of doubt or hesitation with respect to the morality or propriety of an action. Something deep down inside you says, 'That is just not right.' It is the 'little voice' that says 'It is not right,' and you are now scrupulous, you've just developed a weak conscience on that one issue. Now be careful how quickly you categorise yourself as a weak or a strong person in relation to the conscience, you might be weak in one area where I am strong and I might be strong where you are weak, because we are at liberty to come to different decisions on non-fundamentals. But if you have a hesitation on the morality of something, it is now an issue of right and wrong, for you. That is your conscience talking and you cannot and you must not violate it, you see. This is what creates conscience issues in us. We are not talking about matters of preference any more because you are going to hesitate in relation to the morality of the thing. So whether the walls are blue or white, that is a preference issue, you are not going to consider that an issue of morality or propriety.

What are conscience Issues?

What kind of issues are we talking about then that could be conscience issues. Well dress standards at ecclesial meetings would be one, we are coming before God on a Sunday morning and we are likely to feel, at least most of us, very strongly about that. But equally it is not a fundamental issue, there is no uniform requirement in the Bible, and so long as we tick all the obvious boxes, such as modesty, we can wear what we like to the meeting. All right, so would you come to the meeting in a Nazi uniform. There is nothing unclean of itself, it is just a piece of material. Could you break bread in a Nazi war uniform? Well, yes you could. Is it an outright sin? No it is not. Would you do it, would you do it next Sunday? If not, why not? If you had a feeling about the morality of that, or the propriety of that before God, you've got a weak conscience on a certain dress standard at ecclesial meetings. You see the point? Dresses or trousers on girls, would be an example, social drinking would be an example, whether or not we should celebrate Xmas would be an example, whether we should use leavened or unleavened bread at the memorial meeting, would be an example. These are all issues upon which there is no explicit commandment one way or the other in scripture but which we must use biblical principles to make decisions on and which for many of us may become more than simply a matter of preference. I think you see the point. So let's have an example. Social drinking. There is quite a wide range of areas where you could choose or not choose to drink wine socially. Do we or don't we socially drink. Should we or shouldn't we socially drink. So let's make the case, the strong brother will say this. Yes we can socially drink. There is no problem with it. Jesus drank wine at the wedding in Cana. In fact the first miracle he ever did was turning water into wine for social reasons. There was no need to have wine at that wedding. Paul told Timothy to "take a little wine for his stomach's sake." The only prohibition the strong would say that scripture has against wine is in drinking to excess. It is fine to drink socially. Not that we have to drink, the strong would say, whether I do or whether I don't is nothing to me, but I can if I wish to. There's the case. And he is going to have biblical quotes behind it. Well the weak says, 'Sure brother but I have got a different point of view.' The first mention of wine in scripture saw Noah drunk.

The first time wine appears in scripture and it is drunk to excess. The Rechabites are held up in Scripture as a family of faith because they didn't drink wine. The Nazarite wasn't even allowed to touch the grapes that wine came from. And the Proverbs, read them, are eloquent on the dangers of wine. Prov 31v4, "It is not for kings O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine," he says. He feels that morally he can't drink socially because it violates scriptural principles. And you see, two brethren, both with Bibles behind them, both sincere, can come to a different landing on this, what we are calling a non-fundamental issue. If we are talking about drinking to excess, that's fundamental, it is a doctrinal issue, we are not talking about drinking to excess. But one is strong and one is weak on this issue in relation to their conscience, and there is no point, there is no point, in trying to negotiate a compromise between them, because for one of them drinking is not an issue, he will or he won't it is simply a matter of preference, but for the other one, it is a matter of conscience, he can't because of the morality, his perceived morality of the thing. If they both lived on desert Islands, the issue would end there. The problem is they both live in the ecclesia in Rome, or they both live in the ecclesia in Tea Tree Gully, and so they've got to address the problem.

And if you look at v21 of Rom 14, wine and the drinking thereof was precisely one of the issues that they debated 2,000 years ago. And it has remained, let me tell you, a hot topic amongst religious circles ever since. Think about the Temperance Unions in the United States. It is a hot topic today amongst conservative Christian churches the world over, social drinking. You look up the Southern Baptists in Texas, an extremely hot topic. Very strong debate on this issue and many other issues, in the same way as we have in Christadelphia. This example, however, of drinking wine, also illustrates that whether you have a conscience on something or not, it is not necessarily binary, for example, look, we could have a complete abstinence of all wine including at the meeting and serve grape juice at the meeting, some Christian churches do that. We could then say, No, no, that's too extreme we are going to drink but only at the meeting. No, no, too extreme, we are going to drink, but only at the meeting. No, no, too extreme, we are going to drink at the meeting and at home, but not outside of our 4 walls. Or perhaps we are going to drink socially in public, or we could go one step further and we could say, in fact, We are going to drink ecclesially. Now the weak conscience who said, I don't agree with drinking wine socially, probably wouldn't advocate complete abstinence even at the memorial meeting. And the strong conscience who did believe they could drink wine socially, even in public, probably wouldn't advocate us serving wine on a Sunday afternoon at a fraternal meal. So you see, we now have graduations of conscience on the same thing. And sincere brethren will come to different landings on this.

But not to doubtful disputations

Well, there's an introduction, now let us talk about Rom 14, because we are in a pretty good position to understand it. V1, "Him that is weak in the faith, receive you, but not to doubtful disputations," he says. So here are our two groups, weak and strong. And Paul begins the chapter by speaking to the strong, "He that is weak, receive ye." Because as we are going to see, the solution to the problem here lies with the strong. And he talks about the weak as being weak in the faith. Now the definite article is not there, he is not weak in THE faith, he is weak in faith, that is weak in one point of faith. As I mentioned a moment ago, the brother that is weak on wine, might be strong on a dress standard, in terms of their conscience, and vice versa, you see. Well, what is his weakness, what is the weakness of the weak brother in v1. V 2, "For one believeth that he may eat all things, and another who is weak, eateth herbs, or vegetables. You have to appreciate that the word 'faith' in v1, is the same as the word 'believeth' in v2. So he that is weak in his belief believes that he can only eat vegetables, he can't eat meat. He has got a sensitive conscience on one point of belief. He understands that all foods, technically, are allowable. They are not a sin of themselves, but they are not all allowable to him, because he has formed a view that all foods aren't equally acceptable to God. Now we've got a clue, of course, as to the nature of the issue, as we have already read, in v 14. There are foods that are clean and there are foods that are unclean. Well, that was the Jewish issue. The issue of v2, is most probably relating to Jewish food laws. But does that mean that a brother is weak in the truth. Not at all, he has got a weak conscience on this one issue. The fact is however, that God did make no distinction between one food and another. Jesus said, in Mark 7v19, "What comes out of the heart of man, that's what defiles the man." And he said that, the record says, "purging all meats," so there was no problem with any kind of food. You could eat grasshoppers, you could eat worms, you could eat whatever you liked, God didn't care. But this brother cares. It is an issue for him. When you are confronted with an issue like this in ecclesial life, what do you do? Well he starts the Ch in v1, and he says, "Him that is weak in faith receive ye but not to doubtful disputations." The margin says, "not to judge his doubtful thoughts." The New American Standard Bible, "Not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions." All of us have sensitivities in one area or another, so it is not for us to go and try and argue away the conscience of another brother or sister, he has formed it. I mean, read v14 again, "To him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. He believes it to be unclean whether you agree or not. And when it says he 'esteems' it to be unclean, the word 'esteem' here in v14, is the Greek word λογίζομαι from which we get the English word 'logical.' The word literally means

'to compute' or 'to calculate.' The point is he has made a reasoned decision, he hasn't made an arbitrary decision it isn't just a matter of preference, he has made a logical decision.

You come back one page, I will show you why he has made this logical decision. Rom 12v1, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your logical service." It is the same word, he is looking for the way he can logically serve God, you see, and he has decided logically, in his mind, that not all foods are equal. So this is a brother's a studied attempt to give God his 'service of reason." Under no circumstances, therefore, can we seek to undermine that, because that is exactly what God wants him to do. Now it is interesting, you know, because you might just, in listening to me on this, you might have made the immediate connection with Paul's other words to Corinth. Come with me to 1 Cor 8, because when we talk about tissues of conscience, you might remember, Paul writes very similar ideas to the ecclesia at Corinth. Interesting, by the way, that he wrote the letter to the Romans from Corinth when he was actually living in Corinth. It was delivered by Phoebe from Cenchrea, you might recall. And we have the issue of conscience as it appears here in 1 Cor 8, look at v1. "As touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge, knowledge puffs up, but love edifies." So we all have knowledge concerning idols, but v7, "Not everyone has the same knowledge. There is not in every man that knowledge, because some" the weak, "with conscience of the idol unto this hour, eat it as a thing offered unto an idol, and their conscience being weak, is defiled," he said. So in Corinth there were two views about meat offered to idols, some brethren said you could eat it, the idol is just piece of stone, it is like eating meat offered to a statue. The idol is not a God. And others who perhaps had come from that background said, "Ohh, not so fast, I can't do that. In all good conscience before Yahweh the God of Israel, I cannot do that," and you've got a difference you see? Now who was right? Well in principle, the strong was right, the idol is nothing, but because of an association made with that idol perhaps from their previous history, there was a certain group of brethren that could not eat meat offered to idols in Corinth. Well what is the answer to the problem? Rom 8v13, "Wherefore," Paul says, "if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth lest I make my brother offend." I will not be the cause of a bad example. I will not cause somebody to copy me and violate their own conscience. And when you come to Ch 10 of 1 Cor, you've got a practical demonstration of this principle in action. Look at this, in Ch 10v25, "Whatsoever is sold in the shambles" now the word 'shambles' means 'marketplace' and the reason it is called a shambles is because, well, it was a shambles. There were tables and livestock everywhere in the Corinthian market. "Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake," don't ask the butcher if it has been offered to an idol or not, forget it, the idol is a statue, it is nothing. "Because all the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast and you be disposed to go, whatsoever is set before you, asking no question for conscience sake." So the boss takes you out for lunch with your business and they serve beef, don't ask whether it as been offered to idols, just accept it. "But if any man say unto you, 'By the way brother, this has been offered in sacrifice to idols,' Oh, that changes everything. What, has the meat changed? No the meat hasn't changed, it is still smoking away there, but your approach to it now has instantly changed. "Eat not for the sake of him that showed it and for conscience sake, for the earth is the lord's and the fullness thereof." So it is God's meat you can eat it, it is God's meat you can't eat it, you see? "Conscience I say," v29 "not thine own, but of the other, for why is my liberty judged of after man's conscience," he says. This begs the question, yesterday I could eat, today I can't eat, why is my freedom to eat or not, limited by someone else's conscience? I don't have a conscience on this issue. If an idol is nothing, then meat offered to idols is offered to statues, there is none other God but one, what is the problem, it is ok to eat the meat?"

Do all to the glory of God

And this is a fundamental point of ecclesial life, isn't it, and here's the answer, whether it is right to do an activity or not is not based on whether you or I have a clear conscience on a thing but on whether it gives God glory. Of course if you have a conscience against it yourself, you can't do it, but if you've got a clear conscience and another brother doesn't, you can't eat for the sake of his conscience if you are together. Why? V31. "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God," because He owns all the meat. God owns every issue, so it might be fine to eat, it might not be fine to eat, whenever and wherever you like. And for that reason the Apostle makes the simple point in v23 of this chapter. "All things are lawful for me but all things are not expedient. All things are lawful, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth." It is illegal to use our liberty in Christ as a license to the flesh.

So come back to Romans. Understand that from Corinthians you will appreciate the argument's very similar in Romans, but there is a difference, and this is the critical difference between Corinthians and Romans. What is the problem in Corinth? Well the problem was idol's meat, but you don't read anything at all about idol's meat in Romans. Romans is talking about Jewish food laws. What was the risk in Corinth? Well the risk was that the strong Brother could lead a weak brother astray by his inconsiderate example. That's not

the risk in Romans. Romans has got much bigger problems than that. Look at v3. "Let not him that eateth despite him that eateth not. And let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth, for God hath received him." Can you see the problem? In Romans the weak are not the least bit intimidated by the strong. They are not likely to copy what they believe to be the bad example of the strong, instead there is conflict, there is immediate conflict between the weak and the strong on this issue of eating meats in Rom Ch 14v3. And look at the language, the strong despises the weak and the weak judges the strong. This word 'despise,' it is a very powerful word, it means 'to treat with utter contempt.'" The strong hates the weak, he hates him. In v 10 it says, "Why dost thou judge thy brother," from the point of view of the weak, or "Why dost thou set at nought thy brother," from the point of view of the strong. So the word 'despise' in v3 is the same word as the word 'set at nought' in v10. It means to 'treat with contempt.' So the strong brother immediately becomes ungodly. He sneers at the weak, because he can't believe that anybody could be so ignorant as far as the Bible is concerned. As far as he is concerned, the weak is so far beneath his dignity that he is not worth speaking to. This word 'despise,' is the same word you find used in Luke 18v9 in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican about certain that trusted that they were righteous and despised others. So this despising that the strong has of the weak, is the very same despising, the very same hatred that the Pharisee had of the publican. The Judaisers in Corinth did exactly the same to the Apostle Paul in 2 Cor 10v10. They said that "his bodily presence was contemptible," and they really hated the Apostle Paul didn't they?

So why did the strong despise the weak so strongly? Because the weak was limiting their freedom, and they think they are being blackmailed into Judaism. But the weak is by no means beyond reproach, in fact he may bear even more reproach because he judges the strong. He doesn't eat, but he judges the strong. Now the word 'judge' means 'to condemn,' and as you read how that word is used in this chapter it is pretty clear that the judgment of the weak is eternal, by which I mean, he believes that the understanding of the strong is so abysmal, that he is really not worth being called a brother. He is really not worth being called a brother. He is unfit for the kingdom of God because he is such a liberal and he feels, the weak feels, that the strong is trying to blackmail him into humanism. And you can see this is an extremely different cast of problem to what you just read in Corinthians. Corinthians is very one-sided, the strong had the knowledge and the bad example, and the weak was likely to trip up and stumble and perhaps leave the truth, serving idols.

The ecclesia polarised

In Rome? Nothing of the sort. The strong and the weak meet each other like this, and the ecclesia is polarising along racial and cultural lines, about to blow apart. And you've got one brother that will spit across the room at the other and the second brother who says, 'I hope you are not in the kingdom with me.'" Extremely violent reactions to each other on non-fundamental issues. We are not talking about Christadelphian and Catholics, we are speaking about Christadelphian and Christadelphian, but that is the strength of language that the Apostle is using, that's what was happening in Corinth. In the words of Psa 50v20, "He speaketh against thy brother and slandereth thine own mother's son." It was a shocking situation. Well, you might say, 'Is brother Clark overstating the point?' Look at v4, "Who art thou," speaking to the weak. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant. To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea he shall be holden up for God is able to make him stand." As I say, this was a verse written to the weak because the weak was the one that did the judging. The problem is that the weak has usurped the position of God and the strong as it so happens, is God's servant." And the usual word for servant in scripture is the Greek word δούλος which means slave, bond-slave, this is a different word. This is the Greek word οἰκέτης and it means a household servant. This servant was treated like a member of the family, he is like a butler, and if there is one thing you can absolutely rely on this master to do, in v 4, and that is to exercise tolerance toward his servant. And not only will the master defend him, he will make him stand, he will acquit him. So Christ will acquit the strong of his misdeeds, such as they might be, the weak has gone too far, the weak has consigned him out of the kingdom of God. And you can see the seriousness of the problem. As I say, nothing like this is in Corinth, we've got an ecclesia in Rome about to blow apart. What is the solution? Well the Apostle commences in v5 and he says, now let's just put down some principles, "One man esteemeth one day above another, another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." The strong sees no difference between one day and another, the weak thinks Sundays are more special, a notable example would be the Sabbath. When the Apostle Paul finished his 3rd missionary journey in Acts 21v20, he went to the arranging brethren at Jerusalem where he concluded the journey, just before the feast of Pentecost, and they said to him, "For what thou seest brother how many thousand of Jews there are which believe and they are all zealous of the Law and they are informed of thee that thou teachest the Gentiles to forsake Moses." Is it true, Paul? And you can see the issue affected him personally, when he went to Jerusalem the very same issue. But the fact is, in v5, whatever your decision is, you might esteem one day above another, you might esteem all days the same, God accepts you because it is not a fundamental point.

Non-fundamental issues

But I will show you where this can go wrong. Come with me to Col 2. We are talking in Romans about non-fundamentals upon which brethren are at liberty to disagree, and may fall on opposite sides of the fence. If you are on desert islands that makes no difference, if we are in the same ecclesia together, that may make a difference. Here is where it can go terribly wrong, Col 2v16, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon or of the Sabbath days." Now how do you reconcile that in v16, with what we have just read in Rom 14. There appears to be a contradiction, you see. In Romans Paul is extremely gentle with the weak, and he counsels the strong not to antagonise the weak. In Colossians he is very aggressive against apparently the same issues. Well what is the answer to the riddle. Well the clue is in the phrase at the top of v 16, "Let no man." Look at v4, "And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words." V8, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit after the tradition of men." v 18, "Let no man beguile you of your reward, in worshipping angels and voluntary humility" and so forth. What is happening in Colossians? We've got Judaisers coming in teaching that if you don't follow their lead on non-fundamental issues, it is an issue of salvation. This is exactly what the Pharisees did in Matt 15v9, they made the observance of the Law a doctrinal matter. Now what is happening in Romans is you've got Jews wanting to keep certain points of the Law of Moses. They've got a conscience about that, they are not trying to make that an ecclesial issue, but they just can't come at people profaning the Sabbath for example, like having a working B on a Saturday afternoon. They can't come at that in their ecclesia. What is happening here, if I was trying to make the same parallel in Colossians, the Judaisers would be saying, If you hold a working B on Saturday's afternoon, it is salvation issue. You are out of the kingdom of God, because Matt 15v9, the Pharisees made for doctrines the commandments of men. Rom 14, we are talking about non-fundamental issues, food laws, certain days. The issue in Col 2 is that the Judaisers came along and made those into doctrinal issues and added to the statement of faith. You see the difference? Paul is extremely tough on that teaching in Col 2, "Beguile you with enticing words, spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit. He uses none of that kind of language in Rom 14. Rom 14 is genuine consciences, weak on this or that point, not trying to make those issues matters of doctrine. Ok back to Romans. What would that mean as far as our example is concerned previously about socially drinking wine. Well the genuine weak brother would say, that he couldn't socially drink for conscience reasons, and that he wouldn't want to be involved with people who did. The Judaiser would say, 'Anyone who drinks socially won't be in the kingdom of God,' because, you see, he turns a conscience issue into a doctrinal issue and makes for doctrines the commandments of men. That's the difference. Romans, you've got genuine brethren with sensitive consciences, nothing whatsoever, like what you see in Col 2.

Rom 14v6, "He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord. And he that regardeth not the day to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord and he giveth God thanks, and he that eateth not to the Lord, he eateth not and giveth God thanks." I always used to wonder by the way how you can "eat not and give God thanks," I think what it must mean is that he abstains from some foods and gives thanks for the food that he does eat, but you can figure that out for yourself. The point is in v6, that each side has made a decision. The issue is non-fundamental, God will accept them whatever their decision is, to abstain or to partake. You notice the phrase that is reiterated all through those verses, "Unto the Lord, unto the Lord." 6 times, 4 times in v6 and twice in v8, the phrase "Unto the Lord," occurs, and that is significant because this is a phrase of religious devotion, which tells you straight away, these are not trivial matters or simply matters of preference. Eph 5v22, "Wives submit to your own husbands as unto the Lord." It is not a matter of preference whether a wife submits to her husband, if she is conscientious in the truth, it becomes a matter of principle. Eph 6v5, "Servants be obedient to your masters as unto Christ," you see? It is a matter of principle. This is a practical application of "doing all to the glory of God." There is a deliberate conscience decision being made here in v 6 for the sake of the truth. The problem is that the weak and the strong can't agree on how to do that. V7, "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. Whether we live, we live unto the Lord, whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died and rose and revived, that he might be the Lord both of the dead and the living." That is perhaps a little bit ambiguous, but it is not difficult. He is not speaking here of literal life and death. If you live to something, you do it, the strong one. If you die for something, you abstain from it, the weak. And so, just come back a couple of pages and I will show you an example. Rom 6v10, speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, living and dying in a figurative sense." Rom 6v10, "For in that he died, he died unto sin," now he physically died but died metaphorically unto sin. "But in that he liveth, he liveth unto God." So Christ literally died and rose, and metaphorically died to sin and lived to God, as it were, that's how the word is being used here in v 7,8 and 9. But of course there is a critical qualification made in v 7, "None of us liveth to himself, and none of us dieth to himself."

By love serve one another

You can use your liberty in Christ in a correct or an incorrect manner, and here is how the Apostle speaks on

the issue to the Galatians. Gal 5v13, "For brethren you have been called unto liberty. Only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. You can see it resonating with what we already know from Romans. "For all the Law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour a thyself but if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. If this gets away in your ecclesia, just make sure that you don't turn into cannibals he says, because of course, it certainly can, can't it?" Well because whether we live or die to an issue we do it to the Lord, he says this in v10. "Why dost thou judge thy brother or why dost that set at nought your brother, we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ." He comes back therefore to the point that he made earlier in v4 about standing before Christ. And we are all there because the Lord wants every one of us. And why are we there. Well we are there to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. The word 'stand' means 'to present ourselves.' It is exactly the same word as you read in Rom Ch 12v1, "Present yourselves a living sacrifice," or present your bodies a living sacrifice. And that would be the question we answer in v10, how much do our sacrifice mimic that of the Lord's, how much do we really like him, what is our reasonable service? V 11, "For it is written, As I live saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, every tongue shall confess to God." What shall every tongue confess? The answer is, Phil 2v11, "Every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father," that is what every tongue shall confess. "So then every one of us will give account of himself to God." The word account here, is the Greek word λογος it means a verbal account. So what would the Lord say? Please explain to me brother in very clear and simple language why you despised my servant. Please explain to me sister, in very clear and simple language why you judged my servant, and both of you tell me why you did that on behalf of me.

How would you like to give that verbal account? Whoof. V13, "Let us not therefore judge one another anymore," spoken to the weak. "But judge this rather that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brothers way," spoken to the strong. And that concludes the first half of the chapter, the first section of the chapter where he addresses both weak and strong, and lays out before them the issues that were facing them and the principles underpinning those things. From v14 to the end, he now speaks directly to the strong, because of course, the power to solve this problem lies with the strong. And look at the logic, v14, we've read it now about 3 times. "I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself, but to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean to him it is unclean." The Apostle does not enter into the debate on the issue of foods. He simply says I agree with the logic of the strong, there is nothing unclean of itself, but if somebody has a conscience against an activity, it is unclean to them, and therefore don't antagonise the weak, v15. "If thy brother be grieved with thy meat now walkest thou not in love. Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died." Don't insist on your rights when you know it is a sensitive issue otherwise you are in blatant disagreement, as you can see on the screen, with Gal 5v13, the top verse there. And there is only one reason that you would ever grieve somebody, and that is pride, isn't it? There is only one reason, "Love doth not behave herself unseemly, love suffers long, love does not vault itself. Lest you destroy your brother for meat." The word "destroy" means 'to bring to ruin,' as the RSV says, or to 'bring disaster upon,' as the New English Bible says. Now how do you do that? How can you destroy your brother? In one of two ways, by inflaming his anger in v4, so that he judges you, which he ought never to do, or by emboldening his conscience against what he thinks is right so that he copies you, and therefore sins, as v23 says. "For whom Christ died," v15. "Destroy not the weak for whom Christ died." Which of course raises the entire argument to a different plane, doesn't it? The strong are being asked to make a small sacrifice. If he refuses, he might invalidate Christ's major sacrifice, because the salvation of the weak is in the balance, and it would be his fault. It would be his fault. V16, "Let not then, your good be evil spoken of." Your good, is the knowledge of the strong, but in fact everything he stands for is called in question if he pushes his rights isn't it? His exposition, his character, his whole life in the truth is called into question. "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in, as it ought to be, a spirit of holiness." So the strong has created a problem. He is right in principle but he has forced the issue and now he has made the kingdom of God a matter of meat and drink. No one cares about righteousness and peace anymore, that is long gone, it is all about meat and drink, but in doing that he imperils his own salvation, not because he was wrong in his exposition but because he was wrong in his conduct. This is how Bro Carter says it in his book on Romans, "The weak made the eating of some foods a matter of reproach by not partaking of such foods, and this is advised. To make the point clear Paul repeats that all things indeed are clean, the wrong he is considering is not in the meat, but in the eating, and in use of freedom, the strong might be guilty of this wrong. A thing right in itself may be wrong through its effects, the way of self-denial is the noble way." And think about that, the way of self-denial, isn't that the very spirit of the Atonement? I mean, how was atonement made for us, it was made for us by a man sacrificing his will to the will of God that his righteousness might be imputed toward us. Would you want to copy him, or would you not? Well since you are not going to sacrifice yourself physically, in what way do you die for your brethren? That is the practical application of the atonement in this section of Romans, isn't it? Is that clear? V18, "For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men," look at that? If the strong doesn't

insist on his rights he gets the respect of both God and man. So the exhortation is in v 19, "Let us therefore follow after the things that make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." Follow after the things, the word means, 'to pursue,' which implies you've got to chase it down. It is not a sure thing, it is not easy to catch. Peace in the ecclesia doesn't happen by magic it requires diligence. Peace in a marriage I suppose, doesn't happen by magic, it requires diligence, and any relationship we have, it is not automatic. V20, "For meat, destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence," he says. And you can see the contrast with v 19 between v19 and 20. V20 says "Destroy not the work of God." The end of v19 says, "Edify one another." The word 'edify' means 'build up,' the word 'destroy,' means 'pull down.' So don't demolish the work of God, v20, but build it up, v19. It is good,v21, neither to eat flesh, or drink wine nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth or is offended or is made weak. And you will see it is good in v21, as opposed to evil, in v20. So a contrast v 19, 20, a contrast, v20, 21. But of course, the protest comes from the strong. He says, hang on, Woah, too much, Paul, he says, too much. This is unreasonable, I've got right on my side. There is nothing unclean of itself, you've just said so in v 14. Does my exposition count for nothing? says the strong, v22. Hast thou faith? says Paul, have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. International Version. "Blessed is that man who does not condemn himself by what he approves." Now we have already considered one way in which the strong might condemn himself, and that is in v17 by making the kingdom of God an issue of meat and drink. But you know, there is one other way that the strong can condemn himself. You come with me to 1 Cor 10v19, a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing, and the strong has got a little knowledge, but he might not have a lot of knowledge. His conscience is clear as far as he is concerned, he's pretty solid on his exposition, but look what the Apostle says here. 1 Cor 10v19, "What say I then, that the idol is anything? Or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is anything? But I say No, that the things that the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils and not to God, and I would not that you should have fellowship with devils," he says. "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils, you cannot the be partakers of the Lord's table and of the table of devils," what does he mean? Well the strong has become so strong that he goes up to the idol's temple, and he is in fellowship with devils, he's in fellowship with false gods, but the strong protests, he says, There is no such a thing as an idol, it is just a statue, Ch 8v4, "There's none other god but one." But the apostle says here, Yes, yes, 1 Cor 10v19, I understand that there is none other god but one, I understand that idols aren't true, you are in fellowship with idols. How can you be in fellowship with idols if idols aren't true? You see what has happened? The strong has become so strong, that at some point he has crossed the line, and he is out of fellowship with God, even though his conscience is clear, even though he has participated in something which is not fundamental. For crying out loud, idols don't exist, but he is out of fellowship with God, and look what Paul says in v22, "You strong," he says, "you provoke the Lord to jealousy. Are we stronger than He? You've made yourself even strong with God, and you are out of fellowship with God for partaking of something which was, might I say, not wrong in itself, but the association of it was so strong that you are out of fellowship with God.

That would be the second way that the strong could remove himself from the kingdom of God. Come back to Romans, and let's finish. Ch 15v1, this is Paul's conclusion of the matter. "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves. Let everyone of us please his neighbour for his good to edification, for even Christ pleased not himself." How would we summarise that, brothers and sisters, young people. This is, I think, what we have found. Paul writes, Rom 14, chiefly to the strong because the solution lies with them. The strong believe they have liberties in Christ, but the weak have a conscience against taking these liberties. This conscience is strong and is based upon a logical argument. Pressing the issue causes problems in the ecclesia. Both parties sin, the weak judge the strong and the strong despise the weak. Since the issue is not fundamental, that it is not a sin of itself, Paul, in principle, agrees with the reasoning of the strong. If the strong gives way, however, he makes a small sacrifice. If the weak gives way he voids his conscience. Since, therefore, the kingdom of God is more than meat and drink and since the strong can freely partake or not, I mean, he is indifferent on the issue, the strong must give way. To do otherwise would not be to show love, in which case, the strong would sin. Instead he should use his knowledge to edify. Even Christ pleased not himself. We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ to answer for our conduct in these very matters.

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