

Facilitator Notes for *Set Free!* – A Study in Romans
Lesson 19 ~ You Are What You Eat! Romans 14-15:13

**PLEASE DON'T READ THESE NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LESSON.
HEARING GOD FOR YOURSELF IS WAY BETTER THAN MY COMMENTS!**

Questions

Read **Romans 14:1-12**

1. What *attitudes* towards each other were being displayed by the Christians in the church at Rome over disagreements in lifestyle (**14:1, 3-4, 10**)?

Rejection (non-acceptance); judgment; condemnation; looking down on each other

2. Over what specific issues was there disagreement (**14:2,5**)?

Over what a Christian should eat (meat or vegetables); sacred or holy days

♥ Why do differences of opinion tend to divide people?

If someone has a different opinion from us, especially over an issue we feel strongly about, we must admit there is a chance that we are wrong. Emotions also get involved and different opinions influence the way we live so those with different opinions are different in other ways too which means we may not get along. We also can't understand why someone would think differently from us since our way of thinking makes perfect sense!

Paul uses the term "weak in faith" which does **not** mean weak in **character** or **conviction**. Neither does it mean *lacking* in faith. Rather, "weak in faith" really means *lacking in knowledge*. The "weak in faith" had not yet thought through the full implications of their new faith in Jesus Christ. They were still in the process of sorting out all the nuances of what it meant to be a Christ-follower and how their faith effected their everyday behavior. It could be that the "weak in faith" were the Jewish converts in the church who still kept the dietary laws and holy feast days of the Old Testament law. Or, the "weak in faith" could have been Gentile converts whose ideas about what to do or not do was shaped by their former pagan backgrounds. Whatever the case, the point is that the disagreements were over **non-essential issues** of faith and the conflict it was causing was undermining the *love* Christ-followers are to have toward each other which, in turn, affected the *unity* of the church.

♥ What life-style issues and rules do Christians argue about today? What determines if these issues are **essential** or **non-essential** to keeping the faith? **If the issue is not clearly spelled out in scripture, we must agree to disagree.**

♥ From your experience, how have you seen conflict divide and demoralize the body of Christ? Why is unity in a church or community of believers so important? **A house divided cannot stand. Disunity weakens the body of Christ and diminishes her influence in the world. The enemy loves division because of the effect it has on people and on the Kingdom of God. We need each other and we shouldn't be undercutting each other.**

♥ What feelings have you experienced toward a brother or sister in Christ with whom you are in total disagreement over how your Christian faith is to be lived out in everyday life? How, in the past, have you handled these disagreements?

3. Without taking sides, Paul gives a solution to the problem in **14:3**. State the remedy in your own words.

Do not look down on the person that has different opinions and don't judge or condemn those with whom you disagree.

♥ What **word** in **14:1** sums up Paul's solution? **ACCEPT** Would this solution still work today? Why or why not? **Acceptance (receive; affirm; regard favorably) has great power to bridge differences.**

♥ How would following the advice given in **14:3** help solve most problems in a community of Christians?

♥ What are some ways you can "accept" another Christian with whom you have strong disagreements? Communication and dialogue is one way to accept another; listen to the other side; share reasons without judging or condemning.

4. What are all the reasons Paul gives as to why we are not to "look down on" or "condemn" another Christian with whom we have non-essential disagreements (14:3, 4, 6, 10-12)?

God has accepted us all

Each of us are God's servants, accountable to him; he will judge each of us

What matters is each person's accountability before God

If our conscience is right before God, he will defend each of us

All Christians, whatever they do, are trying to honor and thank God;

We answer to God for what our conscience dictates; we will stand before God to be judged

5. What should be the motivation for all of our actions (14:6)?

We should do everything as if we are doing it unto God – our actions, attitudes and habits.

Another way of saying this is to ask: Am I doing this out of respect to God? God is more concerned about attitude rather than details and methods (Mark 2:23-28).

♥ What are some Christian beliefs on which we *cannot* "agree to disagree"? Why?

We cannot agree to disagree on those beliefs that are essential to our Christian faith. For example, who God is (Father, Jesus and Spirit), who humans are; what salvation is; the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, etc. Essentially, we cannot agree to disagree on anything that would change the basic concept or identity of our Christian faith – things that are clearly set forth in scripture.

♥ When scripture is not explicit on an issue, how should a person decide what is right or wrong (14:5)?

How do you go about making these decisions in your own life? Personal conviction or fully convinced in your own mind. This infers that we have thoughtfully considered the issue for ourselves and have come to a conclusion that is right for us.

6. What is Paul's point in 14:7-9 and how does it affect decisions of lifestyle?

We do not live to ourselves alone (NIV) – We do not live in a vacuum and what we do affects others. We need to consider our responsibility to others. One the other hand, our lives are ultimately for Christ alone. Our entire life, from beginning to end belongs to God. Our relationship with God is more important than anything else. We are not our own masters.

♥ Concerning "gray areas," do you need to hear the challenge not to **look down on** those who have strict convictions or the challenge not to **condemn** those with more lenient convictions? Why?

♥ When you are tempted to judge someone's behavior, is it done more out of a need to help the other person do it "right" – or out of a need to declare your own behavior "right"? What does this reveal about yourself?

♥ What truth do we all have to keep in mind (14:10, 12)? Each of us will give a personal account to God. How does this fact affect your decisions?

Read Romans 14:13-23.

7. Paul now switches from *attitudes* towards other Christians to how those *attitudes* will affect *actions*. In the chart below, what motives should govern all our decisions concerning controversial activities?

Verse	Motive
14:13	Don't condemn; don't cause your brother or sister in Christ to stumble by the way you live
14:15	Act out of love for the other person; don't destroy someone else because of what you do

14:18	If we live out of love we will please God and also have the approval of others
14:19	Do what leads to peace and harmony; look for ways to “build up” the other
14:20	Don’t destroy God’s work over something that has much less importance
14:21	Don’t do anything that will cause another Christian to stumble (become weak in their faith or cause them to do something they think is wrong or so offend them that it affects their relationship with God and with you.) We are to seek the good of the other.

- ♥ Can you think of some specific examples where a Christian would choose to refrain from some practice or action out of respect and love to another Christian?
- ♥ What practice would you be willing to give up if it proved to be hurtful to another Christian? Would you give it up completely or only when you are with the "weaker" brother or sister in Christ? Why?
- ♥ How do we know if what we do or don't do is causing our brother or sister in Christ to stumble? To cause another to stumble or fall technically means that we would, by our behavior, encourage them to do something that they believe is wrong or something that violates their conscience. But we also need to be sensitive to doing things that might deeply offend another believer even if they are not really tempted to follow our example. Love and concern for the other should always be our motive instead of doing things just because we want to or we are free to do.

When has our freedom been a stumbling block to someone else? What happened?

8. What are some specific things that Paul mentions that are much more important in the body of Christ than controversial practices (14:15, 17, 19)?

Acting in love; living a life of goodness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit; building each other up (encouraging each other and helping each other grow spiritually)

Why are these things more important than controversial practices?

These are things that have eternal consequences; eating, drinking, and certain “freedoms” etc. will not matter when it comes to eternity.

- ♥ Why is it sometimes easier to focus on the non-essentials rather than the essentials of love, righteousness, peace, joy in the Holy Spirit and building up and strengthening another believer?
- ♥ How have you strengthened and built up a brother or sister in Christ? What was the benefit?
- ♥ If you are not sure something is right or wrong, should you do it? Why or why not? (14:14, 23)

9. What does it mean to cause another Christian to fall or stumble (14:13, 20, 21; 1 Corinthians 8:9-13)?

Both “strong” and “weak” Christians can cause their brother or sister in Christ to stumble. A stumbling block or obstacle refers to something that might cause someone to trip or fall into sin. The strong but insensitive Christian may flaunt his or her freedom, be a harmful example, and thus offend others’ consciences. The “weak” Christian may try to restrain others with nonessential rules and regulations, thus causing dissension. We need to be both strong in faith and sensitive to others’ needs. Because we are all strong in certain areas and weak in others, we constantly need to monitor the effects of our behavior on others.

- ♥ Would you say you are more like the "weak" believer or the "strong" believer? How so?
- ♥ When was a time you gave up a "freedom" in order not to offend another believer? Was it worth it?
- ♥ By instructing the Romans not to judge each other (14:4, 10, 13), does Paul mean we are never to judge between right and wrong where others are concerned? Why or why not? Give an example.

There is a right way and wrong way to “judge” others. See Lesson 3

10. What is the difference between what Paul is talking about in Galatians 4:8-11; 5:1; Colossians 2:16-23 and choosing not to do something that may cause another Christian to stumble?

If another believer is trying to pull us back into legalism (keeping a set of rules or traditions in order to please God (and other people), we are to resist. Often it is the “older, more mature” Christian who might be offended because other Christians are keeping their “rules.” These are people who are not in danger of falling into sin by our example; they just want everyone to conform to what they think is right or live life the way they live it. If we sense a judgmental attitude

or controlling spirit in another person who is “offended”, we need to carefully consider and pray about what to do.

♥ What are three results of living in such a way as to not cause another Christian to stumble (14:18)?
We serve Christ, please God and receive the approval or affirmation of others

What personal benefit might you experience from these results?

♥ What is the advantage of following the advice in 14:21? Why is this sometimes hard to do?

Self-sacrifice and self-denial have the potential of molding us into Christ’s image. These two disciplines break the power of self-centeredness in our lives.

Read Romans 15:1-13.

11. What responsibility do Christians strong in faith (15:1 NIV) have toward weaker Christians (15:1-2, 7)?
We must be considerate of the doubts and fears of those who think certain things are wrong. Our number one concern should not be about pleasing ourselves, but to please our neighbor and build up their faith in the Lord. We accept (receive, welcome and invite into our lives) others with whom we have differences, just as Christ accepted us.

♥ In the world, the weak usually yield or submit to the strong. In the church, why should the strong submit to the weak? Is this fair? Why or why not? Who benefits when this happens? Where do we draw the line on trying to please everyone? Good questions for discussion!

12. The advice given in 15:1-2 is not always easy to do. What three sources of help and encouragement found in 15:3-5 can we count on?

Christ is our example and he will help us right now in doing the right thing

We will also get help and encouragement from reading and studying the Bible

God gives us patience and endurance and encouragement to help us do the right thing.

Ultimately, God is the one who gives a spirit of unity among believers. This is his gift to us and it is not something we can do ourselves.

♥ The word *accept* (14:1, 3; 15:7) means *to receive to oneself; to welcome; to admit to one's society and fellowship; receive and treat with kindness*. How has Christ accepted you? How does this help us in accepting others? Who do you need to show acceptance to?

With what does God want to fill you to overflowing (15:13)? Joy, peace and hope. What must you do (15:13)? God will fill us AS WE TRUST IN HIM Why? God can do very little in our lives without us trusting him and having faith in his promises. Faith or trust causes a heart change in us that then allows God to give us what he wants to give us and what he has been waiting to give us.

Response

Below are some issues over which Christians today might be in disagreement. Discuss with your small group which of these issues require agreement because they are essential to our faith in Christ and which issues require that we "agree to disagree."

Food; dress; make-up; sexual activity; alcohol; tobacco; appropriate movies and books; TV viewing; abortion; disarmament; gay marriage; medical technology; music (in and out of the church); capital punishment; women's roles (in and out of the church); tithing; spiritual gifts; political involvement; homosexuality; modes of baptism and communion; Sabbath-keeping (what activities are allowed or not allowed on Sundays or if keeping a Sabbath is necessary); war on poverty; environmental issues; justice issues surrounding oppressed people; war; virgin birth of Christ; denominational traditions; means of salvation; domestic abuse; love; pornography; sexual abuse and sexual trafficking; animal rights; views on the return of Christ and the end of the age.

What were you feeling toward group members who did not agree with your views? How do you determine what is "right" or "wrong" for yourself? Would Paul's advice from **Romans 14-15:13** about handling disagreements work today for these issues? Why or why not? How can Christians share a spirit of unity despite having different views on certain practices (**Romans 15:5-6**)?

BELOW IS THE SUPPLEMENTARY SCRIPTURE FOR THIS LESSON THAT CAN BE PRINTED OUT FOR SMALL GROUP TIME.

NIV

1Corinthians 8:9-13 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? 11 So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. 12 When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

Galatians 4:8-11 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. 9 But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? 10 You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! 11 I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

Galatians 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Colossians 2:16-23 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. 18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. 19 He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

20 Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 21 "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? 22 These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

NLT

1Corinthians 8:9-13 But you must be careful with this freedom of yours. Do not cause a brother or sister with a weaker conscience to stumble.

10 You see, this is what can happen: Weak Christians who think it is wrong to eat this food will see you eating in the temple of an idol. You know there's nothing wrong with it, but they will be encouraged to violate their conscience by eating food that has been dedicated to the idol. 11 So because of your superior knowledge, a weak Christian, for whom Christ died, will be destroyed. 12 And you are sinning against Christ when you sin against other Christians by encouraging them to do something they believe is wrong. 13 If what I eat is going to make another Christian sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live—for I don't want to make another Christian stumble.

Galatians 4:8-11 Before you Gentiles knew God, you were slaves to so-called gods that do not even exist. 9 And now that you have found God (or should I say, now that God has found you), why do you want to go back again and become slaves once more to the weak and useless spiritual powers of this world? 10 You are trying to find favor with God by what you do or don't do on certain days or months or seasons or years. 11 I fear for you. I am afraid that all my hard work for you was worth nothing.

Galatians 5:1 So Christ has really set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law.

Colossians 2:16-23 So don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new-moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. 17 For these rules were only shadows of the real thing, Christ himself. 18 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. 19 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.

20 You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the evil powers of this world. So why do you keep on following rules of the world, such as, 21 "Don't handle, don't eat, don't touch." 22 Such rules are mere human teaching about things that are gone as soon as we use them. 23 These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, humility, and severe bodily discipline. But they have no effect when it comes to conquering a person's evil thoughts and desires.