



## Lesson 19 ~ You Are What You Eat!

Romans 14-15:13

### Discussion Starter

- When you were growing up, did your family have rules on what you could or could not do on Sundays? If so, what were they?

### Introduction

As any Christ-follower knows, relationships with other Christians can sometimes be a challenge even though we all share a love for God. Christians seldom live their lives the same way or agree in their views concerning different issues in the church and in the world. Even though diversity can be a strength, the disagreements that diversity sometimes causes can, if not handled correctly, become impossible divisions that threaten unity and peace in the body of Christ.

In **Romans 14-15**, Paul counsels the Roman believers about how to maintain harmony in their very diverse Christian community. In the process of helping the Romans, Paul also helps us maintain peace and unity in our Christian communities. Even though the issues that cause division are different today, the principles of love and acceptance, based on Christ's love for us all, still apply. Love and putting the needs of others first still works wonders!

### Preparation

1. Before you read **Romans 14 -15:13**, ask God to open your eyes so that you may see wonderful truths in his Word (**Psalms 119:18**). You may want to make the following prayer your own:

**Triune God - Father, Son and Spirit,**

*I admit that I cannot understand the truth found in God's Word with only my mind.*

*I agree that spiritual truth has to be understood with my heart as well as my head.*

*So I ask You to give me spiritual understanding as I do this lesson.*

*I pray that You would enable me to see, hear and understand,  
with my spirit, all that You want to teach me.*

*I ask this in the powerful name of Father, Son and Spirit.*

*Amen*

2. Read **Romans 14-15:13** slowly and thoughtfully. As you read and reread, **underline or highlight** any verses, phrases or words that are meaningful to you. Put a **question mark** beside anything you don't understand. Put a ✓ beside anything you would like more information about.

**You may also want to read the Scripture in another translation.** The Scripture handouts for these lessons contain the *New International Version* (NIV) and the *New Living Translation* (NLT). The questions are phrased to be answered from **either** of these versions. Other translations and paraphrases should only be used as supplementary texts to help your understanding.

3. Sum up the Scripture passage for this lesson in a short sentence, phrase or title.

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

♥ Why do differences of opinion tend to divide people?

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?
  - ♥ 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?
  - ♥ 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.
    - ♥ What **word** in **14:1** sums up Paul's solution? Would this solution still work today? Why or why not?
    - ♥ 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?
  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**)?
  5. What should be the motivation for all of our actions (**14:6**)?
    - ♥ What are some Christian beliefs on which we *cannot* "agree to disagree"? Why?
    - ♥ 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?

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

- ♥ 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**)? 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
<b>14:13</b>	
<b>14:15</b>	
<b>14:18</b>	
<b>14:19</b>	
<b>14:20</b>	
<b>14:21</b>	

- ♥ 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? 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**)?

Why are these things more important than controversial practices?

- ♥ 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**)?

- ♥ 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.
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?

- ♥ What are three results of living in such a way as to not cause another Christian to stumble (14:18)? 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?

Read Romans 15:1-13.

11. What responsibility do Christians strong in faith (15:1 NIV) have toward weaker Christians (15:1-2, 7)?

- ♥ 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?
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?

- ♥ 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)? What must you do (15:13)? Why?

## *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**)?