

## Romans Study Part 11: Living Righteously Pt 2 (13:8-15:13)

Covenant Presbyterian Church

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*“The glory of God, not the observance of food-laws, nor the satisfaction of one’s natural appetite, nor even the assertion of one’s personal liberty, is the main object of the Christian life and action...and the glory of God is signally served when the conscience of his people is sympathetically treated and their wellbeing is generally promoted.” - F.F. Bruce*

- I. Love and the Law (13:8-10)
  - A. Properly oriented love fulfills the law of Christ
    1. You cannot act in true love toward God and/or your neighbor sin against them simultaneously - the two are mutually exclusive (v.10)
  - B. So by seeking to always truly love God and our neighbor, we will conform ourselves to the will of God (Rom. 12:2)
  - C. Paul is drawing upon the Great Commandment (Matt 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:27)
    1. Here Jesus declares that “all the Law and the Prophets” depend on the two commands: to love God and love your neighbor (Matt 22:40)
- II. Cast Off Works of Darkness (13:11-14)
  - A. “Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed” (v.11)
  - B. The imminent (from our perspective) return of Christ ought to reorient our lives
    1. It should cause us to put off the “works of darkness” and to “put on the armor of light” (v.12)
      - a) List in v.13 is a sample, not all-encompassing
    2. Works of darkness seek to please the “flesh” - the sin nature (v.14). They go directly against the will of God and so are done at night, under the cover of darkness, in an attempt to hide from the face of God.
      - a) But the night has dispersed (v.12) - there is no more hiding (Num. 32:23)
    3. Daytime is at hand. Let us live in such a way that we can walk boldly in the light - with nothing to hide and nothing to fear from God.
      - a) We’re empowered to do this by virtue of the righteousness of Christ that has been made ours (v.14)
      - b) “Now to *put on* Christ, means here to be on every side fortified by the power of his Spirit, and be thereby prepared to discharge all the duties of holiness...inasmuch as God, by adopting us, unites us to the body of his only-begotten Son, and for this purpose, that we, renouncing our former life, may become new men in him.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*,(Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 490.

### III. The Weak and the Strong (14:1-15:6)

#### A. The problem: differences of Christian conscience caused quarreling within the church in Rome (14:1)

1. Vegetarianism/dietary restrictions (14:2, 21)
2. Observance of special days (14:5)
3. Note: This passage is parallel to 1 Corinthians 8-10, where the issue is meat sacrificed to idols
4. Paul divides those involved in the quarreling into two camps: the weak and the strong
5. Paul sides with the strong (15:1) and so indicates that they are in the right. At the same time, he does not indicate that the weak were sinning by holding their views.
  - a) That is, they were mistaken/misguided and lacked a certain level of understanding, but not to the extent that it was considered sinful in and of itself.
  - b) "It is a great error in morals, and a great practical evil, to make that sinful which is in fact innocent. Christian love never requires this or any other sacrifice of truth. Paul would not consent, for the sake of avoiding offense, that eating all kinds of food, even what had been offered to idols, or disregarding sacred festivals of human appointment, should be made a sin; he strenuously and openly maintained the reverse. He represents those who thought differently, as weak in faith, as being under an error, from which more knowledge and more piety would free them. Concession to their weakness he enjoins on a principle perfectly consistent with the assertion of the truth, and with the preservation of Christian liberty, vers. 13-23."<sup>2</sup>
6. However, both parties were sinning against one another in the way they treated one another regarding their different views.
  - a) The strong were enticing the weak to go against their conscience and, in the process, to sin
  - b) The weak were accusing the strong of sinning and, perhaps, even casting doubt on their profession of faith

#### B. The principle: the strong and the weak

1. **Weak** - those whose consciences are troubled by certain practices that are acceptable in the Christian life, due to a lack of knowledge/understanding (c.f. 1 Corinthians 8:1, 7, 10-11). They have weak conscience.
  - a) Those promoting vegetarianism and/or promoting the observance of special days. In 1 Corinthians, those refraining from eating meat sacrificed to idols.

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<sup>2</sup>Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, (Albany: Books for the Ages, 1996), 664.

2. **Strong** - those whose consciences are not troubled by the aforementioned practices, because they have a better understanding of Christian freedom. They have a strong conscience.
    - a) Those who do not have the same scruples regarding vegetarianism and special days. In 1 Corinthians, those who have no problem with eating meat sacrificed to idols.
- C. The response: pursue mutual upbuilding
1. The strong should not despise the weak and the weak should not judge/condemn the strong (14:3)
  2. The strong should willingly and joyfully refrain from exercising their freedom to do that which is offensive to their brother/sister in Christ, for their sake to the glory of God (14:13-15; 21; 15:1-3)
    - a) True freedom in these matters is the freedom to do or not do X. If you feel that you have to do X every time that the opportunity presents itself, then you are not free - you have become enslaved by X.
  3. The strong should seek to educate the weak, but should not push or entice the weak to violate their conscience (14:13, 20, 23)
  4. The weak should obey their conscience (14:22-23)
    - a) Acting against your conscience is always wrong
    - b) "To violate one's conscience, even when the conscience is wrong, is to rebel against God...This is a sort of catch-22, to be sure. When one's conscience misleads, it may be wrong to follow it, for to follow it may lead to sin. But it may also be wrong to disobey conscience, for to disobey conscience is always to rebel against what one thinks is right. This dilemma shows the importance of educating the conscience according to God's Word."<sup>3</sup>
    - c) Even if the act is right, the motive is rebellion against God and so it is sinful
  5. In all things, both parties should act in such a way that leads to peace and mutual edification within the body of Christ (14:17-20; 15:4-7)
    - a) To have the same spirit of self-sacrifice and servanthood that Christ had (15:3, 8)
    - b) "Christians should not allow anything to alienate them from their brethren, who afford credible evidence that they are the servants of God. Owing to ignorance, early prejudice, weakness of faith, and other causes, there may and must exist a diversity of opinion and practice on minor points of duty. But this diversity is no sufficient reason for rejecting from Christian fellowship any member of the family of Christ."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2008), 172.

<sup>4</sup> Hodge, 665

- D. The principle applied today
  - 1. Contemporary examples: Alcohol, smoking tobacco, tattoos
  - 2. In a previous generation: playing cards, drums/guitars in a worship service
  - 3. This has far-reaching implications for living in community as believers
- IV. Christ Confirms the Promises (15:7-13)
  - A. It is more natural, given the language that Paul uses, to break that passage between vv. 6 and 7
    - 1. v.7 is parallel to 14:1, indicating that this is meant to be a conclusion to the weak-strong section
  - B. Paul reminds the church that Christ is fulfillment of God's promises to his people concerning the Gentiles
    - 1. In other words, Christ is the savior of the elect - Jew and Gentile alike
    - 2. He uses the OT to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of these promises and that these promises are not new - it was always God's plan
  - C. This is important given the background to the tension in the church in Rome
    - 1. It seems to indicate that the weak-strong issues were related to questions concerning the continued use/practice of the law in the church
  - D. At the same time, this functions as a fitting conclusion to the broader passage of 12:1-15:13, because it points us to the Lordship of Christ, which is both an equalizer and a unifier