

# Romans

2024

## Lesson 17: *Disputable Matters* Romans 14:1-23

### Embrace disciples with differing maturities

#### ▲ Some believers have strong faith

##### ▼ The command to these believers

Romans 14:1 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

##### ▼ The confidence of these believers

Romans 14:2 One man's faith allows him to eat everything,

#### ▲ Some believers have struggling faith

##### ▼ The consideration of these believers

Romans 14:1 him whose faith is weak,

##### ▼ The convictions of these believers

Romans 14:2 One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.

### Employ decent manners

#### ▲ Don't be conceited

Romans 14:3 The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not,

#### ▲ Don't be condemning

Romans 14:3 and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.

#### ▲ Don't be conceited or condemning, Christian

Romans 14:4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

### Examine examples of disputable matters

#### ▲ There's the matter of elevating and esteeming different days

##### ▼ Consider their convictions

Romans 14:5 One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

##### ▼ Consider their commitment to Christ

Romans 14:6 He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord.

#### ▲ There's the matter of eating and drinking

##### ▼ Consider their convictions

Romans 14:6 He who eats meat — and he who abstains,

##### ▼ Consider their commitment to Christ

Romans 14:6 He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

##### ▼ Consider their connection to Christ

Romans 14:7 For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. <sup>8</sup> If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

### Eliminate divisive and disparaging mindsets

#### ▲ Christ will judge your brothers and sisters

Romans 14:9 For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. <sup>10</sup> You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother?

#### ▲ Christ will judge you, brothers and sisters

Romans 14:10 For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. <sup>11</sup> It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God." <sup>12</sup> So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. (*Isaiah 45:23*)

### Engage in devoted ministry

#### ▲ Stop being critical

Romans 14:13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another.

#### ▲ Start being constructive

##### ▼ Don't be a stumbling block

Romans 14:13 Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. <sup>14</sup> As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. <sup>15</sup> If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. — <sup>19</sup> Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. <sup>20</sup> Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. <sup>21</sup> It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

##### ▼ Don't be a supersensitive believer

Romans 14:16 Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil.

##### ▼ Don't be a sidetracked believer

Romans 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, <sup>18</sup> because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

#### ▲ Start being careful and confidential

Romans 14:22 So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. <sup>23</sup> But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

# Romans 14

Romans 14:1 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. 2 One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. 3 The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. 4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

5 One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. 7 For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. 8 If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

9 For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. 10 You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. 11 It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God." 12 So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. (*Isaiah 45:23*)

13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. 14 As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. 15 If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. 16 Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. 21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

22 So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. 23 But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

## To Eat or Not To Eat

### 1. Jesus had declared all foods clean during his ministry, eliminating the obligation to obey the dietary restrictions provided in the Law of Moses.

Mark 7:14 Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. 15 Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.'" 17 After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. 18 "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? 19 For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")

### 2. The Apostle Peter, several years after the Ascension of Jesus, boasted that he had never violated the dietary restrictions of the Law of Moses.

Acts 10:9 Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 11 He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. 12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. 13 Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." 14 "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

### 3. Many Jewish believers still felt obliged to live under the dietary restrictions of the Law of Moses despite Jesus' declaration. Some 28 years after the Ascension of Jesus, thousands of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were still "zealous for the law."

Acts 21:17 When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. 18 The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. 19 Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. 20 When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law."

### 4. The LORD had warned his people through Moses against participating in pagan worship feasts in the land of Canaan which would include eating food that had been sacrificed to idols.

Exodus 24:14 Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. 15 "Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land; for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices. 16 And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same."

### 5. In the Gentile world, many local churches were mixed with both Jewish believers and Gentile believers. In order to promote peace and unity within the churches, the Apostles and Elders at Jerusalem sent instructions to the Gentiles about abstaining from three different categories of foods (49AD) and reaffirmed those instructions again some nine years later when Paul arrived at Jerusalem after his third missionary journey (58AD). Two of those food categories were dietary in nature: blood and the meat of strangled animals. The third prohibited food category was food sacrificed to idols.

Acts 15:23 With them they sent the following letter: The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings. 24 We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. 25 So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul— 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. 28 It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: 29 You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.

Acts 21:25 As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality."

### 6. The issue of food sacrificed to idols was at the forefront the churches in the Gentile world, where idolatry was commonplace, and where Gentile believers had almost certainly come to Christ from a past life of participating in the idol worship of their culture. Such idol worship was marked by participation in pagan orgies, celebration at worship feasts, and the offering of food as sacrifices to idols. Of course, none of the idols actually ate the food offered to them as sacrifices! After removing the food from the idol temples and altars, the food was sold in the market. At least some of that food was labeled as having been sacrificed to idols. Christian believers shopping in the market had to make a decision whether to buy that meat and eat it or refuse to do so. In addition, when they dined with friends and family, they might become aware that the food being served had been sacrificed to idols. This context created much contention within the churches. As believers in Christ, they acknowledged that an "idol is nothing" (1 Corinthians 8:1). At the same time, they understood that the worship of idols involved demonic realities (1 Corinthians 10:20). The Apostle Paul dealt with this issue extensively in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 and 10:14-11:1 and provided some practical rules:

- ▶ If eating food that has been sacrificed to an idol causes you to focus on the idol, then don't eat it;
- ▶ If you don't know where the food has been when you're buying it at the market, buy it and eat it without asking any questions;
- ▶ If you're eating at an unbeliever's house, eat whatever is put before you and don't ask any questions;
- ▶ However, if you're eating at an unbeliever's house and they tell you that the food has been sacrificed to an idol, then don't eat it;
- ▶ Absolutely, do not participate in any idolatrous worship feast or festival;
- ▶ If eating food that has been sacrificed to an idol offends your fellow believer, then don't eat—it's not worth damaging your brother or sister.

### 7. Jesus addressed eating food sacrificed to idols in his letters to Pergamum and Thyatira in the Book of Revelation and condemned those who promoted such eating in the context of sexual immorality.

Revelation 2:14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you (*Pergamum*): You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.

Revelation 2:20 Nevertheless, I have this against you (*Thyatira*): You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

### 8. Two general rules seem to summarize the spirit of the New Testament:

- ▶ Don't eat or drink anything that tends to lead you into sinful living;
- ▶ Don't eat or drink anything that risks damaging the faith a fellow believer.