

# Romans (14:22-23)

## *Keep it to Yourself*

Part 84 - October 1, 2006

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As Jews and Gentiles came together in the early church, they had to set aside their prejudices and hostilities, and receive one another with compassion and compromise.

- The Gentiles were sensitive to the Jew's strict upbringing.
- The Jews were sensitive to the Gentiles' pagan backgrounds.

Speaking of Jews and Gentiles getting along and compromising ...

A priest and a rabbi were neighbors, so they decided to buy a car and share it. The rabbi looks out his window and sees the priest sprinkling water onto the hood. When he asks what he's doing, the priest says, "I'm blessing *our* car!" "Oh," says the rabbi, "That's a nice thought." So, a few minutes later the rabbi comes out, whistling happily. Then he walks to the back of the car, takes out his hacksaw, and cuts off the end of the tail pipe.

Many Jewish believers *couldn't* even eat with Gentile believers.

Q: Remember how God had to specially prepare the Apostle Peter to go to the home of a Gentile centurion named Cornelius?

A: God gave him three visions of a sheet being let down to Earth:

It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." - *Acts 10:12-15 NIV*

Their strict kosher diet that was originally intended to set them *apart* was now keeping them from uniting through Christ.

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. 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 14:22-23 NIV*

## THESE FOOLISH THINGS

When Paul says: “These things” he’s referring to three points of diversity (over disputable matters) in the Roman church: meat eating, wine drinking, and day keeping.

Ever know someone who’s totally into health food; and they point out all your bad eating habits, and they pressure you to eat tofu and drink soy milk ... and they’re really irritating? Well, it was like that ... only with a spiritual twist!

Whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God (14:22a)

Churches tend to have major splits over minor issues. This is a proven tactic of the enemy against the body of Christ. I take joy in the fact that we have people here who speak in tongues, and people who never will; people who believe you can lose your salvation, and people who believe you just can’t.

We have people who believe it’s okay to drink *without* getting drunk, and people who believe ... you shouldn’t drink at all.

- We must not allow the disputable to become divisive.

When it comes to end times prophecy, we have pre-trib, mid-trib, post-trib, preterist, partial preterist, pre-millennial, postmillennial, and amillennial ... did I leave anyone out? People want to pin me down: “What are you?” I’m a pan-millennialist ... I believe it’ll all pan out in the end! Matthew (24:36) says no man knows the day or the hour. So, you can be on the date and place committee - I’ll go ahead and stay on the *welcoming* committee. Jesus is welcome to come back anytime He wants!

So, Paul says: “Keep it to yourself!”

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. ... To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. - *1 Corinthians 9:20;22 NIV*

## TWO VIOLATIONS

There are two ways we violate the freedom God gives us:

- A. We flaunt it.

The Living Bible’s paraphrase of this verse says: Don’t flaunt your faith in front of others who might be hurt by it. - *Romans 14:22a TLB*

It’s very tempting to label a Christian who is more conservative than yourself, as being a “prude” or “ignorant”, and then feeling justified acting in ways that upset or embarrass them.

I can practice my freedom without parading it. Enjoy your freedom, but don't flaunt it in a way that could confuse or compromise a weaker or more inflexible believer.

B. [The 2<sup>nd</sup> violation is when] We force it.

The Message paraphrases this verse as: Cultivate your own relationship with God, but don't impose it on others. - *Romans 14:22a TMNT*

Q: Do you know why Paul wrote chapter fourteen?

A: Because he understands the trap of legalism.

Jesus tried to teach the Pharisees that the motivations that drive our faith must be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Legalism deals with rules and regulations, not purpose, intentions, and motives; and that's why legalism can't renew the heart.



One way to better understand the weaker and the stronger believer is to examine them in context with the Pharisee. I'll use three images to represent them: The lamb symbolizes the weaker (vulnerable) believer; the ram symbolizes the stronger (convinced) believer; and the wolf (in sheep's clothing) represents a Pharisee.



You see, we have the lamb, the ram, and the sham!



All three will differ from my opinion at times, but there's a big difference in how each type reacts when it happens:

- A. The weak believer is surprised by what I approve of.
  - B. The strong believer accepts my differing perspectives.
  - C. The Pharisee judges and rejects my convictions.
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- A. The weak believer is sincere, but uninformed.
  - B. The strong believer is fully convinced, but humble.
  - C. The Pharisee is fully convinced and proud of his wisdom.
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- A. The weak need instruction and are open to it.
  - B. The strong have been taught, but are open to correction.
  - C. The Pharisee has been taught, but is not open to correction.
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- A. The weak do not feel qualified to instruct me.
  - B. The strong are willing to discuss why they differ.
  - C. The Pharisee wants to conform me to his viewpoint.
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- A. The weak are stumbled by my lack of sensitivity.
  - B. The strong do not stumble or sin because of my actions.
  - C. The Pharisee does not stumble, but sins in anger.

## COHERENT CONVICTIONS

The Pharisee may have strong convictions, but because of his own pride, he takes offense at those who resist his pressure to conform to his point of view. It's the Holy Spirit's job to change us. It's our job to pray for, support, and encourage each other. I want people to say, "His Place is an *army* of encouragers!"

This doesn't mean that we shouldn't *instruct* one another, or have healthy discussions about our differing views. We're just not supposed to flaunt 'em or force 'em. There's no prohibition against teaching truth. Truth is what liberates us from legalism, and sets our conscience free.

When Moses led the Jews from Egypt, Pharaoh's army surrounded them. What Moses said to them, applies to us as well:

The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still. - *Exodus 14:14 NIV*

We should concentrate on staying out of God's way. We're fortunate if our own behavior and beliefs are coherent! And this is precisely what Paul says next:

Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves (14:22b)

Remember when Paul said: "Do not by your eating destroy your brother ..."? (*Romans 14:15*) Now he lays out exactly how they're destroyed, and why:

But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith (14:23a)

Our conscience is directly linked to condemnation.

Everything that does not come from faith is sin (14:23b)

In other words, if you do anything that you believe is not right, even if you have just the *slightest* doubt, you are sinning. When in doubt, don't! This goes for *not doing* what you think you should, as well as *doing* what you think you shouldn't.



It's very interesting that when Matthew quotes the Lord's Prayer he incorporates both concepts of sins: "Forgive us our **debts**, as we forgive our debtors." (*Matthew 6:12 NKJ*) *Debts* are the words or deeds we "owed" but didn't pay. And then: "If you do not forgive men their **trespasses**, neither will your father forgive your trespasses." (*Matthew 6:15 NKJ*) *Trespasses* are words or deeds that "crossed the line".

Whenever our words or actions are inconsistent with what we believe to be right ... whenever we turn a disputable matter into a divisive moment ... every time we flaunt or force our freedoms we are not acting in good faith. And you know ...

Everything that does not come from faith is sin. (14:23b)