

## ALTARED STATE "A MATTER OF CONVICTION" ROMANS 14:1-12

"Can we all get along?" Rodney King led police on a high-speed chase through the San Fernando Valley in March 1991. A man named George Holliday recorded the confrontation between King and multiple police officers when King was caught, a confrontation that led to King's hospitalization. The officers were charged with using excessive force and were later acquitted, their acquittal igniting racial tension across the country. Riots swept L.A., injuring hundreds and prompting King to go on TV with his plea, "Can we all get along?" Often misquoted as "Can't we all just get along?" this quote—correctly worded or not—is often heard, whether the conflict has to do with racial equality or something else entirely—like disputes in the church.

Disputes happen. One happened in Philippi, one that was serious enough to be mentioned in a letter to be read publicly to the congregation. Paul simply writes: "I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord" (Php 4:2). No need to go into the details; everyone knows them already. Diversity fosters them: ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, cultural and family backgrounds, personal values and convictions. The list is practically endless, and it goes without saying, the more diversity the more differences, particularly differences of opinion.

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***In essentials, unity; in non-essentials,  
liberty; in all things, charity.***

— Augustine

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In the Christian community, the most provocative differences of opinion generally revolve around Christian doctrines and practices; such differences fueled by contempt and censoriousness naturally lead to rows in the congregation. To the church in Corinth Paul writes: "My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ'" (1Co 1:11-12). In Romans 14:1-12 the apostle addresses a dispute between the "weak" and the "strong," and in so doing provides us with instructions on how to avoid such disputes.

### **This Week's Core Competency**

**Humility** – I choose to esteem others above myself.

People who only *attend* church *occasionally*, people with "church friends," whom they see once a week at most, will probably never be caught up in the kind of situation Paul describes in Romans 14:1-12; those who belong to church, people with "refrigerator-rights friends," whom they see frequently and spontaneously outside of Sunday morning worship services, inevitably will. Doing life together with others in biblical community exposes us to the mosaic of the body of Christ, and when we come together in all our diversity to do what Christians do—*together* rather than *individually*—differences of opinion will, as you might expect, surface—some won't matter much, but others will. Furthermore, the ones that matter

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will naturally mirror the diversity of our spiritual traditions. When Christians with different denominational backgrounds (e.g., Southern Baptist, Presbyterian, Church of Christ, and Catholic) bring their differences *in doctrine* (e.g., regarding the sacraments and the coming of Christ), *in worship* (e.g., liturgical vs. non-liturgical), and *in their personal practice of Christianity* with them to community, disputes will inevitably arise. In Romans 14 the "disputable matters" involved whether to eat meat or only vegetables and whether to consider certain days holy or every day alike. To issues of that sort, Paul tells them, "make up your own mind" (v. 5 paraphrased), and then he tells them, "whatever you decide, live for the Lord" (vv. 6-8 summarized). What's more, whatever they decide, they must accept one another and neither treat one another with "contempt" nor "judge" one another.

The secret to attaining Paul's goal of harmony in diversity is *humility*—thinking more of others than you do yourself and looking to the interests of others rather than to your own—because pride is the root of both a condescending and a censorious attitude. Pride goes hand in hand with the thought "I'm right and you're not" and with the thought, "I'm more righteous than you are." On the one hand, the "strong" majority in the church at Rome "prided themselves on their enlightened, 'liberal,' perspective taken toward those whom they considered to be foolishly 'hung up' on the trivia of a bygone era," namely, following Jewish dietary laws and observing Sabbath. On the other, the "weak" minority prided themselves as "the righteous remnant who alone upheld true standards of piety and righteousness and who were 'standing in judgment' over those who fell beneath these standards" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 838). To both groups Paul said, "Stop it!" Accept one another because God has accepted you. What a humbling thought!

## day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

### Romans 14:1-12

1 Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. 2 One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. 3 The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. 4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

5 One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. 6 Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever

eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. 7 For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. 8 If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for 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 sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? 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 acknowledge God.'"

12 So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

## EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- \* Circle "accept" in v. 1.
- \* Circle "faith" in v. 1.
- \* Circle "weak" in v. 1.
- \* Circle "disputable matters" in v. 1.
- \* Highlight vv. 2, 5.
- \* Underline "treat with contempt" and "judge" in vv. 3, 10.

- \* In the margin next to v. 2 write, "Cf., v. 6."
- \* Double underline "stand or fall" in v. 4.
- \* Bracket "to the Lord" in v. 6.
- \* Circle "live/s" and "die/s" in vv. 7, 8.
- \* Box "so that" indicating *purpose* in v. 9.
- \* Circle "God's judgment seat" in v. 10.

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## day 2

**EXPLORE** – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. What's wrong with the paraphrase, "Put up with" or "Tolerate" the brother or sister with *weak* faith?
2. *Weak* faith is presumably not as good as *strong* faith. How so?
3. Explain the relationship of *weak* faith and *strong* faith to *Jewish* Christians and *Gentile* Christians in Rome.
4. Comment on the dominant *attitudes* of the two groups in question toward one another.
5. To whom does "you" refer in verse 4?
6. One person "regards one day as special" and another "eats meat"—both "to the Lord" (v. 6). Put what "to the Lord" means in your own words.
7. Taken together verse 7 and 8 express an implicit *contrast*. Unpack what it means.
8. Explain the point of the *rhetorical* questions in verse 10.
9. How *seriously* do you *personally* take verse 12?
10. **Discussion:** Talk about an example of a contemporary situation analogous to the one Paul addresses in Romans 14:1-12.

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## day 3

### EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Paul wraps up his series of exhortations he began in chapter 12 with a lengthy plea for unity in 14:1-15:13. One commentator's overview of this section of Romans is helpful: "The command to 'receive' fellow believers begins the section (14:1) and is repeated again at its climax (15:7). Paul accentuates the theme of mutuality sounded in this last verse—'receive one another'—with three other 'one another' references: 'do not judge one another' (14:13); 'let us pursue those matters that lead to peace and to edification for one another' (14:19); 'May the God of endurance and of comfort give to you the power to think the same thing among one another according to Christ Jesus' (15:5). These exhortation to mutual acceptance and concern are directed specifically to two groups of Christians: those who are 'weak in faith' (14:1; cf. 15:1) and those who are 'strong in faith' (15:1). Two, and probably three, issues divide these two groups: (1) the 'strong' eat all kinds of food while the 'weak' eat only vegetables (14:2); (2) the 'strong' make no distinction among days while the 'weak' value some days more than others (14:5); and (3) the 'strong' drink wine while the 'weak' abstain (14:21; cf. 14:17)" (Moo, 826-27). As a result of their disagreements over these "disputable matters," the strong treat the weak with contempt, and the weak pass judgment on the strong (14:3). Paul wants it to stop; he wants the strong to accept the weak and the weak to quit judging the strong.

Romans 14:1-12 is divided into three paragraphs in the NIV (vv. 1-4, 5-9, 10-12), the second starting in verse 5. Since rhetorical questions in verse 10 mark the beginning of the third paragraph, perhaps the rhetorical question in verse 4 marks the beginning of the second paragraph (vv. 1-3, 4-9, 10-12). In either case, the development of Paul's thought from paragraph to paragraph is easy to trace. In the first and third paragraphs, he states and then restates his main point in practically the same terms: the "strong" are not to treat the "weak" with contempt, and the "weak" are not to judge the strong. On the identity of the two groups, the same commentator writes: "The 'weak' were mainly Jewish Christians who, like some of the Corinthians, believed that it was wrong to eat meat that was sold in marketplace and was probably tainted by idolatry . . . Abstention

from meat and wine [v. 21] is, of course, not required by the Mosaic law. But scrupulous Jews would sometimes avoid all meat in environments where they could not be sure that the meat had been prepared in a 'kosher' manner . . . Similarly, Jews would sometimes abstain from wine out of concern that it had been tainted by the pagan practice of offering the wine as a libation to the gods" (Moo, 829, 831; see full discussion 828-31). This would mean that the strong, the dominant group, were mainly Gentile Christians.

Paul makes it clear in verse 3 that both groups are at fault by rebuking both sides in the argument. The "strong" must not treat the "weak" with contempt and the "weak" must not judge the "strong" because *God has accepted them both*. After all, "who are you to judge someone else's servant" (v. 4)—where "you," i.e., "the one who does not eat everything" (v. 3), probably refers to the Jewish-oriented "weak" believer.

Obviously, there's room for disagreement in the body of Christ over "disputable matters." Paul goes on to explain that what's important is that each one make up their own mind regarding such things and so live to honor and please the Lord. No one's life is theirs to live for themselves. Those who belong to him must live for him! One writer puts it nicely: "Paul recognizes there will be differences of opinion and belief within the body of Christ, and in non-essential matters he is content for it to be so. He believes that people should be allowed to make up and be convicted in their own minds about such issues. In other words, he expects some of these difference to reflect deeply held convictions, and that too is okay. And yet, he still seeks to build a firm unity in the group of Christians he is addressing" (Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 336).

Finally, Paul explains because Jesus was raised from the dead and made "both Lord and Messiah" (Ac 2:36), he who is Lord of *all* is also judge of *all*. No believer has either the right or the authority to judge a brother or sister in Christ, much less treat them with contempt. And then he concludes with the sobering thought "we will all stand before God's judgment seat" where "each of us will give an account of ourselves to God" (v. 10, 12). So, get your own house in order.

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day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

### *The Message of the Passage*

*Brothers and sisters in Christ should accept one another rather than judge or treat one another with contempt because God is the rightful judge before whom they all will one day give an account of themselves.*

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22.

Identify a couple of "disputable matters" that threaten to divide the body of Christ today.

Have you ever found yourself in the middle of a "church" situation like the one in Rome? Explain.

What's your personal strategy for accommodating diversity in your biblical community?

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# notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 1 **accept** "The verb means 'receive or accept into one's society, home, circle of acquaintance' (BAGD), and implies that the Roman Christians were not only to 'tolerate' the weak, but that they were to treat them as brothers and sisters in the intimate fellowship typical of the people of God" (Moo, 835).

v. 1 **faith** Faith does not refer to the readers' faith in Christ for salvation. In this context it refers to their "insight into some of the implications of their faith. These are Christians who are not able to accept for themselves the truth that their faith in Christ implies liberation from certain OT/Jewish ritual requirements. The 'faith' with respect to which these people are 'weak,' therefore, is related to their basic faith in Christ but one step removed from it. It involves their individual outworking of Christian faith, their convictions about what that faith allows and prohibits" (Moo, 836). "Paul's designation for the overscrupulous believer is 'weak in faith,' meaning that this man's faith is not strong enough to enable him to perceive the full liberty he has in Christ to partake. He is not troubled by questions of doctrine but is plagued by doubt as to whether it is right for him to eat some food (cf. v.23)" (Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 10:144-45).

v. 1 **weak** Two groups are addressed: those "whose faith is weak" (v. 1) and "we who are strong" (15:1), the dominant group. The "strong" were mainly Gentile Christians. "The term *koinon* in Rom. 14:14 is used in contexts where Jewish dietary rules involving clean and unclean food are in view. This means that Paul is indeed dealing with a situation in Rome that involves the *kasrut* laws [i.e., Jewish dietary laws]. In short, Paul is dealing with a *Jewish Christian versus Gentile Christian* issue here" (Witherington, 333-34 italics added).

v. 1 **disputable matters** I.e., disputes over observance of OT/Jewish food laws and over observance of sacred days," e.g., weekly Sabbath, annual religious festivals, and perhaps, weekly fasting and prayer days as well. "One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables" (v. 2), and "One person considers one day more sacred than another, another considers every day alike" (v. 5).

v. 3 **contempt, judge** "Despise' connotes a disdainful, condescending judgment, an attitude that we can well imagine the 'strong' majority, who prided themselves on their enlightened, 'liberal,' perspective, taking toward those whom they considered to be foolishly 'hung up' on the trivia of a bygone era. The 'weak,' Paul suggests, responded in kind, considering themselves to be the 'righteous remnant' who alone upheld true standards of piety and righteousness and who were 'standing in judgment' over those who fell beneath these standards" (Moo, 838). "Paul reminds both that God has accepted the person in question, and so should they—despising and condemning are not Christian attitudes" (Witherington, 335).

v. 4 **stand, fall** "The use of 'stand' and 'fall' metaphorically elsewhere and the application of the terms here to the relationship of slave to master suggest that they refer to approval/disapproval; we may compare the English 'stand in favor with'/'fall out of favor with.' It is the Lord, not the fellow Christian, whom the believer must please and who will ultimately determine the acceptability of the believer and his or her conduct" (Moo, 841).

v. 6 **to the Lord** I.e., "in the interest of" or "for the benefit of" the Lord. Cf., "The one who observes the day does it for the Lord. The one who eats, eats for the Lord because he gives thanks to God, and the one who abstains from eating abstains for the Lord, and he gives thanks to God" (NET); "Those who think highly of a certain day do so in honor of the Lord; those who will eat anything do so in honor of the Lord, because they give thanks to God for the food. Those who refuse to eat certain things do so in honor of the Lord, and they give thanks to God" (GNT).

v. 8 **lives, dies** Paul is likely using a figure of speech called *merism*, the combination of two contrasting words to refer to an entirety. Here the combination of lives/dies and live/die refers to one's whole lifetime. "What Paul means, as verse 8 shows, is that each Christian lives out his life in Christ's sight, and as His servant" (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, TNTC, 245). What's more, the believer's whole lifetime extends beyond death so that dead or alive we belong to the Lord.

v. 9 **Lord** Cf., Ac 2:32-36.

v. 10 **why** "The rhetorical question about why someone judges a brother and sister presumes the fact that Christ the risen and alive Lord is to be the judge, and therefore believers are not" (Witherington, 337). "In light of vv. 7-9, he is reminding them that it is God, and not other Christians, to whom each believer is answerable" (Moo, 847). "Both the critical weaker brother and the scorning stronger brother are guilty of the same offense, namely, judging prematurely and unwarrantedly. Jesus Christ (v. 9) is the God (v. 10) who will 'judge' (cf. John 5:22, 27). This then is another reference to 'the judgment seat (Gr. *bema*) of Christ [God]' (2 Cor. 5:10; cf. 1 Cor. 3:12-15)" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Romans," 2017 ed., 198, [planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/romans.pdf](http://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/romans.pdf)).

### Family Talk

#### Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

You know those people that are the church police? They make it their business to know your business. I'm not talking about those that bring a Gospel-centered gentle rebuke, loving admonishment, or accountability. I'm talking about the finger pointers that think you're not measuring up to their standard of living. A few years ago, my husband was approached by the father of my young son's friend. This father told my husband that he wouldn't allow his kid to play at our house because we weren't the type of Christians he wanted his son exposed to. I'm not sure what type of Christian he preferred, but, apparently, we didn't fit his mold. We laugh about it now, but at the time it was pretty painful for me. Our world is filled with people who judge what's on the surface rather than what's in the heart. As Christians on this parenting journey together, we should strive to mutually encourage one another without passing judgement. Each family has a unique set of values and rules all centered on one thing—bringing glory to God and point others to Him. We have opportunities to respect one another while living differently under the Christian umbrella. Let's let our love for Christ unify us as a community. What can you do this week to encourage another believer in their parenting? Is there a young family that needs your experience and guidance? I'm praying for your family as you seek to glorify God this week.

#### What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Romans 14:1-12

1. Who are we to accept and how do we do that?
2. How many knees will bow and tongues confess to God?
3. What does it mean to give an account of yourself to God?

#### What Do You Think

Whose place is it to judge? Why?

#### What R U Going To Do

How can you encourage another whose faith is not as strong as yours?

#### Core Comp

Humility - I choose to make others more important than myself.

#### Memory Verse

Romans 12:4-5 – *For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*

### KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse \_\_\_\_\_, completed *Scrolls* \_\_\_\_\_, brought Bible \_\_\_\_\_, brought a friend \_\_\_\_\_.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_ Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

# 30 CORE COMPETENCIES

## 10 CORE BELIEFS

### **Trinity** *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **Salvation By Grace** *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Authority of the Bible** *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

### **Personal God** *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

### **Identity in Christ** *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

### **Church** *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

### **Humanity** *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

### **Compassion** *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

### **Eternity** *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

### **Stewardship** *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

## 10 CORE PRACTICES

### **Worship** *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

### **Prayer** *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Bible Study** *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Single-mindedness** *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

### **Spiritual Gifts** *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

### **Biblical Community** *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

### **Giving Away My Time** *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Money**

*2 Corinthians 8:7*

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Faith** *Ephesians*

*6:19-20*

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Life** *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

## 10 CORE VIRTUES

### **Joy** *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

### **Peace** *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

### **Faithfulness** *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

### **Self-Control** *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

### **Humility** *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

### **Love** *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

### **Patience** *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

### **Kindness/Goodness** *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

### **Gentleness** *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

### **Hope** *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

## About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you Belong, Become, and go Beyond as follower of Jesus Christ through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is [tbulick@pantego.org](mailto:tbulick@pantego.org).