

Weak & Strong



Ice-Breaker

1. What food would be hardest for you to give up?
2. What is your favorite hymn or praise song?
3. What is one custom or ritual (e.g., coffee break) you faithfully practice?



Scripture Passage

Romans 14:1-15:13

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



Bible Study

1. What "disputable matters" divide the church today?
2. When it comes to "gray areas," how do you react to those with strict convictions? Those with more lenient convictions?
3. As time has passed, how has your sensitivity to the consciences of other Christians changed?
4. What should be our main guideline in determining what we do or say in the presence of fellow Christians?
5. What qualities should characterize the church?
6. In what way does knowing you will give an account before God (v. 12) affect how you relate to others?
7. What active step can you take to build up others in your church or this group?

CASE STUDY: At a church business meeting, you find yourself at odds with another over whether the youth group should sponsor a dance. Harsh words are said at the door as the meeting adjourns. What do you do next?



Reference Notes

14:1-15:13 While it is difficult to pin down the identity of the groups Paul addresses here, the general issue is quite clear. There were two perspectives at work in the church at Rome, and they threatened to split it apart. There were those who felt that in Christ all the old taboos, restrictions, and ceremonial laws were done away with. These were the "strong," and to them all food and drink were alike and no day was sacred. On the other hand, the "weak" could not bring themselves to violate the regulations they had lived by for so long. Paul's sympathies are with the broad perspective (the strong), though he addresses most of his comments to "the strong," calling for

sensitivity to the scruples of "the weak."

14:1 Accept him. This is the basic imperative addressed to the "strong" majority in the church: receive the "weak" into fellowship. **him whose faith is weak.** Those who are not sure that their faith allows them to do certain things. The issue is not a lack of faith in Christ. Both the "weak" and the "strong" are authentically Christian. **judgment.** Do not judge negatively the scruples of another.

14:2 eat. The Jews could not eat certain foods (see Leviticus 11), nor could members of certain Greek sects (e.g., the Pythagoreans abstained from meat).

14:3 look down / condemn. Two forms of judgment: the tendency of the "strong" not to take seriously the scruples of the weak (i.e., to laugh at them or even despise them); and the tendency of the "weak" to act superior and become censorious (because they felt that not doing certain things made them better Christians). Both attitudes are wrong. **God has accepted him.** The abstainer cannot condemn those who indulge, since no one can presume to judge a person God has accepted.

14:4 It is Christ himself who is concerned whether the "strong" Christian continues in faith or falls away.

14:5 day. "The Jews had made a tyranny of the Sabbath, surrounding it with a jungle of rules and negatives and prohibitions" (Barclay). In addition, they observed various festivals and fasted on certain days each week. **convinced.** Another principle guiding action: let action or abstinence result from conviction.

14:6-9 Both conclusions are arrived at out of a desire to serve God; for whom all Christians live.

14:10 brother. Paul reminds them of their true relationship with one another. This is a family issue; not a contention between strangers. Besides, God alone has the right to judge others. **judgment seat.** A Roman judge sat on a special seat dispensing justice.

14:13 This verse summarizes 14:9-12. **stumbling block.** A new theme is introduced into the discussion: the liberty of the strong can, in fact, be detrimental to others. What appears to them as an innocent pleasure or action may cause the more scrupulous pain, shock, outrage, or even hurt.

14:14 I am fully convinced. Paul comes down clearly on the side of the strong (see Mark 7:15). **unclean.** That is, in the ritual sense: there is no food that has power to harm one's relationship with God. **regards something as unclean.** For those believers who have not been convinced that Christ abolished the ceremonial law of the Old Testament (even though the food is not objectively unclean), it is subjectively so for that person.

14:15 If the "strong" exercise their liberty even when they know such actions are seen as sinful by the "weak," they are failing to act lovingly toward them. To do so is to jeopardize the faith of the weak and to disturb the harmony of the body. To act lovingly is more vital than to exercise one's freedom. **destroy.** By exercising this liberty, it is possible that "the weak in faith will be grievously hurt, he will have the integrity of his faith ... and obedience destroyed, and his salvation put at risk" (Cranfield).

14:17-18 Such matters as eating or drinking are trivial in kingdom terms; to cause spiritual ruin over them is scandalous.

14:17 righteousness, peace and joy. The kingdom of God does not consist of selfish actions, regardless of the scruples of one's brothers and sisters. Instead, the kingdom of God consists of "righteousness"; giving God and others their due (especially in this case, understanding and consideration), "peace"; that which makes for the highest good for another (especially here, right relationships), and "joy"; that which comes by seeking the good of others. Paul urges outward actions motivated by the needs of others, rather than a self-oriented insistence on personal "rights."

14:19 mutual edification. Literally, "the building up of one another"; i.e., helping either an individual Christian or the church grow in faith and practice.

14:21 The strong are called upon to use their strength not to eat or drink when doing so would cause harm. **drink wine.** The Old Testament does not forbid the drinking of wine except for priests on duty (Leviticus 10:9) or Nazarites (Numbers 6:2-3). Certain wine, however, may have been considered unclean, because its firstfruits had been offered as a libation to a pagan god.

14:23 faith. Here faith signifies a sort of inner freedom or liberty that comes from knowing that what one is doing is in accord with Christian faith in general. **sin.** When a Christian acts without that sense of inner liberty, such an act, even though in itself is neutral (neither inherently bad or good), is sin to that Christian. Strong Christians need to know this when they urge the weak to partake against their conscience.

15:1 strong. "Under the gospel the strong, those who, because of the inner freedom which has been given to them, have plenty of room in which to maneuver, have an inescapable obligation to help to carry the infirmities, disabilities, embarrassments and encumbrances of their brothers who are having to live without that inner freedom which they themselves enjoy" (Cranfield). **not to please ourselves.** This is not a general admonition to avoid all that personally pleases us (as it has been misinterpreted), but rather a call to the strong not to please themselves by exercising their rights to indulge when it might hurt others.

15:3 Paul quotes Psalm 69:9, in which Christ is understood to be saying to God that those insults directed to God have fallen on him. This is an example of how far Christ went in not pleasing himself.

15:4 This explains and justifies Paul's use of an Old Testament reference by way of application to Christ. One of the values of the Old Testament to Christians is that it promotes hope. When Christians hold fast to their hope for the future, it is a stimulus to appropriate action in the present.

15:5-6 Paul's wish for the Christians at Rome is put into the form of a prayer.

15:7-13 This is the concluding paragraph of Paul's argument in the book of Romans. In it he draws the various threads of the epistle together. "The last discussion may seem to have taken us a long way from the rarefied heights of chapters 1-8. Yet it is simply the gospel of justification by faith in the imperative. Moreover, this tension between those who observed food laws and Sabbath-days and those who didn't was only, as Paul has hitherto tactfully refrained from rubbing in, the antagonism of Jew and Gentile. ... And it was precisely in the breaking down of this barrier once and for all that for him the gospel consisted: 'Accept one another as Christ has accepted us (both Jew and Gentile), to the glory of God' (v. 7)" (J. A. T. Robinson).

15:7 Accept one another. Paul's basic command addressed to the church as a whole, by which he sums up 14:1-15:13. It is broader than the exhortation in 14:1, which is directed to the strong.

15:8-9 Jews / Gentiles. Paul's words seem to indicate that perhaps the division between weak and

strong is a division between Jew and Gentile.

15:9-12 For one last time before he draws his book to a close, Paul asserts the amazing fact (to a first-century Jew) that the Gentiles are part of God's plan. He cites four Old Testament passages from the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament) to demonstrate that Jesus came for the sake of both Jew and Gentile. Each shows the Gentiles coming to faith.

15:12 *Root of Jesse.* The Messiah would be descended from David, whose father was Jesse.

15:13 Paul ends with a prayer that Christians will experience the triple gift of joy, peace and hope. The source of these gifts is the Holy Spirit. Joy and peace in particular are destroyed by division. In this closing benediction Paul uses all the key words from chapters 1-8: hope, joy, peace, trust (faith) and power (of the Holy Spirit). Thus he concludes his argument.

Caring Time

1. Where do you need the God of hope to fill you with joy and peace right now?
2. What prayer requests do you have for this week? End your prayer time by saying together verse 13 of chapter 15.