

• Continuing the theme of minor matters

1. These 'matters of opinion' are to be worked out individually

1. These 'matters of opinion' are to be worked out individually. Paul said earlier that each one of us has to think for himself. Now he says, ²²So as for you, the faith that you have, have as your own conviction before God. Obviously Paul is not referring to **saving** faith. There is no question of keeping that to oneself! But we do not parade our liberty too much. Still, it is a wonderful thing when one is able to enjoy God's world and does not feel guilty in doing so. *Blessed is the one who does not judge himself in what he approves*, says Paul. He was thinking mainly of food and the sanctity of every day of the year, but the principle extends to many other things. God's world is good. Sin does not reside in the thing; it resides in our heart if we misuse the thing

2. The Christian has to maintain peace with God as he makes use of God's world

• Our consciences need educating

2. **The Christian has to maintain peace with God as he makes use of God's world.** It is a terrible thing if while one is enjoying God's world, one feels condemned. ²³*But the person who has doubts is condemned if he or she eats meat because he does not eat by faith, and that which is not done out of faith is sin.* If while you are eating meat you are all the time feeling that you are sinning as you do so, you are in the most awful bondage. We are to live by personal contact and fellowship with God. If we even **think** that something we are doing is sinful it damages our relationship with God. You have to maintain your peace with God! That which is not done out of faith is sin. You need to educate your conscience fast or it will be a painfully restricted and narrow kind of life that you live.

3. The strong are to 'carry' the weaknesses of those who are painfully slow to realise their freedom

• We cannot exploit any freedom we have in order to be ruled by self-centredness

• Paul used this freedom to assist others who were slower than he was in the things of God

3. **The strong are to 'carry' the weaknesses of those who are painfully slow to realize their freedom.** A new chapter begins at Romans 15:1, yet there is no major change of subject. The entire section, Romans 14:1–15:13, deals with the possibility of division within the church. ¹*Now we who are 'strong' enough to eat ought to carry the weaknesses of those who are incapable, and not please ourselves.* Paul clearly implies that he himself is one of the strong. 'Now **we** who are able . . .' He himself enjoys this bold, confident liberty to enjoy God's world. If the weak are weak in their understanding, the strong Christians in Rome are not using their strength to assist others but are ruled by a spirit of self-pleasing pride. Here we come to the heart of all sorts of spiritual problems. We all are gripped by self-centredness and like to please ourselves in all manner of ways. But we are not to allow a rift between the strong and the weak. We are not to exploit any freedom we have in order to be ruled by self-centredness. Why is it that we get so scornful of those who are slower or are bound by all sorts of traditions? Because we like to flatter ourselves. Because we like to feel superior. Paul, despite all his teaching about freedom, dedicated his life to ministering to gentiles, steadily teaching them and taking time and trouble to answer every difficulty they might have, founding churches upon the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was free from the Mosaic law, from regulations of numerous kinds, but he used his freedom not to get a cushy life, but to assist others who were slower than he was in the things of God. The only real liberty is found when we love God and serve other people!

4. Paul asks us to help the weaker Christian

• In a more long-term manner

4. Two further requests come in Romans 15:2–3. **He asks us to help the weaker Christian.** Paul continues: ²*Let each one of us please his neighbour for what is good in order to build him up.* It means that we are concerned to please him by helping him, but we do so in a way that **truly** helps him, not in a manner that confirms him in his legalism. This is a more long-term pleasing of the neighbour than giving him what he immediately wants. We shall **eventually** please him if we help him to discover more of God's graciousness.

5. Paul asks us to consider the example of Christ

5. He asks us to consider the example of Christ. He says, ³For even Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.' Christ could have scornfully abandoned us in our ignorance and weak understanding of his graciousness towards us – but he did not! Instead he came alongside us to teach us and rescue us from our ignorance. Paul quotes Psalm 69: 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.' Those who wanted to reproach God insulted Christ. Similarly in Rome there will be some Christian people who unintentionally are reproaching the grace of God, because in their ignorance they are still wanting to keep vegetarian regulations and perhaps Jewish holy days. They are unintentionally reproaching God. But their hostility is likely to fall on the strong Christians. Paul asks the strong Christians to go on showing love no matter what reproaches they might at first face. They are the strong ones! They say they believe in God's limitless grace. Then let them show their graciousness by winning over their weak brothers and sisters.

• A digression explaining why he quotes the Old Testament

• Because the Scriptures were written in advance to speak of something that was to happen ahead of their times

• Ends with a prayer for the same mentality – a spirit of loving acceptance and a 'coming to the same mind'

In Romans 15:4 Paul digresses for one sentence to explain why he is quoting the Old Testament Scriptures. He has referred to the Old Testament many times in this letter. Now he explains the reason why. *For such things as were written in advance, were written to teach us, so that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.* The Scriptures were written in advance to speak of something that was to happen ahead of their times. They were in fact a preparation for the gospel-age. The Scriptures were 'written in advance . . . to teach us', says Paul. We are to be people who meditate upon the Word of God. Paul ends this section concerning the weak and the strong with a prayer. ⁵And the God of endurance and of encouragement give you the gift of having the same mentality among one another according to Christ Jesus ⁶in order that together with one mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He tells them what he is praying for them; this will act as a hint to them concerning what he would like to happen in their lives. Initially the 'same mentality' will involve the spirit of loving acceptance of each other that Paul has been asking for. But 'coming to the same mind' must include eventually coming to agreement. Differences of opinion in minor matters hinder and pervert the preaching of the gospel; and that detracts from the glory of God. Paul prays that they may get back fast to glorifying God in the way they speak and in the way they live.



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