The Book of Romans

Chapter 14

 We are in the third division of this letter to the Romans, where Paul lays down some basic rules for Christian living. In the last chapter, Paul admonishes us to be, as a Christian people, submissive to all authorities and that would include paying taxes and duties as required. We are to obey the laws, no matter how restrictive they may be. IN other words, as those people living in Rome were under a constant state of harassment, they were to fly under the radar as much as possible, not drawing attention to themselves and not giving the authorities cause to go after them. That was to be their Christian witness.

 This flies directly against the accusations Christians face today from other non-Christians, regarding violent acts purportedly committed by Christians over the centuries. Also the Muslim likes to cite the violence of Christians, to make acceptable or tries to justify, their own ‘written in’ violence of the Koran, which actually, is a lie, but too many Christians don’t have the knowledge and understanding to refute it. The Doctrine of Christianity is peace and agape love, but people sometimes can forget their doctrine when faced with angry opposition.

 Paul also admonishes the reader to have unity and agape love with all the brethren. To be in no one’s debt and assume responsibility for yourself and your own actions. There are the ‘Commandments’ which all should follow which are different from the Mosaic Law itself. The greatest ‘Commandment’ was “You shall ‘love’ your neighbor as yourself.” When you have that Agape Love which comes from God Himself through the imparting of the Holy Spirit, this should be an immediate and automatic event, don’t you think?

 Finally, Paul tells us to put on The Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, we should be totally filled with the Holy Spirit and Jesus then becomes a part of us in all we do. That is an earthshaking idea, isn’t it? And frankly, quite impossible to grasp the meaning of. How hard it is to emulate the attitudes and actions of Jesus, especially in these times of government interference and private parties using legal means to shut down the message of the Cross for today? How hard is it, for the Christian in the workplace or at play, to maintain their Christian witness in the face of overt hostility, to the Christian lifestyle or attitudes?

 A] Romans 14: 1 through 4; (read)

 1] “*Receive one who is weak in the faith but not to disputes over doubtful things.”*

 We are now entering another area of controversy for the Christian. Just what is the proper comportment for the Christian. Dr J. Vernon McGee gave a strong illustration regarding his wife, who before they were married, was raised in a small town Texas home. Her father being pastor of a small fundamental Baptist Church. This could have been just after the turn of the 20th century and there were religious taboos such as no dancing, or no mixed swimming. But the use of tobacco products was acceptable. I knew many Churches who practiced such taboos, but as Dr McGee explained it, once they were married and he had received a call to a Church in Los Angeles, she came into a different world, where dancing was allowed and the beaches were crowded with young people with scant bathing attire and both sexes were romping in the surf together. BUT it was also a place where the use of tobacco products was not accepted.

 I can see the old pictures of my great-grandfather Reverend Edwin Lincoln Eslinger, a fundamental Methodist Pastor from Central Pennsylvania, and in his mouth, was a large cigar. Evidently, he puffed those things on a regular basis. I think he smoked a pipe also. Even in the years growing up for me, the use of tobacco products was the mark of growing up.

 Now Paul, here, tells the reader to accept the weak in the faith, or bring him into the fellowship so he can be nurtured in the faith. But the one thing not to be doing, is getting into the perceived doctrinal tidbits. All of us Christians come to the table with our own preconceived ideas about what we should believe or accept. Especially those things that have doubtful origin.

 2] “*For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.”*

 This was a bone of contention between the Jews, and Gentiles regarding The Jewish laws concerning diet. But look closely at the verse. This had to do with someone unsure of his faith thus the fear of offending another with dietary restrictions, will eat only herbs. Folks who ate no meat. Jews did eat meats as required by Law and as prepared by Law. This verse went a bit further.

 It is noted that centuries before, certain groups, including the Greek Mathematician Pythagoras were vegetarians and they pushed these beliefs, as Pythagoras did, on his students. Eastern religions also became vegetarians and I am sure there were folks in and around Rome who also were. It is thought that early Genesis showed Adam and Eve to be vegetarians. But in Genesis 9:3 right after the flood, God did give to man all living things that moved, for food. Then at this point, God only had one dietary restriction for mankind, and that was to be sure the animal was dead before eating it, then after the Jews left Egypt and went on their sojourn in the desert, God did institute a lot of dietary laws.

 So, this verse, is it directly related to vegetarians? Not really, it was for those new in the faith who were caught between the Jewish Law and the Gentile habits. Also caught between the habits of all the other religions in Rome as well as this new Christian Faith. Remember these worldly beliefs also gave meat and grain offerings which afterward were taken to the market and sold. We learned about that in 1st Corinthians.

 3] “*Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.”*

 Here is where that unity of the believer is coming in. Getting the Jewish Christian on that level playing field with the Gentile believer, and standing united as they welcome all those new in the faith with the united message. And that message is God welcome all who believe regardless of their eating and sleeping habits. (remember, this was settled by God between Cornelius and Peter)

 4] “*Who are you to judge another’s servant? To his own master, he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.”*

 Basically, Paul challenges anyone who has that judgmental spirit, and friends we all, at times, can have that judgmental spirit. The Church over the centuries seemed to practice being judgmental. An illustration of this is, I am a dinner guest at the home of a very wealthy man and during the course of the meal the servant brings me a bowl of cold soup. Being incensed I chastise the servant for bringing me that cold soup, but ----that wasn’t my place, was it? So, who are we that we chastize another believer because of something we perceive they said or did. Are we seeing the picture of these folks a little clearer?

 B] Romans 14: 5 through 13; (read)

 1] “*One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day to the Lord he does not observe it.”*

 This, I believe, belongs to the Jewish celebrations of their holy days for feasting. From Passover to Hanukah, and the Gentiles who have no holy days to celebrate. It can also allude to Sabbath, which the Jews strictly adhered to, but I also believe the Gentile Christians also worshipped simply to hide from the Roman authorities.

 Paul is being careful here, saying you worship when and where you can. Don’t judge another because of their worship habits. We worship in Spirit and in Truth, and it is in our relationship with God Himself, determines how and when we worship. That being said, we also cannot just go to the golf course and say I worship as I play. That doesn’t wash. We need that time of corporate assemblage for worship.

 2] “*He who eats, eats to the Lord, but he gives God thanks, and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat and gives thanks.”*

 This whole discussion is more of a heart thing. When I sit to meal, I give thanks, I am so appreciative of the largess the Lord has blessed me with, and when I sit down to fast I also give thanks to the Lord because He prompts me to fast at certain times.

 3] “*None of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die we are the Lords.”*

 The one fact we see here is, as a Christian, we cannot live apart from Jesus Christ. If I have made my profession of Faith, I have sought Him and found Him, I am that new creation in Christ, becoming adopted as a child of God, and hence I have that Holy Spirit within me, how can I ever think I can live apart from God in any form?

 4] “*For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be the Lord of both the living and the dead.”*

 This is the crux of the Christian Faith, that Jesus died for the sins of man, he rose up from the grave and lives again to reign forever more. He is Lord over the living and the dead. That simple. Why do we have to make it so complicated?

 5] “*But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: “As I live says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” (Isaiah 45:23)*

 Jesus is on the throne and He alone shall judge, so who are we to judge our brothers and sisters? That is not our job.

 I believe this encapsulates the original tenor of the letter regarding the rift between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians. Remember although we have spent weeks studying this letter, it probably only takes a few minutes to actually read it.

 The Jewish Christians held on to their Laws and traditions, the feasts and celebrations and expected the Gentile Christians to do the same, but Paul has taken all this time to refute this premise and is attempting to bring unity between the two. That unity tells us we bow down and worship God in Spirit and in truth. Both Jew and Gentile.

 6] "*So then, each of us shall give account of himself before God. Therefore, let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or cause to fall in our brother's way."*

 That time will come when we shall all come before the Throne of Judgment and how shall that day be? Were we kind and considerate, uplifting and giving encouragement to a brother? Or were we complaining, judgmental, unfair, and discouraging? Did our attitude become a point of contention or enlightenment? AS we then, stand before the Throne and face our Judge and Redeemer, what is it He shall find in our lives?

 C] Romans 14: 14 through 18; (read)

 1] "*I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean, of itself, but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean."*

 As we saw in Genesis 9; God gave to mankind, anything that lived in the animal world, to be food, therefore nothing was unclean. But to the Jewish nation He did establish dietary laws. Now if God did give mankind a greater latitude of diet then nothing He gave them was unclean to them.

 Paul is speaking on personal conviction. If what you believe is true, then you are not incorrect. If you believe you can eat pork, by all means you have that right to eat pork, but if you do not believe you should eat pork, then don't. It is your personal conviction.

 2] "*Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died."*

This verse becomes the caveat to the previous verses. Is what I do, say, or eat, becoming a stumbling block for another brother? If I have a Jewish Christian brother, and I sit down to meal with him, and order a pork or ham, does this offend him? And if so, would this cause him to pull away from the faith? Then I certainly do him a grave injustice and do not have Christian Love within me, do I?

 3] "*Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men."*

 In other words, it is not the dietary restrictions but the heart and comportment of the believer. Am I doing all things through the Holy Spirit and in His Agape Love? Do I look to the other before myself?

 D] Romans 14: 19 through 23; (read)

 1] "*Therefore let us pursue the things which make peace, and things by which one may edify another."*

 Here is that Christian Agape unity Paul is striving for. We pursue those things that bring unity and in unity peace, and as we pursue these things, we educate all the others in the process. We encourage, lift up and comfort.

 2] "*Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense*."

 This can be taken from either side, but the crux of the matter Paul addresses was the Jewish Dietary Laws and the Gentile freedom of diet, which are clashing. For the peace and Christian Witness of the brotherhood, let's not be stumbling blocks for the sake of Salvation which is the work of God. When done on purpose, that is plainly evil on the part of the offender.

 3] "*It is good to neither eat meat or drink wine or do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended, or is made weak."*

 What Paul wants, is the Christian family to be humble, seeking the best for the neighbor, be complete in our total witness, and living in agape love for all the brothers.

 4] "*Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats , because he does not east from faith , for whatever is not from faith is sin."*

 So, If I believe in my heart that whatever I eat is perfectly proper, then I am not sinning. This is about our personal convictions. Also what this means is when I am with another who has opposite convictions I should, out of respect and witness, refrain from eating or doing that which the other has convictions over, but on my own I should have no issue between myself and God.

 I have a close friend who has chosen to align himself with Jewish dietary laws, and when I am with him, I respect his dietary preferences, but at the same time, I eat what I usually eat, and he respects that. Although there is no problem with my eating whatever I want, I do have restrictions where my doctors recommend what my cardiac diet should allow. Moderation and wisdom do go a long way.