

WHAT CAN WE EAT?
ANSWERS ABOUT LIBERTY (PART 2)
ROMANS 14:1-9

Seventy-seven years ago, 76 POWs held at the German Stalag Luft III camp fled that camp through a tunnel they had dug under the camp to a location outside the fence of the camp. They had actually dug three tunnels — Tom, Dick, and Harry — but only “Harry” was completed. The tunnel was 28 feet deep and 336 feet long, supported by wooden slats from the beds of the prisoners. While the plan was for 200 men to escape on the night of March 24, 1944, only 76 made it through the tunnel before the Germans discovered it. Of the 76 that made it through the tunnel, only three made it to freedom without being re-captured. Of the 73 who were recaptured, 50 were shot to death by the Gestapo under orders from Adolph Hitler.



At a memorial service for the event a few years ago, [the RAF's Air Vice Marshal Stuart Atha](#) said that the event that was known as “The Great Escape” was “an extraordinary chapter” in history. He said the escapees were “an exceptional band of airmen whose bravery, ingenuity and resilient spirit set an example for all time...they were not prisoners of war — they were prisoners *at* war.” [my emphasis]

History is filled with the stories of people who have gone to extreme lengths to secure freedom and liberty. That is also true of believers and their quest to exercise spiritual freedoms as well. But how can we exercise our freedoms in a way that demonstrates our liberty, while not compelling others to act the way we do? And how can we exercise our freedoms in a way that maintains spiritual unity in the church? That’s Paul’s concern in Romans 14, which we can summarize this way:

USE YOUR INDIVIDUAL FREEDOMS AS A MEANS OF PRESERVING THE CORPORATE UNITY OF THE BODY.

Our personal freedom is always subordinate to our corporate responsibilities. Our commitment to the unity of the church dominates this section. We want to act so unity is preserved. So in these verses, Paul provides **five instructions** for the use of our liberties.

1. The Reality of **DIFFERENCES** (vv. 1-2)
2. One **ATTITUDE** to Guide Our Different Choices: **ACCEPT** One Another (v. 1a)
3. One **CAUTION** in Making Different Choices: Don’t **DISCRIMINATE** (v. 3b)
4. One **PRINCIPLE** to Remember in Our Different Choices: God is (and will) **JUDGE** (v. 4)
5. Three **GUIDES** for Making Our Different Choices (vv. 5-9)
 - ✓ Do what you do with **CONFIDENCE** (v. 5)
 - ✓ Do what you do with **GRATITUDE** (v. 6)
 - ✓ Do what you do for **THE LORD** (vv. 7-9)

1. The Reality of DIFFERENCES (vv. 1-2)

- There are “WEAK” people — The weakness of these individuals is in relation to *faith* (v. 1) by which he means they believe in Christ for salvation, but they lack confidence to exercise freedoms they have been granted from the Law (e.g., 7:4; 8:2-4). They are “troubled in conscience.” [Kruse] They have a lack of confidence in the privileges they have been granted in Christ.
- There are “STRONG” people — These people have faith in Christ and a “faith” (v. 2, confidence) that doesn’t bind them to maintain the requirements of the Law.
 - ✓ The contrast between the “weak” and “strong” is emphasized in 1 Cor. 8:4, 7.
 - ✓ Reminder: this difference about actions is not a question of doing things that are sinful. Neither the “weak” or the “strong” is sinning (violating the revealed moral will of God). They are just choosing different actions as a means of expressing their obedience to God and pursuit of sanctification.
- Those different people have different ideas about DAILY concerns: *food* (vv. 2-3) and *worship* (v. 5)
 - ✓ Paul identifies two particular areas of disagreement; it’s unclear if this was actually happening in Rome, or if his experience with Corinth is bringing these examples to mind. Regardless, it is issues just like this that can divide fellowship and create disharmony. They are typical and daily issues.
 - ✓ There *were* differences about daily choices in Rome, and there *are* differences about how to live in the church body: diet, entertainment, use of money for vehicles, technology, vacation, houses, and more (!), clothing, medical treatments, masks, food, government, parenting (and contraceptives), schooling, children’s sports leagues, work on Sunday, and more!
 - ✓ Paul’s concern in this chapter is, “how will we live with one another in a way that exemplifies we love each other more than we love our liberty?” How will we relate to one another? *His goal is loving unity* (not uniformity)...

2. One ATTITUDE to Guide Our Different Choices: ACCEPT One Another (v. 1a)

- The main principle that Paul wants the Romans to know about liberty issues is given in the very first verse: (everyone) *accept the one who is weak*.
 - ✓ To accept someone is to bring them into fellowship. It is companionship. Even intimacy.
 - ✓ We tend to use the word *accept* as a synonym of “tolerance” but avoid using “fellowship.”
 - ✓ When Paul says, *accept*, he means “bring them into full fellowship and relationship in the body.”
- Notice that Paul also offers a contrast to what acceptance is: *not for the purpose of passing judgment*.

- We aren't evaluating *opinions* — the thoughts and motivations for why people do what they do. They have “scruples” about issues that have been formed with a variety of influences that we don't understand (we can't see the heart). We just know it isn't sin, so we encourage and embrace them.
- So acceptance says, “I embrace your participation in the body and I welcome and will even work to help you practice your preferences.” This is the heart of what Paul says — we accept one another because we love one another (12:9ff; 13:8). We will be known by love and we will defend each other's rights to exercise liberty in different ways.

3. One CAUTION in Making Different Choices: Don't DISCRIMINATE (v. 3)

- Whether we are weak or strong, we both have a temptation and tendency to act unlovingly.
 - ✓ So Paul cautions that the strong are not to *regard with contempt* those who don't eat. The idea is that he treats them with disdain, as if the non-eater has no worth — “he doesn't get it...” This person considers himself superior and looks down on the other person because of his actions.
 - ✓ And similarly, he cautions that the weak are *not to judge the one who eats*. He makes a distinction with the one who eats, “I don't see how you can eat meat/drive that car/take that vacation and be a godly Christian.” Like the meat-eater who is contemptuous, this is a form of spiritual pride.
 - ✓ These two terms *contempt* and *judge* are roughly synonymous and have the idea of ungodly discrimination — Paul wants us to see that these are temptations for both these kinds of people.
 - ✓ The problem is not whether someone eats meat or vegetables. The problem is what I think about the person who doesn't do what I do (“my faith is better than yours”). The problem is about judgmentalism, divisiveness, disunity, disharmony, and lack of love.
- There is no room for any of these things in the church because *God has accepted him*.
 - ✓ Not only does God not treat my brother contemptuously or judge him, but God *accepts* him.
 - ✓ This word *accept* is used 4x in this passage (only 12x in all the NT) — 14:1, 3; 15:7 [2x]. The idea in both this chapter and ch. 15 is that we accept each other because God accepts us.
 - ✓ When we talk about how God has accepted us, we think about fellowship, intimacy, joy, fellowship, harmony, and delight (14:18; Heb. 12:28; 1 Pt. 2:5 — different words, but same concept).
 - ✓ God is not reserved in His fellowship with us. The reason God accepts us is because we are in Christ (5:12ff); He further accepts the actions of both the weak and the strong in this context because neither is sinning and both are attempting to honor the Lord.
 - ✓ Because He puts no restrictions on fellowship, we put no restrictions on fellowship for liberty issues.
- It is not our call whether or not to accept each other into the body of Christ. God has already done that. So because He has done that for us, we do it for each other.

4. One PRINCIPLE to Remember in Our Different Choices: God is (and will) JUDGE (v. 4)

- When Paul wants to drive home a point, he will sometimes do it with questions: e.g., 6:1-2; 9:20.
- The force of his question in v. 4 is, “who made you judge and jury?” “Have you forgotten who the Judge is?” “Have you forgotten that He *will* judge (all men)?”
 - ✓ We have forgotten who is in charge. Yes, the other person (whether weak or strong) is a servant of someone else; but they are servants of the Lord — not me. I have no authority over them.
 - ✓ Paul draws the principle from real life: whoever is a slave and has a master will be judged by that master. If I’m not the master, I don’t have a right to judge that person’s choices of liberty.
 - ✓ His example likely resonated quickly with the Roman readers: there may have been 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire, including doctors, teachers, musicians, actors, secretaries, stewards.
 - ✓ While “many slaves were loved and trusted members of the family...one great inescapable fact dominated the whole situation: in Roman law a slave was not a person but a thing; and he had absolutely no legal rights whatsoever....Aristotle writes, “There can be no friendship nor justice towards inanimate things...[including] a slave...for master and slave have nothing in common; a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave.” [Barclay, *1 Peter*]
 - ✓ He will either **stand** in righteousness or **fall** in judgment to his master. The slave was fully accountable to his owner, as the Bishop Chrysologus wrote in the 5th century: “Whatever a master does to a slave, undeservedly, in anger, willingly, unwillingly, in forgetfulness, after careful thought, knowingly, unknowingly, is judgment, justice and law.” The master had total authority to act.
 - ✓ If the slave survives or dies was completely in the hands of the slave’s master. No one else had any authority to act either for or against the slave. The same principle is true in relation to the believer and Christ. Paul’s clear point is that the **Lord** will judge (he makes the same point in 1 Cor. 4:3-5).
 - ✓ What was unexpected for the Roman citizen is true of the believer, which Paul anticipates at the end of v. 4 — *both* the weak and strong **will stand** (there will be no condemnation). **The Lord** will make them to persevere in their faith and preserve them (both).
- Whenever we create divisions and break fellowship over non-sin, liberty issues, we not only are harming the unity, love, and fellowship of the church body, but we are assuming that we have a position that we do not have. Even worse, we are assuming we have a *divine* position and *divine* authority.
- We don’t have that position.
- Moreover, we have forgotten that we also will be judged by God. We will have to give an account to Him for our actions (1 Cor. 4:4; 2 Cor. 5:10) — and we need to prepare for that meeting and not worry about judging others now.
- It is notable that Paul will return to this theme later in the chapter (vv. 10-12). He wants us to understand that we are not Judge; we are (all) being and going to be judged. We need to prepare for our judgment, not to be judge of others.

- Having established attitudes and mindsets to cultivate towards others, Paul offers several guides to how we make personal decisions about what to do with our liberties: how do we decide to spend our money (how much money is too much for a car, vacation, or cup of coffee?), what we do with our discretionary time, what we watch on TV (or if it is permissible to have one)...

5. Three GUIDES for Making Our Different Choices (vv. 5-9)

• Do what you do with CONFIDENCE (v. 5)

- ✓ In verses 2-3 Paul identified one possible freedom that might elicit different choices: food. Here he introduces another topic: worship.
- ✓ When he says *one person regards one day above another* he could be referring to one of two possibilities — the preference to worship on Saturday and keep the OT pattern/commandment, or the preference to keep OT feast days. It could be either (or both), but it probably at least includes the Sabbath because like the OT food laws, the Sabbath was such a significant Jewish practice. Both the Sabbath and feast days were debated in other early churches (Gal. 4:10; Col. 2:16).
- ✓ The word *regard* is the word “judge” — the person has studied and considered and then come to a conclusion or an evaluation. His actions are on the basis of his evaluation.
- ✓ But not everyone thinks like Jewish converts who still hang onto some OT practices — they *regard* (same word for judgment and evaluation) *every day* alike. That is, they don’t think of any one day as more significant spiritually than another. They are not compelled by Sabbath worship (Sunday is actually preferable to them) and they believe there is no compelling reason to keep feast days.
- ✓ While we always want to be careful about making arguments from what Bible writers do not say (“he didn’t say...so it must mean...” — an “argument from silence”), what Paul doesn’t say is highly significant — he *does not* correct either worshipper. He makes no condemnation or commendation. The actions themselves are of no importance because there is freedom to do both without sinning.
- ✓ What is important is that whatever one does, he does in accord with his conscience. He should not act contrary to what he believes is right and true. So Paul says that whatever a person decides, *he must be fully convinced...*
 - He says *each person* — every person is going to have to come to a conclusion about what they will do regarding food and worship; every person must make a personal evaluation & decision. This is equally important and essential for every person.
 - To be *fully convinced* means that they are assured and certain; they are confident. It was this kind of confidence that led Abraham to faith (the same word is used in 4:21). It is settled.
 - And reinforcing the emphasis on “each person” Paul says, *in his own mind*. In other words, “you think and consider and evaluate for yourself. Don’t unthinkingly follow others.” He wants everyone to come to his own conclusions and then not waver from that decision.”

- ✓ We noted last week that every person has a conscience that evaluates every action; the problem with the conscience is that it can be misinformed and even corrupted. So while we follow the conscience, we also inform and teach and train the conscience. That's what Paul is talking about here — inform your conscience about these liberty issues and then follow it (e.g., Peter, **Acts 10:9ff**).
- ✓ Then, having come to a firm conclusion, follow what your conscience has been trained to do — act on what you are convinced and confident is the right thing for you to do. This is essential to “fighting the good fight of faith” (**1 Tim. 1:19**).
- ✓ Let me put this together for you in a couple of ways:
 - **Never go against your conscience.** Even if your conscience is misinformed or overly sensitive (condemning you for something that is not sin), you *never* want to train yourself to ignore the conscience. Ignoring your conscience will lead to killing your conscience and making it ineffective and useless (1 Tim. 4:2).
 - **Beware of following the convictions of others.** Doing what others do simply because they are influential in your life will keep you from thinking deeply and may cause you to violate something you believe is best for your sanctification.
 - **Beware of imposing your convictions on others.** Our goal is to think for ourselves, not to compel others to do everything we do. If they ask you questions, answer, but never compel.

• **Do what you do with GRATITUDE (v. 6)**

- ✓ Paul connects the questions about worship and eating together; by doing that, he demonstrates that there is not a theological problem about those issues that needs correction. He is not attempting to “fix” either person. He is wanting to make sure that they are making their choices appropriately.
- ✓ So having connected the two ideas, he now makes two observations about the choices:
 - Both the Sabbath worshipper (and by implication, the non-worshipper) do it **for the Lord**.
 - Both the eater and non-eater do what they do **with thankfulness**.
- ✓ We will talk about doing what they do **for the Lord** below. In this verse, pay particular attention to the emphasis on gratitude.
 - Both the meat eater and the vegetarian are eating in faith, giving thanks for God's provision.
 - Both give thanks and neither feels superior *or inferior* for what they do. They are eating what they are eating to give honor and gratitude to the Lord.
 - They are not resentful for what they have (or don't have). And as they give thanks they are not evaluating (and condemning) what the other is eating. They are giving gratitude for what they have for their own individual meal.
 - They are applying the principle of **1 Tim. 4:3-5** well.
 - One important test of anything we do is, “Can I do this with gratitude for God's good gift of this to me? And will God receive this is a genuine and right expression of gratitude?”

• Do what you do for **THE LORD** (vv. 7-9)

- ✓ In v. 4, Paul introduced the idea of the Lordship of Christ. In vv. 7-9 (actually v. 6), he expands it significantly and helps us to see the implication and importance of His lordship.
- ✓ Why is it so important for the believer to give thanks and do things for the Lord (v. 6)? Because **(for) not one of us lives for himself...** (v. 7). We are living for something more important than our own wants and desires.
- ✓ When Paul says **not one lives for himself** he means that there is something in life that is beyond our personal inclinations and passions. Similarly, he says that **not one dies for himself** he means that he does not die for his own benefit, but just as he lived for the benefit of another, he dies in a way that brings benefit (glory) to another (God). Both their life and death reveal God's glory.
- ✓ He makes it very clear in v. 8 —
 - Living is **for the Lord** — we live in such a way that He takes pleasure in what we do and so that others see what He is like. Many passages make this same point: **Rom. 8:29; 11:36; 1 Cor. 6:20; 8:6; 10:31; 2 Cor. 5:15; Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:18.**
 - [Aside: living for the glory of the Lord does not preclude doing things like taking a walk on the beach, going on vacation in the mountains, eating a hotdog or a bowl of ice cream, reading a satisfying novel, watching a movie with my wife, or taking a car ride with the top down, planting three dozen flowers in my yard, painting my car a new color, attending a baseball game, or building a fire in the fire pit and roasting marshmallows... All these things and many more are gifts of common grace that can be enjoyed (and should be enjoyed as gifts of God's common grace) as an expression of our delight in God. Joe Rigney's books are helpful on this topic.]
 - Dying is **for the Lord** — we die in dependence on the Lord for our souls and we die content to go to Heaven, not clinging to the things of this world as if they are ultimate (Phil. 1:21; 1 Cor. 6:20b; 7:23-24; 8:6).
 - Summary: **whether we live or die, we are the Lord's** — we belong to Him and because of that, what we do in both life and death is for His glory and honor. The clause is somewhat emphatic: "the Lord's we are." That is, we really do belong to Him — we *are* His. We have no rights or privileges of our own and we do not live for ourselves and every decision we make is about revering and honoring Him. All our liberty decisions should reflect that we belong to the Lord.
- ✓ Verse 9 expands the idea giving a reason (**for**) why we belong to the Lord —
 - We belong to Him because that was the **end** (purpose) of His **dying** and **living** (death and resurrection) — Christ's death was for the purpose of making us His and making Him first in our lives (**Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:18**). He did not die so we would stay self-indulgent; He died so that we would become Christ-indulgent.
 - He died and rose to **be Lord both of the dead and of the living**. He died and rose so that He might exercise His absolute lordship and dominion over us — and all people (cf. **Phil. 2:8-10**).

- ✓ What is important about His lordship in this discussion?

“...the Lordship of Christ means I must never pressurize a fellow Christian to do something they really believe dishonours Christ, even if I happen to know that it wouldn't. What they believe subjectively is more important here than what I may know objectively. They and we must be 'fully convinced in our own minds' that the way we behave honours Jesus as Lord.” [Ash, *Teaching Romans*, 2: Kindle 2362.]

CONCLUSION:

Making decisions is often difficult. Sometimes it is hard because there does not seem to be a clear decision for what is wise and best. And Scripture often gives us latitude to enjoy either option. What do we do then? How do we start to make decisions about liberty issues? According to this passage, there are three primary questions to ask:

- ✓ Am I convinced that this is the best thing for me to do?
- ✓ Can I do this with gratitude to God?
- ✓ Can I do this for the Lord?

Until we can answer those questions affirmatively, it would be unwise (and sinful) to proceed.

BENEDICTION: 1 Corinthians 11:33-36