

KEEPING PEACE ON PREFERENCE ISSUES: ROMANS 14-15

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Introduction The misuse and use of Romans 14-15

- Romans 14-15 were not given by God to protect Christians who want to want to push the line of moral propriety.
- Romans 14-15 were revealed by God to help Christians stop pushing personal opinions and preferences to the point that they strain and even break relationships in the church.

John Calvin:

Men are readily inclined to slide from a difference of opinion into dispute and controversy. The apostle, therefore, shows how those who are of different opinions may live together without disagreement. (Romans, 289)

Important Preliminary Points:

1. Romans 14-15 were not given to provide those longing for worldliness a biblical grounds for justifying morally dubious activities.
2. Romans 14-15 are not instruction on how to handle unrepentant sin or doctrinal error on a core doctrines of the faith.
3. Paul assumes in these chapters that there will be legitimate, strong differences of opinion in the church. This is an expectation, not an exception (Rom 14:5, 14, 22).
4. Definitions of the words *weak* and *strong* as used by Paul of believers (14:1; 15:1). The *strong*: those who believe there are several legitimate ways of handling a given preference issue. The *weak*: those who believe there is only one way of handling a given preference issue.

The Context:

The preceding context: Rom 12:3, 10, 16

The historical context: Rom 14:2-3, 5-6

Doug Moo:

The weak were those—mainly Jewish Christians—who could not bring themselves to abandon the requirements of the law they had observed all

their lives. They could not, as Christians, simply ignore the food laws, Sabbath observances, and so on. (Romans, NIV Application Commentary, 447)

Seven reasons why Christians need to maintain peace on preference issues.

1) God is accepting. Rom 14:1-3

God is accepting of believers, and we must imitate Him. That doesn't necessarily mean we have to change our views on a preference issue, but it does mean that you change your attitude toward those who disagree, so that you disagree agreeably.

2) Jesus is Master. Rom 14:4-9

The terms *servant* and *master* and the phrase *for the Lord* highlight the main point of this small section. This is a pointed rebuke to the Christian who believes that it is his responsibility to organise everyone in the church around his preferences. Other believers report to Christ on preference issues, not to you or me.

3) God is Judge. Rom 14:10-13

Paul clearly draws a double-thick line between the legitimate authority that Christ has given the church to judge sin and false doctrine, and the illegitimate authority of meddling in daily life and personal preferences.

4) Love is pre-eminent. Rom 14:14-15

When strong, non-sin opinions pop up in the church, what you do is relax, and let love cover the differences.

A side comment to the strong: Rom 14:16-18

The strong don't have to give in to manipulation by a "professionally weaker" brother.

5) Peace is priority. Rom 14:19-21

A side comment to the weak: Rom 14:22-23

The weak should never give in on the spur of the moment to intentional or unintentional pressure from the strong, because people who get used to ignoring their consciences are people headed for big sin.

6) Christianity is other-focused. Rom 15:1-4

Christianity is always other-focused, even in freedom areas, which are usually typified by an extremely high level of self-preoccupation. The great reason we are other-focused is our Lord is other focused (v. 3).

7) God is ultimate. Rom 15:5-12

God likes churches that have one voice, not many voices because they've been split over preference issues.

Appendix A:

Five questions to ask when facing "grey-area" decisions:

1. Is it for my glory or God's? (1 Cor 10:31)
2. Is it for my good or my brother's good? (1 Cor 10:24)
3. Is it for my happiness or another's holiness? (1 Cor 8:8-9, 12-13)
4. Is it for my satisfaction or another's salvation? (1 Cor 9:22-23a; 10:33)
5. Is it for momentary pleasure or eternal profit? (1 Cor 10:23)