

[Romans 14:17 – 15:3]

~ Our Spiritual Safari slowed tremendously in our previous several reports because we have carefully considered myriad Scriptural truths; truths that are equally as important as the eighth chapter of Romans was. I'm not sure I would assign them levels of importance, but I am giving nearly ten thousand words to chapter fourteen because it is so deeply controversial. Perhaps that consideration alone emphasizes a rank? Either way, this chapter has caused many to become hyper-critical saints who erroneously conclude they never sin anymore. Unfortunately, most of them are given over to extreme gossip – vicious gossip, by the way – and I have found that they are totally dishonest in their dealings with other people, too. Now, friends, I don't write about things I do not know for certain. I know these things because I have had dealings with them; and I have discovered that the people who need to really be watched out for carefully are those carrying a huge Bible under their arms!

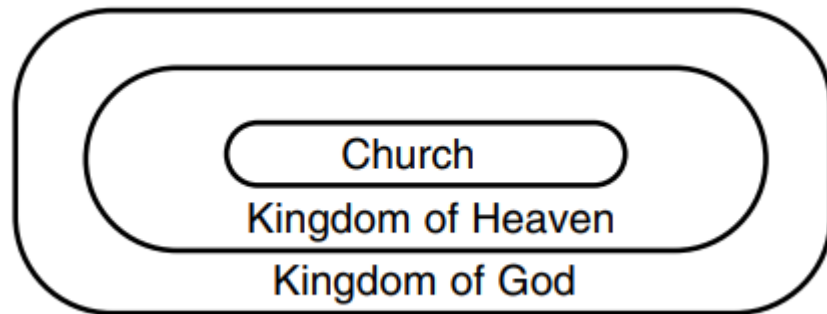
We are going to have to understand that there are no rules for Christian conduct under the dispensation of grace; but we *DO* have certain tremendous spiritual principles that believers are to govern themselves by. Because those spiritual principles are so important to comprehend, think about and put into practice in our life, we have examined them in the manner that we have in our last several reports. If you have not read our last few reports I would suggest you *AT LEAST* go back to the beginning of chapter fourteen; but starting at the beginning of Romans would be most edifying! So, let's pray for judgment, wisdom and understanding now....

XIV

17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

~ This is the *ONLY* reference to the *Kingdom of God* in the entire epistle to the Romans. Paul is *NOT* speaking of the *Kingdom of Heaven*, as we considered in Matthew, because the Kingdom of Heaven finds its final

fruition in the millennial and Messianic kingdom here on earth. The *Kingdom of God* is much broader and larger than the *Kingdom of Heaven* – although it *INCLUDES* the *Kingdom of Heaven* – and everything else in God’s created universe – and within that parameter, we find the church; this section of Scripture also makes reference to that!



Dr. Lang has given a most satisfactory definition, saying, “... *the Heavenly sphere of life in which God’s Word and Spirit govern, and whose body on earth is the church...*” most closely matches the Lord Jesus’ use of the terminology ‘*Kingdom of God.*’ Remember, Jesus said, “*except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God!*” Well, *THAT* is the Heavenly sphere of life in which God’s Word and Spirit govern!

Dr. Stifler said, “... *God rules everywhere, but there is a realm where He governs by spiritual forces and spiritual laws alone!*” That realm exists in one of the domains in the life of a believer. Man is totally incapable of entering or discerning the *Kingdom of God* without the new birth by Spirit and of water! Verse eighteen has *NOTHING* to do with eating, drinking, fasting, meat on Friday, pork, vegetarianism — or any other type of diet. Those things just don’t happen to enter into the equation of that which Paul is referring to in this passage.

Righteousness means to be right with God; and to live a life that is well-pleasing to Him by faith. In the Holy Spirit, this has reference to our Christian standing and walk. This is more practical than theological, to be sure. This is moral as opposed to oral. There is a difference between the righteousness in the Holy Spirit and the righteousness we have in Christ, too. The “*joy*” Paul speaks of is almost completely absent in the lives of modern believers. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, and there should be joy in our lives. That doesn’t mean we plaster a fake smile on our face and run around

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like weirdo's, though. I don't smile just because others want me to, and smiling doesn't determine whether I am a Christian or not; but what *does* matter is if we have a genuine joy of life deep in our hearts....

18 For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

~ There will come a literal Kingdom established on this earth; ruled and reigned by Christ Himself *IN THAT DAY*. Jesus said to the apostles, "*I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until I drink it with you!*" Make no mistake: there *WILL* be a literal Kingdom established upon this earth. However, what Paul is referring to is entering the Kingdom that can only be entered *after* one is truly born again. You won't be building it, though. It's already established; and has been for eternities past. God is calling out a people to His Name here on earth today; not building a kingdom. Let's keep our story straight.

But, don't think the world is going to applaud you, either – because they aren't going to. More realistically, you'll be persecuted and discouraged; but deep down inside, men *DO* approve of a *GENUINE* believer; what they despise is that which is hypocritical and phony in the life of a self-professing believer — and they will destroy any character flaw they find. That's why almost no one attends church anymore, by the way. This is a great principle of conduct, but it pinches the toes until the shoe is broken in and fits correctly. The walk and the talk of the believer must both be of one accord — which happens by faith, and is pleasing to God while meeting the approval of the consciences of men....

19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

~ Here is an explicit exhortation to all the tongue-talking Jesus people. Paul said, in first Corinthians chapter fourteen at four, "*.... he that speaketh in a tongue edifies himself.*" Now, do you want to edify others *or yourself* with your conduct? To '*pursue*' means to press towards the mark. See, the believer is to avoid the use of food – or *ANY* physical thing – that offends a brother. I don't think those who speak in a tongue realize exactly how

offensive they are to other people. What I do know is that talking in an incoherent drivel does *NOTHING* for the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ. It divides believers. If you want to pray in tongues, then why don't you just do it silently? Even then, your understanding is unfruitful – as Paul also said in first Corinthians chapter fourteen at verse fourteen. This is the wholly negative aspect of this exhortation. What we need to do is constantly strive towards spiritual values like righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit – and forget that tongues nonsense, friends. We need to do *only* those things that build others up in the faith, and never do that which divides. We're going to really focus on the fact that a child of God cannot – *CANNOT* – grow if they are apart from the Word of God; and all of this ties into that....

20 For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.

~ The believer has the liberty to eat or abstain from eating. Meat doesn't commend us to God. However, for the sake of the physical, do not tear down the work of God in the heart of some weak believer who may be offended by your meat-eating. We are never to do anything that might wreck the faith of another child of God....

21 It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

22 Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.

23 And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

~ Paul returns to this issue of eating and drinking again and again; and I think he does so because this is the area where most of us offend others. Verse twenty-two is a key verse in this connection. The faith you have – have it to yourself in the sight of God. Just like speaking in tongues; speak it to yourself, friends. Honestly, no one else really cares about your piety – it's shameful. That's *ALL* it is! You can only be happy if you are not judged

by the thing you approve of! That just happens to cover a whole lot of spiritual ground, too, by the way. This part of Paul's exhortation looks *BACK* over what we have done. Happy is the man that is not condemned of offending others by that thing which he has done.

Now, I recognize this paragraph is going to be altogether misunderstood, and people will misquote what I say here – but I am going to say it anyways. People have asked me if a Christian can get drunk and still be a saved person; and I say the answer is yes. The Prodigal Son was always a son – even out there in the far country. I'm sure the Prodigal Son got drunk and did many other things. Well, either way, he was always a son! The only difference between the Prodigal Son and the pigs is that no pigs said they would arise and go home. The Prodigal Son hated it in the pig pen and wanted out; but the pigs *LOVE* it in the pig pen. The difference between the Christian who gets drunk and the man in the world who gets drunk is that the man in the world shakes off his hangover and goes back out and does it again and again. The child of God wakes up with a hangover and tells God in prayer that he hates what he has done; and then repents. The Prodigal Son never returned to the pig pen after he went home.

Is there something you do that you always hate yourself for after you have done it? If there is, then you're wrong in doing that thing, of course. It doesn't matter what is. It might be going to church. Actually, church is the most dangerous place most people can go. Satan isn't down in the crack house with drunks because he already owns that crowd. Why would the devil waste time with what he has already destroyed? Honestly, I think the devil is ashamed of those people anyways. No, Satan is most effective moving in and around the church. Do you regret things you said in church? The devil doesn't. We need to make sure we can look back on our conduct and account to the Lord for that thing. Did you do it by faith? Whatsoever is not of faith is sin. Do you really believe in what you're doing? If not – then you ought not be doing it. We are saved by faith, so we are to walk by faith, also....

XV

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1 We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

2 Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.

~ As we move towards the end of the epistle to the Romans, we continue in the relationship between believers – one to another – and, specifically, the relationship of a strong brother to a weak brother. We began this section of Scripture concerning separation in chapter fourteen; and we revisit the subject in these first three verses of chapter fifteen. This passage will conclude the major argument of Paul’s letter; and then Paul will return to the subject of personal relationships.

Radical higher criticism has questioned the authenticity of the final two chapters in Romans. They have neither reason nor documentary evidence for calling into question the authorship; but the Bower School of days gone by, and many others, do exactly that. Dr. Kerr established the authorship as verified in his opening statement to **‘The Introduction to New Testament Study’** when he says, “... *despite these objections, the integrity of the epistle to the Romans remains certain.*”

Alright, this is where we find Paul’s third and final great guiding principle for establishing and governing our Christian conduct. Paul identifies himself with the strong believer in verse one. Paul insists that we need to yield consideration for the feelings and prejudices of the *WEAK* believers. If you know a Christian who is offended by eating pork, don’t invite them to dinner and serve baby back ribs. Maybe you love barbecue ribs as much as I do, but it’s insulting to some people. Now, in some areas, I’ll admit I am a weak believer because there are some things I feel very definitely I cannot do. I don’t really see a problem with pork, dancing or the movies; but we who are strong need to bear those infirmities and not please ourselves when we are around others who have strong convictions that differ.

1 Corinthians 10: 24 *Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth. 25 Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: 26 For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof ~*

1 Corinthians 9: 19 *For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. 20 And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; 21 To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ) that I might gain them that are without law. 22 To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23 And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you ~*

Paul could say he was free from men, but he made himself a servant that he might gain even more men to Christ. Maybe you wouldn't go to a Roman Catholic Church, for example; yet you expect them to come to your church! The hyper separated people always ask how far we can go with this doctrine. I know some people who try to witness in strip clubs. I think they're entirely wrong. There are some things we can know very definitely are wrong. Others feel they can take an alcoholic drink in order to witness to a crowd; well, personally, I think they're just attempting to validate their drunkenness. However, what we have been considering are areas that the Bible does not address specifically. If I thought I could win some soul for Christ at the movies, then I would probably go see a movie once in a while. Since that isn't going to happen for me, let's just remember we're each going to give our own account of our lives. Do you do what you do because you love Christ and want to serve Him? Or is there some other motivation?
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3 *For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.*

~ This is the only instance I can find where Paul uses Christ as an example; but, even so, He is only an example to believers. Further, He is only an example to believers *in redemption*. Never are we to attempt to imitate Christ, because our thoughts are not His thoughts, and our ways are not His ways. His thoughts and ways are much higher than ours. No one has ever been sanctified – or has even been saved – by following an example. We become Christians *by faith* in the Lord Jesus Christ; there is no other way.

So, on that note, our Spiritual Safari is going to conclude this leg of our expedition through the entire Word of God. Our next several concluding reports are going to find Paul becoming extremely personal. Our next report is going to examine how Jews and Gentiles are one in salvation. Does your life live up to the three great principles of Christian conduct that we have so painstakingly studied? Have you examined your life to see if your actions align with the principles found in the Word of God? Have you asked God to reveal those things that hinder your relationship to Him? If you answered no to *ANY* of those three questions, there is cause for alarm in your life. May I suggest you get it straight before you take another step ~