

BIBLE & BAGEL

Romans – Our Common Faith

18 March 2016

As we get into chapter 14 of the book of Romans, we must bear in mind the things that Apostle Paul has said previously especially to the Gentiles; in chapter 11 he told them not to be arrogant towards the Jews and remember that were in-grafted branches. In chapter 12 he told them to offer their bodies as living sacrifices (emphasis on bodies), and in chapter 13 he told them to submit to the leadership in the synagogues where they were meeting. Now we see what the real issue was among the Roman believers.

Romans 14:1-4

Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. 2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. 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. 4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. NKJV

Apostle Paul admonishes the believers here to accept those who one would consider weaker in the faith and not to dispute over minor issues. He says people who believe they can eat anything should not look down upon people who are restricted in their diet. Just as one who eats anything is the Lord's servant so is the one who is restricted in his diet. The former should not judge the latter because God is the judge and God can enable him to stand or cause him to fall and the promise is that God will make him stand.

The question we have to ask is “who will stumble over the issue of food?” Being vegetarian was very rare in the Roman Empire in those days. So the logical explanation is the Jews, they were restricted in their diet by the Torah. The problem in the church then was that Gentiles who believed that they could eat all things were being boastful over the Jews and arguing with them over this issue. The Apostle reminds them here that they are all equally God's servants and ultimately God will make them stand. Sometimes when we think we are more “mature” than someone else we tend to become proud and even boastful over others, we must guard ourselves against the sin of pride and thinking too highly of ourselves. If we do we hurt others who are equally servants and children of God.

Romans 14:5-10

One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 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. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. 7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. 8 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 Lord's. 9 For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Apostle Paul brings up another issue here that of people treating certain days as special while others treating every day the same. Likewise with food one who eats all foods gives thanks to the Lord while those who do not eat certain foods also gives



thanks to the Lord. The point here is that we do not live alone we are not “islands” just existing on our own but we are connected to the Lord and to each other.

The point Apostle Paul is making here is that we live in relationship to one another and therefore we ought not to cause others to stumble in their faith. He also said in 1 Corinthians 8 that eating food or abstaining from certain foods does not make us better in the sight of Godⁱ, the context there was eating food that had been sacrificed to idols. Ultimately love and concern for our brethren should rule us. If what we eat cause others to question our faith or if they imitate us and eat something that causes them to feel guilty, then we should restrain ourselves.

Romans 14:10-15

10 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. 11 For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God." 12 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. 13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way. 14 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. 15 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. NKJV

We should not judge one another or look down on others because we are all ultimately going to stand before Messiah in judgment and we shall all have to answer for how we have lived whether we have loved our brother enough to restrain ourselves for their sake. So we should make up our mind that we will not cause our brother to stumble. He says there is nothing unclean in itself but if someone considers a certain food unclean then it is unclean in his mind and if by eating something he considers unclean it causes him to falter in his faith then we are not showing a loving attitude.

Apostle Paul is not only speaking about Jewish believers when it comes to clean and unclean foods, he is also very concerned about Jewish pre-believers, remember the church gathered in the synagogue which was very likely in the home of a Jewish person. In Romans 16 we see there was a church in the house of Archippus and this is also mentioned in His letter to Philemonⁱⁱ. In the synagogue there were both believers as well as pre-believers and the Jewish pre-believers especially would stumble at the sight of “believers” eating things that were forbidden and think that these surely could not be worshipping the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who had given the commands about food. Remember Apostle Paul had previously said that Gentiles were to provoke the Jews to jealousy so that they would find Messiahⁱⁱⁱ. This could not be achieved if the Gentiles were arrogant and living only to satisfy their own flesh.

We must remember that God has placed us in a family called the church, we must not cause others to stumble and prevent them from coming to faith in Messiah, if it means restricting ourselves regarding certain foods or anything else we should make those sacrifices for the sake of their salvation.

ⁱ 1 Corinthians 4:4-8

ⁱⁱ Romans 16:5, Philemon 2

ⁱⁱⁱ Romans 10:19, 11:11

