

Eternity Daily Bible Study

Romans 9-16 The Implications of Salvation

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE MINISTRY OF THE AIBI

Number: 616

Verses: Romans 14:14-17

Topic: The Nature Of The Kingdom

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Romans 14:14-17 HCSB *(I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself. Still, to someone who considers a thing to be unclean, to that one it is unclean.) (15) For if your brother is hurt by what you eat, you are no longer walking according to love. By what you eat, do not destroy that one for whom Christ died. (16) Therefore, do not let your good be slandered, (17) for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

What is the nature of the Kingdom of God? Is it all about externals (such as eating, drinking, and Sabbaths) or is the Kingdom all about internals (love, righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit)? Paul comes down clearly and firmly on one side of this dispute. The Kingdom of God is about attitudes, and the disposition of our soul and spirit and not about what we wear or eat or drink, or about when we go to church!

Paul starts with an astonishing statement: *I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself.* Pork was not unclean "in itself" nor was wine, nor was beef or liver or snails or frog's legs. The idea of "unclean things" was removed by the Lord Jesus. It seems to have taken some time for Paul the former Pharisee to arrive at this remarkable conclusion because he says *I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus*

Jesus had to persuade Paul of this truth because it was not self-evident to Paul, in fact it went right against all of Paul's upbringing! The Pharisees believed in ritual contamination. That is if a holy thing touched and unclean thing, then the holy thing became unclean also. But Jesus reversed this!

When Jesus touched a dead body (like the girl on the bier) Jesus did not become unclean – rather the girl rose from the dead! And when Jesus touched a leper He did not become leprous or unclean – rather the leper became clean and whole and healed. And when Jesus was touched by a woman with the issue of blood or came across a demoniac, He was not defiled, rather the person was healed and the demon cast out! Jesus taught and demonstrated with great clarity and frequent repetition that the power of the Holy Spirit was not diminished in any way by the impure, the unclean, the diseased, the demonic or the insane!

A preacher full of the Holy Spirit can go into a bar or a brothel and come out with converts and changed lives! A young preacher called David Wilkerson went to New York and even transformed a bikie gang! Corrie Ten Boom was alight in the darkness of Nazi concentration camps that did not destroy her soul, and Jackie Pullinger went into the opium dens of the Walled City of Hong Kong to minister Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit brought great Spirit-filled revival! Nothing is unclean to the person of faith!

The Paul adds a warning: *Still, to someone who considers a thing to be unclean, to that one it is unclean.* For instance to some people alcohol is unclean and they will never go to a bar, and it would hurt them spiritually to do so – and I respect that! For me playing tournament chess (which brought out a spirit of excessive competition) was unclean for a long while. It was something I simply could not do without sinning! There are limits to our faith!

I know Christians who minister to the porn industry and who attend conventions and shows in Las Vegas – and can do so successfully and without compromise. But for 99% of men that would be an absolute disaster! Paul warns us so we don't go too far in our freedom. We have to combine Jesus' call to freedom with his call to holiness! (Scriptures always have to be interpreted in balance with each other).

So when a person of strong faith for whom X is clean, meets a person of weak faith for whom X is unclean – who gives way? The person of strong faith should respect the feelings of the person with weaker faith in the matter: *For if your brother is hurt by what you eat, you are no longer walking according to love. By what you eat, do not destroy that one for whom Christ died.*

In other words if I prefer a good California red wine, and my brother in Christ believes wine is sinful – then it is up to me to give way and I should not partake in his or her presence. I don't want to stumble an alcoholic, I don't want to hurt a single soul, so the communion will be with grape juice!

Liberty has to be exercised with love and consideration for those around me *do not destroy that one for whom Christ died* is a powerful principle! If Christ died for them, then we should nurture them and love them and respect their spiritual sensitivities. This includes such things as not having vigorous theological debates in front of new believers. Exposing young Christians to some scholars' doubts about the Canon of Scripture or the Trinity does far more harm than good!

Paul then brings the debate around to the nature of the Kingdom of God: *Therefore, do not let your good be slandered, (17) for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

In other words do not let what is good to you, be spoken of as evil, because it destroyed someone of weaker faith. I like peanuts. But to some people with peanut allergies they are potentially fatal. The good thing – peanuts, would be spoken of as evil if I was so insensitive as to give peanuts to someone who had the allergy. Does that mean that everyone has to stop eating peanuts? No! They are good! But you must not give them to your brother who has a peanut allergy! (And that principle can be applied to many things). We must walk in love and consideration.

The Kingdom of God is not about the externals of what you do or do not eat or drink. It is about how you act towards other people in love. It is the hidden internal stuff of the heart and the transformational work of God in us producing righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Lets summarize this with a few principles:

1. Nothing is unclean in and of itself.
2. The power of the Holy Spirit is so great that it overcomes ritual uncleanness - and redemption is more powerful than sin.
3. But we cannot go around playing with fire. If it is unclean to you, then its unclean. If in doubt – don't!
4. The stronger in faith gives way to the weaker – we may have to give up some freedoms to ensure others are not injured in their Christian life.
5. The focus of the Christian life should not be on external conformity to rules about what we can eat or drink, or when we should go to church.
6. The focus of the Christian life should be on internal conformity to Christ-likeness e.g. love, righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Blessings,

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