

Eternity Daily Bible Study

Romans 9-16 The Implications of Salvation

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE MINISTRY OF THE AIBI

Number: 612

Verses: Romans 14

Topic: Doubtful Issues

Date: 25th January 2007

Romans 14:1-4 HCSB *Accept anyone who is weak in faith, but don't argue about doubtful issues. (2) One person believes he may eat anything, but one who is weak eats only vegetables. (3) One who eats must not look down on one who does not eat; and one who does not eat must not criticize one who does, because God has accepted him. (4) Who are you to criticize another's household slave? Before his own Lord he stands or falls. And stand he will! For the Lord is able to make him stand.*

The point of chapter 14 is "but don't argue about doubtful issues" and we need to keep that in mind as we look at this chapter! It is fundamentally an appeal for unity between the "strong in faith" and the "weak in faith" which we shall define shortly.

The strong in faith were not worried about "small stuff" and felt fine about eating meat and did not ask questions about where it came from or whether it had been sacrificed to heathen gods (idols). They just ate the food and gave glory to God.

The weak in faith suffered from what the ancient divines termed the "sin of particularity" - that is they were preoccupied with minor ethical quibbles. These folk are still around today and get concerned about the color of lipstick, the names of certain bible versions and the root derivation of common words. They probably also would never decorate a Christmas tree because of its "pagan origins". Paul calls these folk "weak in faith" because of their inordinate fear of moral impurity and spiritual contamination.

The "strong in faith" however were given to scoffing at the fears of their brethren and hurt their feelings. They were unloving, cruel and disdainful of the sensitivities of their brothers and sisters in the faith! So on one hand we have quibbling and on the other hand we have insensitivity - and both are wrong!

Now we need to remember that issues of food and drink were "hot potatoes" that arose time and time again. The strict Jewish Christians would not eat pork and tended to keep the Jewish food laws, the Gentiles however were concerned about the dedication of the animals to idols (much as Halal meat today is slaughtered facing Mecca). They saw this as making the food spiritually suspect and preferred to eat vegetables rather than eat meat slaughtered in such a pagan fashion.

Later on Paul tells the Corinthians that meat that is actually within the bounds of an idols temple is taboo. You don't go into the temple of Diana just to eat barbecue! However if you are outside of the temple precincts - just eat the meat without asking any questions (1 Corinthians 10:14-33).

This is still an issue for Asian students with "family shrines" in the kitchen where food is

often dedicated to the spirits of the ancestors or to Buddha. If one of the family members is a Christian how should he or she handle it. Generally they just ask for their food to be put aside and not dedicated – but it can be a very delicate issue.

The thing is that the varying spiritual approaches can cause divisions between people. Paul simply says “you are BOTH right!”. The people who do not eat the food are right for following their conscience and the people who go ahead are right because their faith tells them that “idols are nothing” and enables them to be bold! Both sides are serving God – just in slightly different ways:

One who eats must not look down on one who does not eat; and one who does not eat must not criticize one who does, because God has accepted him. (4) Who are you to criticize another's household slave? Before his own Lord he stands or falls. And stand he will! For the Lord is able to make him stand.

God has accepted BOTH sets of people. The weak in faith will be “made to stand” by God, and the strong in faith is still accepted by God even though he eats (v.3). If we are saved, then we are accepted by God because of the work of Christ on the cross. Every single born-again Christian is acceptable to God! For the blood of Jesus Christ has made us acceptable! Therefore we are never to see another believer as “unacceptable” or to reject them for having a different practice or opinion on a minor matter.

Romans 15:7 ISV *Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ accepted you, for the glory of God.*

To put it another way: The people who do not put up a Christmas tree because it was an ancient pagan practice are acceptable to God, and so are those who do put up a Christmas tree in faith as a commemoration of Christ are acceptable to God. Both serve God in their own way.

Paul wants us to stop arguing about such things and to just love one another even though we have differences in the way that we interpret our faith. Unity is more important than uniformity. We are allowed diversity in personal faith practice on “minor matters”. As someone (I think Augustine) has said: “In the essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity.”

I drive a rather large car, and some Christians accuse me of contributing to global warming. But I see it as being between me and God – and He is my Master and not them (v. 4) Yet I should respect them and give them the liberty to have their views. And they should leave me alone for I am not to be “judged by another man's conscience” (1 Corinthians 10:29).

We have to learn to live with each other. Christians have very different political views, environmental views, approaches to Christian music and to festivals and church practices and to matters of food and drink. In all these matters Paul tells us that love is the number one priority and that both sides are fine with God and that arguing about who is “right” and who is “wrong” is divisive and does far more harm than good.

Blessings,

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