

## Lesson 29 - The Book of Romans

Just a recap of the book before we begin this lesson - The first 8 chapters we call **doctrinal** – That is the issues of sin, salvation and sanctification –

The next 3 chapters were **dispensational** – the past present and future of the nation of Israel and now we are in the 3<sup>rd</sup> major section which we might refer to as the **practical section**- Faith, Hope and Love.

This section deals with the question, “so what does all of this have to do with my walk today?” and that is where we are starting in **Chapter 14**. I would summarize this next section as dealing with the maturity of the believer.

At this juncture, I want to air my dirty laundry. I have never been captivated by the social aspect of the gospel. That is, I am not normally interested in something other than doctrine. I love to study doctrine, The breakdown of words, the eclipsing of the first 8 chapters of this wonderful book really capture my attention.

It is interesting to me that Paul starts out making a distinction between the weak believer and the more mature believer. That covers the first 8 chapters of this book. I have never really been captivated by the issues of faith, hope and love near as much as I am doctrine.

With this background, when entering the 3<sup>rd</sup> major section of this book I found to be a “ho hum” portion, but I persevered in spite of myself.

Boy, was I amazed at **chapter 14-16** of this book.

Oh, I am captivated by the fact that I want to become a “mature” believer. Or as John Wimber put it – I want to grow up before I grow old.

I have studied in depth that portion of scripture in **1<sup>st</sup> John** where it moves the believer from “little children” through “young men” to eventually “fathers in the faith”

The thing I missed in the “fathers” message (realizing that it says “knows Him who is from the beginning”) is that within the heart of the Father, lies the entire message of **Romans 14-16**. That is – just how important the body of Jesus Christ is to the Father and the emphasis He places upon it.

I am aware of the description given of the body in **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians** where Paul states how important each part of the body is. I have even seen examples of “stubbing my toe” and how my whole body reacts, or getting soap in my eye while in the shower seems to affect my whole body.

But I am seeing a deeper understanding as Paul describes that *if the foot should say, because I am not a hand, I am not of the body” and the ear should say because I am not a hand, is it therefore not part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing, or if the whole body were a hearing, where would be the*

smelling? **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12 – 15 & following.** So, I am realizing something very important.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> portion of the book is as important as the two previous sections.

At this juncture, I want to add a very important point.

### **Spiritual maturity is not measured by what we are able to “give up”**

The more *mature believer* is not measured by his/her ability to abstain from certain practices. Maturity has nothing to do with what we may consider as behavioral activity. I.e.; I don't smoke, drink, go to dances, go to the movies, watch t.v. or wear specific clothing, cut my hair or not wear pants.

This has nothing to do with maturity.

### **Spiritual maturity is rather measured by the liberty in which we walk and our ability to matriculate that liberty into the body as a whole.**

Paul goes into depth, with how the mature believer must act, not only among the weaker believer, but the world in general.

The weaker believer is the one who needs “rules to live by”. The stronger believer is aware of the liberty he has, but must act in such a way as to NOT cause a weaker believer to stumble.

In other words, he does not use his liberty to somehow condemn the weaker believer, or cause the weaker believer to question his position with Christ, or feel condemned because he doesn't have the same liberty.

Paul put it this way “all things are lawful for me, but not everything is expedient” I.e.: I have to liberty to do anything I chose to do, but some things I chose to do are not good for me. In any case, I do not want to be under the control of anything I have the liberty to allow in my life.

And, I certainly do not want my liberty to cause a problem with another brother or sister in Christ. The unity of the body is in view here.

Looking at verse **2 of Chapter 14**, Paul states; “for one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. More commonly, some believers refuse to eat pork because they see it as an unclean animal. OK, that is their belief. For them to eat pork feeling this way, is a problem. It is a lack of faith on their part.

It is also a problem for the stronger believer who has the liberty to eat pork, but insists in correcting the weaker believe or somehow tries to shame him from such a silly notion.

Same thing is true of someone who has the liberty to drink a glass of wine or have a beer. If it stumbles the walk of the weaker believer, Paul says don't indulge your liberty in front of them. Other examples that are often questioned are such things as smoking or going to movies etc.

Again, the unity of the body is in view.

Paul mentions the day in which we go to church, and how it should not divide the body of Christ.

Side bar her beloved – there is much discussion about the sabbath and what day that actually is. Also, this was a question on this issue when Jesus walked the earth. I am not here to debate this. Suffice to say I believe that there should be one day of rest for the believer. One where he/she can relax from daily routine, and have a “down day” to enjoy God and His creation. Be it Saturday or Sunday – to me it is not a dividing issue.

So, too. Worship on the “Sabbath” and what that day really is. I.e.; Saturday or Sunday, matters not for he who observes it, observes it unto the Lord, he who does not, does not observe it to the Lord. **Verse 6.**

He who eats, does so to the Lord for he gives thanks, and he who eats not, also does so unto the Lord. We don't judge others – period. They, like each of us, do these things unto the Lord – period. Why? “if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord, and whether we live or die, we do so to the Lord.”

Weaker believers judge such issues just as do stronger believers. Both are wrong in His eyes.

Why? According to **verse 10** “we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ, and **verse 12** says “each of us will have to give an account of himself to God.”

A very important verse is **verse 14** which states: “I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing that is unclean of itself, but to him who considers it unclean then to him it is unclean.”

**Verse 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.*”

Again, the weaker believer is living by self-imposed or external rules to live by. For their sakes we must prefer their feelings and thoughts to ours. We do not set about to please ourselves, for the body of Christ is in view.

**One of the biggest hinderances to Christianity, is the judgmental positions of other Christians.**

Self-righteous is a stumbling block to us all. We must guard against it. Usually taking a stand on this “hill to die on” causes division in the body of Christ and we are warned against doing that.

Summed up in **verse 22** – *Do you have faith? (to eat what you want, go where you want, do what you want, wear what you want etc.) have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.*”

*“But, he who doubts, is condemned if he eats, (drink, go, do, wear) because he does not eat from faith, for whatever is not from faith is sin.”*

This is not complicated beloved; in fact, it is pretty practical if you are honest about it.

Now this is important for all of us.

**Chapter 15 verse 1** states *“we then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not please ourselves.” Let each of us please his neighbor, for his **good** leading to edification.”*

Again, Spiritual maturity is not measured by what we have “given up”. All too often, folks think just the opposite. “You call yourself a Christian and you do such and such, or watch or enter into such and such”? I used to do that, but not anymore. I am much more mature today than I was then. Oops beloved, wrong approach.

Anything that tears at the unity of the body needs to be questioned by each of us.

This is so hard for me. I am so uncomfortable when sitting under a preacher that mixes law and grace. I have to leave rather than say anything. That is probably the best approach, but truth be known I wish this preacher would “grow up” and get ahold of the truth (like I have). Truth be known, I just withdraw my fellowship and don’t go back.

I am taking a “new look” at His body.

Paul put it this way in **Philippians 1:15** “Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill, some from selfish ambitions, not sincerely, yet he concludes in **verse 18** “What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached: and in this I rejoice, yes and will rejoice.”

Seems like we have to move past those who are caught up in the faith message, or the prosperity message, or the healing message and just rejoice that Christ is being preached.

What say you?

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