

## Loving Your Brother, Not Your Personal Opinions – Romans 14:1-23

**Introduction** – Everyone has their opinions, and every thinking Christian tends to have many opinions which he believes are correct (else he wouldn't have them). Now, we are to live with one another in community and in the love of Christ (Rom 13:8, 10). When it comes to these opinions, they must be lived out in the context of the greater right – “...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). But of course, we all have an opinion on what that means. Flying high over this entire chapter, let's see if we can understand and apply what Paul means; what God means.

**Overview of Romans 14** – We are to receive one another while we are in process of our sanctification, even when this means a disagreement on our methods of sanctification. Each servant will answer to His Master on the Master's schedule (vv1-4). Whether it is how you view your days or what you choose to eat or not eat, we are to do so unto the Lord with thanksgiving (vv5-6). These decisions are not to be made “*individualistically*” but connected “*to the Lord*” (vv7-8). We must learn that we are not the Judge and that the Lord will judge – both our brother, and ourselves, including the way we judged our brother or put a stumbling block in his way (vv9-13). Paul was convinced by the Lord regarding much Christian liberty (all food being clean was one example), but was also convinced by the Lord to respect someone else's scruples with charity (vv14-15). It is possible to be right in your opinion and wrong in the way you superimpose it over “*the heart of the kingdom*” (vv16-17). There is a way to live out your opinion and still be liked by others in the kingdom (v18). Live your life emphasizing the things which edify and make for peace (and he doesn't mean your particular opinion); your brother is the work of God – the weak one, the strong one, both of them and so learn to mind your own business in a godly way, living with your opinions by faith in a God who loves broadly (vv19-23).

**Avoid “Christianity And...”** – If love is the end, then let love be the end. You may be fully convinced about your views on food and nutrition, traditional vs alternative medicine, how you birth your children, homeschool vs day school, how you do (or don't do) family devotions, and a host of other hot items before us now and yet to come. Love doesn't push the fad, and wise love knows what an option is and what the law requires (i.e. 1 Cor 6:19 teaches that it is always unlawful to have sex outside of marriage – it says nothing at all about eating refined sugar, fast food cheeseburgers, or whether you smoke a cigar). Too many movements in the history of the church have turned into “Christianity And.... = real Christianity” and that is anathema.

**A Word About Food** – Central in Paul's discussion and examples is the issue of what you can or cannot eat as a Christian. First, Paul knows that the vegetarian is the weaker brother (not the vegetarian who prefers not to eat meat, but the vegetarian who believes he is better at sanctifying his soul by denying himself meat – a la Col 2:20-23). God says, “*of every tree of the garden you may freely eat,*” and there were no restrictions, even if the food was processed. It didn't matter with regard to your standing before God. At the same time, Paul is quick to warn strong brothers of waving their liberty around on a stick (God had declared all foods clean in the New Covenant administration) when those coming into the fellowship were stumbled because of old associations (v21, also 1 Cor 10:14ff). Love trumps liberty.

**Food and Idolatry** – Sometimes food is an idol and oftentimes food is associated with an idol. In addition, Christians have had a perennial problem with food anxieties. Our current culture is no different. The devil tempted Eve with food and an idol – “*Has God indeed said...and she took of its fruit and ate...*” (Gen 3). The temptation to change your diet in order to change your spiritual condition is as old as the Garden – and there is often a thin line between seeking to change one's appearance and seeking to change one's spirituality. Our materialism-driven culture sees no connections between how we are feeling/acting and unconfessed sin, father hunger, and the lack of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Could this be why there is so much emphasis on our diet, or what we put in our mouths? (Matt 15:16-20).

**Fully Persuaded and Thankful** – “*Let each be fully convinced in his own mind,*” (v5), “*he give thanks to God,*” (v6 – twice), “*each of us shall give account of himself to God,*” (v12), “*I know and am convinced...*” (v14), “*Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves,*” (v22). If you are loving your brother and thankful to God, then it is perfectly fine to be fully persuaded about “whatever.” But any lack of charity or lack of thanksgiving forfeits your right to such opinions. You love your brother by not judging or despising him, and you render thanks to God with a deep contentment with what you are receiving or rejecting.

**Choosing in the Context of Faith** (v23) – We just skimmed and there is much to consider. But the bottom line is to render your decisions before the Lord with faith. Loving your brother means that there is often a greater right than being right. And the heart of the kingdom is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Let your conversations start and end there.