

# OUR LIFE TOGETHER

## An Accepting Fellowship

### INTRODUCTION:

- I. This morning we're continuing our study on the subject of BIBLICAL FELLOWSHIP in a series of lessons we've entitled OUR LIFE TOGETHER.
  - A. In the past, we've focused on certain ASPECTS of BIBLICAL FELLOWSHIP among God's people.
    1. For example, we learned that the NATURE of our fellowship in Christ should be patterned after the kind of close intimacy found in a LOVING, NURTURING FAMILY – where we are DEPENDENT upon our relationship with Jesus Christ, AND DEPENDENT upon our relationship with ONE ANOTHER as brothers and sisters in Christ.
    2. We also learned that we have certain FREEDOMS or LIBERTIES in Christ, but WITH those freedoms and liberties there is ALSO a responsibility to USE our freedoms or liberties PROPERLY.
    3. And in our last lesson we learned that we should have UNITY in all matters of doctrine and faith.
- II. However, in the lesson this morning, we want to probe a little further into this concept of UNITY among believers in Christ.

- A. More specifically, we want to learn how we can have fellowship when there are DIFFERENCES over what SOME consider DOCTRINE or FAITH, while OTHERS see these SAME differences as simply matters of PERSONAL OPINION – in other words, how we can TRULY have an ACCEPTING FELLOWSHIP.
1. And to do this, we're going to spend most of our time this morning in the **14<sup>th</sup> chapter of Paul's letter to the church at Rome.**
  2. However, before we go to **Romans chapter 14**, let's take a moment to understand why this study is SO IMPORTANT to having the RIGHT kind of fellowship.
- B. The old adage, "*in matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion, liberty; in all things, charity*" is certainly one that applies to the context of Romans chapter 14.
1. The apostle Paul penned **Romans chapter 14** by inspiration of the Holy Spirit to help Christians achieve UNITY among ourselves in the area of LIBERTY – that is, in areas where God has NOT LEGISLATED, but left us the freedom to choose for ourselves how we may do certain things.
  2. Unfortunately, SOME are not content to apply **Romans 14** ONLY to matters of opinion or liberty.
    - a. THEY claim that **Romans 14** shows how we can have UNITY over DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCES.



*joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" –*

ESPECIALLY when it comes to DOCTRINAL ISSUES.

- b. Anything SHORT of that ISN'T UNITY, it's COMPROMISE with ERROR.
- 5. As we pointed out in our LAST lesson, the ONLY WAY we can have TRUE BIBLICAL UNITY in areas where we differ doctrinally is to RESOLVE those differences through a DILIGENT, OPEN-HEARTED, OPEN-MINDED study of God's divinely inspired word.
- C. So, let's turn our attention to **Romans chapter 14** and see what the apostle Paul has to teach us about we can TRULY have an ACCEPTING FELLOWSHIP.

**BODY:**

- I. To begin, we need to take a moment to define a couple words used by the apostle Paul in these verses.
  - A. First, Paul says we are to "*receive one who is weak...*" (**Romans 14:1**). What does he mean by one who is WEAK?
    - 1. Paul is speaking about someone who is "*WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE*" or who LACKS UNDERSTANDING when it comes to our LIBERTY or FREEDOM OF CHOICE in areas where God has NOT LEGISLATED or COMMANDED.

- a. In areas where God HAS legislated or commanded, we DON'T have freedom of choice – we either OBEY or DISOBEY.
  - b. However, in SOME areas God gives us the LIBERTY or FREEDOM to choose for ourselves how we may want to apply a spiritual principle or carry out a commandment.
2. However, in the case of the WEAK brother in **Romans 14** lacks spiritual understanding – he lacks spiritual knowledge. Therefore, he sees certain things as DOCTRINAL ISSUES that in REALITY are merely matters of OPINION.
3. For example:
- a. The weak brother eats only vegetables for fear of eating meat that may have been offered to idols – even though the apostle Paul told the Corinthians idols are nothing, and neither is meat offered to idols.
  - b. The weak brother esteems certain days above others, or sees certain days as Holy Days – even though the apostle Paul told the New Testament church that we are NOT to be judged according to the holy days that were under the Law of Moses (including the Sabbath).
  - c. The weak brother refuses to drink wine of ANY KIND (diluted or not) – even though the apostle Paul told Timothy to drink wine for his infirmities.
4. Therefore, this brother is WEAK simply because he lacks proper understanding when it comes to matters of LIBERTY or CHOICE.

B. But Paul adds we are to *"receive one who is weak in faith..."* What does he mean by one who is weak in FAITH?

1. The word FAITH in this passage is NOT referring to faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, but rather ASSURANCE, CONVICTION, or INNER CONFIDENCE.

a. In other words, the weak brother lacks spiritual understanding about matters of LIBERTY.

b. And BECAUSE he lacks spiritual understanding about matters of liberty, he lacks ASSURANCE, CONVICTION, or INNER CONFIDENCE when it comes to matters of liberty of freedom. In other words:

(1). He doesn't feel confident when it comes to eating meat because he's afraid it may have been offered to an idol.

(2). He doesn't feel confident as a Christian unless he is still keeping certain holy days that were commonly observed under the Law of Moses.

(3). And his conscience won't allow him to drink wine (even diluted wine) under any circumstances whatsoever.

II. So, what was the problem? Why was it so important for the apostle Paul to include this chapter in his letter to the church at Rome.

A. The problem was this:

1. Those who were STRONG in faith and who UNDERSTOOD matters of liberty, were looking DOWN on those who were WEAK in faith, and who ate only vegetables, who kept all the Jewish holy days, and who didn't drink wine.
  2. And those who were WEAK in faith and who LACKED spiritual understanding about matters of liberty were casting judgment on those whose CONSCIENCE would allow them to eat meat that may have been offered to idols, or ignore the holy days under the Old Law, or drink wine.
  3. The STRONG thought their WEAK brothers and sisters in Christ were spiritually IGNORANT, and the WEAK thought their STRONG brothers and sisters in Christ were sinning.
- B. Therefore, Paul said those who HAVE UNDERSTANDING and those who LACK KNOWLEDGE have responsibilities to each other.
1. To those who HAVE UNDERSTANDING, the apostle Paul says, "Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things."  
**(Romans 14:1).**
    - a. Other translations say:
      - (1). "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters." (NIV)
      - (2). "Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions." (NASB)

(3). *"Accept Christians who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong." (NLT)*

2. In fact, Paul admonished BOTH sides by saying:

a. **Romans 14:3-6** – *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. 5 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.*

3. And so, the apostle Paul sums up the problem with this admonition:

a. **Romans 14:10-13** – *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.*

C. Paul's instructions were simple.

1. FIRST, Paul says ONE SIDE needs to STOP JUDGING their brother or sister in matters of personal LIBERTY, while the OTHER SIDE needs to STOP JUDGING in matters of PRIVATE CONVICTION.
  - a. We need to remember that JESUS CHRIST is the ONE and ONLY JUDGE, and SOMEDAY we will BOTH stand before the Lord and be judged!
2. And SECOND, we need to do everything we can to avoid putting a "STUMBLING-BLOCK" before our WEAK brother or sister.
  - a. But what IS this "stumbling-block"?
  - b. A "stumbling-block" is ANYTHING that causes the WEAK brother or sister to be FURTHER WEAKENED by causing them to VIOLATE their conscience.
  - c. They violate their conscience when they have been INTIMIDATED into PARTICIPATING in something they feel is wrong. For example:
    - (1). The meat-eater puts a "stumbling-block" before the vegetarian by KNOWING he's a vegetarian and inviting him over for a BAR-B-QUE.
    - (2). The meat-eater puts a "stumbling-block" before the vegetarian by inviting him over for a bar-b-que on SATURDAY – the Sabbath.

(3). The meat-eater puts a "*stumbling-block*" before the vegetarian by inviting him over for a bar-b-que on Saturday – the Sabbath – and serves WINE with the meal.

D. The issue here is NOT over what is BIBLICALLY right or wrong, but over what SOME FEEL is biblically right or wrong.

1. The WEAK brother considers these issues to be matters of DOCTRINE. Whereas, the STRONG brother sees these issues as merely matters of PERSONAL OPINION.

2. But REGARDLESS of how the STRONG brother saw these issues, the WEAK brother saw these things as UNCLEAN and SINFUL – and so, to HIM, they WERE UNCLEAN and SINFUL.

a. This is why Paul said: **Romans 14:14** – *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.*

3. Therefore, Paul says the STRONG should NOT insist on exercising their liberty and completely DISREGARD the sincere feelings and beliefs of the WEAK.

a. When we DISREGARD the feelings and beliefs of the weak, we are "*no longer walking in love.*" (**Romans 14:15**)

E. And so, the apostle Paul sums up the way we should act toward one another when we differ in areas such as this.

1. **Romans 14:19-21** – *Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. 21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.*

F. And then, the apostle Paul adds one more admonition.

1. No doubt, SOME were probably wondering if they could NEVER exercise their liberty under ANY circumstances without offending the conscience of the WEAK.
2. And so, Paul offers one solution.
  - a. **Romans 14:22-23** – *Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.*
  - b. When Paul asks "*Do you have faith?*" he's simply asking if you have CONFIDENCE and ASSURANCE that a particular LIBERTY of yours is OKAY in the eyes of God?
  - c. If you feel it IS okay in the sight of God, then let it be BETWEEN YOU AND THE LORD!
  - d. Or, to put it another way, KEEP IT TO YOURSELF!

e. Don't make a PUBLIC DISPLAY of your liberty, and don't share your beliefs and opinions with others, ESPECIALLY when you know they think you're sinning.

f. KEEP IT TO YOURSELF!

3. And the reason is simply this: If the WEAK BROTHER isn't SURE something is a matter of liberty or freedom, or if he isn't SURE it's okay in the eyes of God, AND he does it ANYWAY, he SINS because he VIOLATED HIS CONSCIENCE.

a. ANYONE who violates their conscience SINS – regardless of whether the thing they did was right or wrong. It becomes a SIN when they do it in violation of THEIR conscience.

b. And WE SIN when we intimidate OTHERS into doing something that VIOLATES their conscience.

III. So, how do we make application of all this to situations we may encounter today?

How do we handle issues WE feel are matters of LIBERTY and FREEDOM, but where OTHERS see the issue as DOCTRINE or a clearly stated BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE? Let me suggest three things:

A. First, we need to do all we can to openly and honestly study the issue together in an effort to resolve our differences.

1. The brother who is WEAK IN FAITH – or who is WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE or who lacks SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING – needs to GAIN knowledge, and needs to ATTAIN spiritual understanding.
  - a. This means we need to patiently work with the weak brother to help him come to a proper understanding of matters of LIBERTY and FREEDOM.
  - b. The only way we're going to do that is to STUDY the issue together with an OPEN HEART and an OPEN MIND.
  
2. A good example of how to handle someone who is WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE or lacks SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING is the case of Apollos in Acts chapter 18.
  - a. **Acts 18:24-26** – *Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. 25 This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26 So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.*
  - b. The issue HERE wasn't over matters of OPINION verses matters of faith or doctrine. It was a matter of doctrine. Apollos simply didn't have a COMPLETE understanding of baptism.

- c. But the PRINCIPLE still applies. Aquila and his wife Priscilla *"took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately."*
3. The apostle Paul does the same thing in his first letter to the church at Corinth.
  - a. Paul spends two chapters (**8 and 10**) trying to explain that eating meat that may have been offered to idols is not INHERENTLY SINFUL.
4. Let me suggest ANOTHER reason why we need to sit down and STUDY together with OPEN HEARTS and OPEN MINDS to resolve our differences.
  - a. What if the brother or sister WE thought was WEAK was actually RIGHT?
  - b. What if it really IS a matter where God commanded, or where there IS a BINDING APOSTOLIC EXAMPLE, or what if it really IS CLEARLY AND CONCISELY INFERRED in the Scriptures?
  - c. Wouldn't WE want to know that something WE considered to be a matter of liberty WAS NOT a matter of liberty at all, and that WE were violating Scripture?
  - d. That's why we BOTH need to sit down with OPEN HEARTS and OPEN MINDS and HONESTLY search the Scriptures TOGETHER.
  - e. Even though we might be FULLY CONVINCED in our OWN mind that something is a matter of liberty, we COULD be WRONG.

- B. Second, we need to do all we can to AVOID OFFENDING THE CONSCIENCE of a weak brother.
1. Paul understood that despite all his efforts to explain that eating meat offered to idols is not INHERENTLY SINFUL, there would be SOME brethren who would NEVER be able to eat meat with a clear conscience.
  2. Therefore, Paul told those who are STRONG:
    - a. **1 Corinthians 8:9-10** – ... *beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. 10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols?*
  3. Then Paul concluded:
    - a. **1 Corinthians 8:13** – *Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.*
  4. The apostle Paul felt it was better to GIVE UP HIS LIBERTY rather than cause a brother or sister to STUMBLE.
  5. But does this mean we can NEVER exercise a LIBERTY or FREEDOM if someone else sees the matter as sinful?
- C. Finally, if we are CONFIDENT we have the LIBERTY or FREEDOM to engage in a particular practice, and we know OTHERS see the practice as sinful, then we must use UTMOST DISCRETION when we engage in the practice.
1. This is why Paul said:

- a. **Romans 14:22** – *Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.*
  - b. In other words, are you FULLY and COMPLETELY CONFIDENT that you have the LIBERTY to engage in a particular practice? Paul says then let it be between you and God.
2. This simply means KEEP IT TO YOURSELF!
- a. For example, if you are FULLY CONVINCED that it's okay to eat meat that has been offered to idols, DON'T be so BOLD and OPEN in your convictions that you actually eat it IN THE IDOL'S TEMPLE.
  - b. GO to the meat market, BUY your meat, then TAKE IT HOME and enjoy it in the privacy of your OWN HOME.
  - c. And may I add – KEEP QUITE ABOUT IT!
  - d. Let it be between YOU and GOD ALONE!!

## CONCLUSION:

- I. I think you can NOW see that **Romans chapter 14** is NOT speaking about us simply setting aside and ignoring differences that are CLEARLY DOCTRINAL.
  - A. In previous lessons we've stressed that we MUST be COMPLETELY UNITED when it comes to DOCTRINAL ISSUES.
    1. If the matter concerns something SPECIFICALLY COMMANDED by God, or something for which we find a BINDING APOSTOLIC EXAMPLE, or

something that is CLEARLY and CONCISELY INFERRED from the Scriptures, then we MUST do what the Scriptures say.

2. God does NOT grant us the liberty or freedom to chose when it comes to matters of FAITH revealed in His divinely inspired Word.
  - a. We either OBEY or DISOBEY.
3. There is no such thing as UNITY IN DIVERSITY when it comes to those things revealed by God in His Word.
  - a. We are not allowed to simply AGREE TO DISAGREE.
  - b. We either WALK BY THE SAME RULE, or we make our OWN rules and face the consequences on the day of Judgment.

B. However, when God has NOT legislated – when God has NOT specified how to carry out a commandment, or when He has NOT provided an apostolic example, or when He has NOT clearly inferred – then God grants us the LIBERTY and FREEDOM to choose for ourselves how we will CARRY OUT a commandment, or how we will APPLY a divinely inspired principle.

1. However, we must always remember Paul’s admonition concerning the USE of liberties:
  - a. **1 Corinthians 8:9-10** – *But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.*
  - b. **Galatians 5:13-14** – *For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love*

serve one another. 14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

C. The bottom line is that we must do WHATEVER we need to do to maintain UNITY in the body of Christ.

1. The apostle Paul put it this way:

a. **Ephesians 4:2-3** – ... with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

2. This means we must learn to TOLERATE differences of opinions when it comes to matters of LIBERTY.

a. We need to ACCEPT one another as brothers and sisters in Christ and NEVER try to push OUR OWN AGENDA.

b. Rather, we must do as Paul told the Philippian church: to not only look out for our OWN interests, but also for the interests of OTHERS.

**(Philippians 2:1-4)**

c. When it comes to matters of OPINION, we must TOLERATE one another, PROTECT one another, and ACCEPT one another.

II. Throughout this series of lessons we've been stressing the need for us to have TRUE, GENUINE, BIBLICAL FELLOWSHIP.

- A. And the kind of fellowship we've been seeing throughout this series is the kind of LOVING, NURTURING sense of ONENESS you would expect to find in a WARM, CARING, ACCEPTING FAMILY.
  - 1. We should NEVER lose sight of the fact that we are INDEED family.
  - 2. We're here to LOVE one another, EDIFY one another, CARE FOR one another, and STRENGTHEN one another.
  - 3. Most importantly, we NEED one another.
  
- B. This doesn't mean that we don't have close, intimate friendships OUTSIDE of the family of God, it just means that the relationship we have HERE should be the CLOSEST OF ALL.
  - 1. We're not just FRIENDS who worship together, we're FAMILY – we're brothers and sisters in CHRIST.
  
- C. And throughout this series of lessons on TRUE BIBLICAL FELLOWSHIP, we've also stressed ONE OTHER thing.
  - 1. We've stressed how much we want to see the LORD'S FAMILY HERE grow.
    - a. That's why we've said over and over that if you are NOT a member of the LORD'S FAMILY, we would love nothing more than for you to BECOME one.
    - b. If you TRULY believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, then COME to HIM in faith, repenting of your sins, and be baptized INTO CHRIST for the remission of your sins.

- c. The LORD will then ADD YOU to HIS FAMILY, the church, and you can join US to work and worship as HIS FAMILY in THIS place.
2. And if you ARE a member of the Lord's family, but have lost touch with your brothers or sisters in Christ and want to come back home, there's a simple solution for THAT as well.
  - a. All the Lord asks you to do is come to Him, confessing your sins, and He will restore you COMPLETELY.
3. Or, perhaps you're carrying some HEAVY BURDEN in your life, and you need the help of your brothers and sisters in Christ to HELP you.
  - a. All YOU need to do is simply let that be KNOWN so that we can all PRAY together for you, and do what we can to PERSONALLY help you with that burden.

VERSES 1-2 ARE OFTEN USED TO FORBID ALL MANNER OF JUDGMENT

A. FOR EXAMPLE, ANY ADVERSE OR UNFAVORABLE CRITICISM...

1. Such as pointing out a fault in someone else
  2. Even if it be truly "constructive" criticism
- B. FOR EXAMPLE, THE EXERCISE OF CHURCH "DISCIPLINE"...
1. Exercising discipline of any sort does require "judging" others as to their moral or spiritual condition
  2. Since such "judgment" is involved, some feel verses 1-2 rule out any sort of church discipline
- C. OR EVEN EXPOSING THOSE WHO TEACH ERROR...
1. Admittedly, it requires making a judgment in order to consider whether someone is teaching error
  2. Therefore, some people, in light of verses 1-2, believe that we cannot speak out against those who teach error
- II. JESUS CANNOT BE RULING OUT "ALL" FORMS OF JUDGING
- A. THE "IMMEDIATE CONTEXT" OF THIS PASSAGE REVEALS THAT IN SOME CASES "PROPER JUDGMENT" MUST BE MADE...
1. Mt 7:6 implies that some judgment is to be made as to who are "dogs" and who are "hogs"
    - a. Otherwise, how can we know when not to give that which is holy to "dogs"?
    - b. Or how can we know when not to cast our pearls before "swine"?
  2. Mt 7:15-20 implies that we must make judgments in determining who is a false teacher ("by their fruits you will know them")

B. THE "REMOTE CONTEXT" OF THE SCRIPTURES SPEAK OF TIMES WHEN JUDGMENT MUST BE MADE

1. On another occasion, Jesus taught people to "judge with righteous judgment" - Jn 7:24
2. Christians have a responsibility to "judge those who are inside" the local congregation - 1 Co 5:9-13
3. We are taught by the apostle of love (John) to "test the spirits" (which requires making judgments) - 1 Jn 4:1

[There is not a contradiction here, for as we continue on in our text, we notice that...]

III. JESUS EXPLAINS WHAT "KIND" OF JUDGING HE IS CONDEMNING

A. JUDGING WHEN ONE IS BLIND TO HIS OR HER OWN FAULTS (3-5)

1. Jesus is saying "that is it wrong for anyone to concentrate his attention on the speck in his brother's eye, and while thus occupied, to ignore the beam in his own eye" (HENDRIKSEN)
2. Paul taught the necessity of proper "introspection" when trying to help others - Ga 6:1

B. JUDGING WITHOUT MERCY AND LOVE...

1. "The Lord is here condemning the spirit of censoriousness, judging harshly, self-righteously, without mercy, without love as also the parallel passage (Lk 6:36-37) clearly indicates." (HENDRIKSEN)

2. James warns against making judgments without mercy - Ja 2:13
  - a. If we make judgments without showing mercy, then no mercy will be shown when we are judged!
  - b. Just as Jesus said in verse 2...
    - 1) "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged"
    - 2) "With the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you"

#### IV. JESUS IMPLIES THERE ARE TIMES WHEN WE "MUST" MAKE JUDGMENTS!

##### A. IT IS "AFTER" WE HAVE CORRECTED OUR OWN FAULTS (5)

1. First, we must remove the "beam" from our own eye
2. But when we have done so, we are able to see, discern (judge), and be of help to others who are overcome in their faults
3. Indeed, the "law of Christ" requires us to! - cf. Ga 6:1-2

##### B. WE MUST JUDGE BETWEEN THOSE "WORTHY" AND THOSE WHO ARE "HOGS AND DOGS" (6)

1. With those who are receptive, we are to be long-suffering in trying to help them come out of their error - cf. 2 Ti 2:24-26
2. But for those who are not, we are not to waste what is good and holy on them!
  - a. Cf. the instructions of Jesus to His disciples - Mt 10:12-15
  - b. Cf. the example of Paul and Barnabas at Antioch of Pisidia - Ac 13:42-46
3. Determining who is which requires "judgment" upon our part!

## CONCLUSION

1. The kind of judging forbidden by Jesus is that which LENSKI calls "self-righteous, hypocritical judging which is false and calls down God's judgment on itself."
2. This is the kind of judging that was also condemned by James when he wrote: "Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?" - Ja 4:11-12
3. May God help us to refrain from such judging, and be more apt to remove the "beams" from our own eyes; for only then we will be useful in helping others with their problems...

## II. GOD'S ATTITUDE TOWARD "ACCEPTANCE"

### A. GOD IS NOT ONE TO SHOW PARTIALITY...

1. He revealed Himself to Israel as One who shows no partiality - Deu 10:17
2. Paul wrote of God's impartial judgment to come - Ro 2:9-11
3. Peter also wrote of God's impartiality - 1 Pe 1:17

### B. GOD IS WILLING TO ACCEPT ALL...

1. This was the purpose of the vision shown to Peter, and the Spirit falling upon the Gentile listeners - cf. Ac 10:34-35

2. As Peter would relate later at the Jerusalem conference, God makes no distinction -  
Ac 15:7-9

3. And in his last epistle, Peter wrote that the Lord desires all to come to repentance -  
2 Pe 3:9

C. GOD WANTS US TO BE ONE, AND ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER...

1. Even as Christ has received us, so we are to receive one another - Ro 15:7

2. Putting on Christ in baptism, our differences lose their significance as we  
contemplate our oneness made possible in Him - cf. Ga 3:27-28

[When we understand that God is no respecter of persons, and that we are to receive  
one another just as He has received us, we are in a better position to have "An  
Accepting Fellowship".

Here are few more thoughts along the lines of...]

III. APPLYING THE CONCEPT OF "ACCEPTANCE"

A. DO NOT PRACTICE "PARTIALITY"...

1. By showing favoritism towards some, and prejudice towards others - Ja 2:1

2. As an example, consider Ja 2:2-9

a. Where we are told to accept the poor as well as the rich

b. This principle can be applied in many other areas where there are differences

3. We must also beware of "reverse partiality" (e.g., where the poor despise the rich, out of envy)
- B. PUT ON THE "NEW MAN" THROUGH SPIRITUAL RENEWAL...
1. Whatever our differences, we are all to become like Christ - Co 3:9-10
  2. As we do so, our differences lose significance - Co 3:11
  3. For as we develop Christ-like character, the potential for partiality lessens - Co 3:12-15
    - a. We will have a heart of compassion, not ice
    - b. We will be kind, not cruel
    - c. We will be humble, not proud
    - d. We will be gentle, not harsh
    - e. We will be patient, not intolerant
    - f. We will be forgiving, not judgmental
    - g. We will be loving, not bigoted
- C. THOUGH DIFFERENCES LOSE THEIR SIGNIFICANCE, THIS DOES NOT MEAN DIFFERENCES CEASE TO EXIST...
1. A Jew is still a Jew, and a Gentile is still a Gentile
  2. The poor are still poor, and the rich are still rich
  3. Divine guidelines governing some differences must still be respected
    - a. The servant must still honor his responsibilities as a slave - cf. Co 3:22-25

- b. The differences in responsibilities between male and female must still honored - cf. Co 3:18; 1 Ti 2:11-12; 1 Co 14:34-38 -- Just as all members are to submit to the "elders" - 1 Ti 3:1-7; He 13:17

## CONCLUSION

1. As we grow in Christ, putting on the "new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him", we are more likely to fulfill the admonition of Paul: "Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God." - Ro 15:7
2. Only as we accept one another without partiality can we hope to attain to the level of fellowship the Lord intended for His people to enjoy in the family of God
3. Are you contributing to "An Accepting Fellowship"? Are you willing to accept others, even as God has accepted you?

Romans chapter 14 deals with disagreements over *matters of opinions* -- areas where the Lord has *not* legislated, but left the matter for us to exercise our own judgment. This passage is not dealing with disagreements over interpretation of Scripture, or over other matters where God has legislated. Disagreements in those areas need to be settled in keeping with God's Word. And those who refuse to follow the commandments of the Lord clearly have no fellowship with those who do keep God's Word. However, in *matters of personal opinion* (where God has *not*

legislated), especially when a “*weak brother*” is involved, we are to receive him, and we are not to despise him or judge him (Romans 14:1-4). In these matters, everyone needs to “*be fully convinced in his own mind*” (v. 5). If someone is convinced it’s wrong for them to engage in a particular practice (even though it may be in an area where God has *not* legislated one way or the other), it is wrong! On the other hand, if someone is just as convinced it’s permissible for them to engage in a practice (in an area where God has *not* legislated one way or the other), then it’s okay. The overriding principles in these matters are to make certain we do nothing to cause our weak brother to stumble, and that we “*pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.*”

Paul adds one final thought in Romans 14 that is essential in avoiding offending the conscience of another. He says, “*Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves*” (Romans 14:22). The word “*faith*” in this verse stands for “*confidence that a thing is right and wholesome.*” If we have confidence that a particular practice is acceptable to God, and yet we know others may disagree (especially the weak brother), then we are to keep the matter between ourselves and the Lord. We have no right whatsoever to openly push our opinions on others, or to make a public display of our convictions regarding a controversial matter, especially if we know there are those weak in the faith who may be further weakened by knowledge of our opinions. We need to keep the matter to ourselves. But Paul adds this as well, “*But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith: for whatever is*

*not from faith is sin*” (Romans 14:23). Once again, Paul is using the word “*faith*” to describe confidence that a thing is right. If we are not “*fully convinced in our own mind*” (Romans 14:5) that we have every right to engage in a particular practice, then we cannot do it. To violate our conscience in this way is to sin, for “*whatever is not from faith (confidence that a thing is right) is sin.*”