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THE LOOKOUT

JANUARY 2022

Unit: ROMANS (Part 1)

Theme: RIGHTEOUS

Overview: Romans has been responsible for more church revivals than any other New Testament book. It is proper to spend three months studying it under three separate themes. The first theme has to do with being righteous. Students will learn that God is righteous, and therefore judgment should be left in his hands. Students will learn that Abraham was a good example of being righteous, as was the remnant of Israel. Finally, students will learn what righteous living looks like in daily life.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF JANUARY 30, 2022

LESSON AIM: **Treat others with kindness and respect even when they think differently on some things than you do.**

UNIT: Romans (Part 1)

THEME: Righteous

LESSON TEXT: Romans 14:1-5, 13-23

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Romans 14:6-12; 15:1-7; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13;
Philippians 2:1-11

RIGHTEOUS RELATIONSHIPS

BY MARK SCOTT

Faith that does not produce faithfulness is not worth a fig. The new right standing with God that has been created by the gospel has a practical side. Doctrine always shows up in duty. Beginning in Romans 12:1, Paul gave the believers several practical teachings—examples include presenting their bodies as living sacrifices, using their spiritual gifts, loving others purely, obeying authorities, living with moral excellence, and treating other believers with kindness when those believers disagree with one another.

Eating is a big deal in the Bible—and it's spiritual. It's as old as the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1–2). It is the centerpiece of Middle Eastern hospitality (Genesis 12–50). It began the Passover celebration (Exodus 12). It may be all that is important in life “under the sun” (Ecclesiastes). It was the major emphasis at the Last Supper and last breakfast (Luke 22; John 21). It will be part of the marriage feast of the Lamb (Revelation 19). But sometimes mealtimes can get awkward (1 Corinthians 8–10; Romans 14). In righteous relationships people . . .

Accept Others

Romans 14:1-5

Eugene Peterson said, “Where two or three are gathered together, there problems develop.” When believers disagree about *disputable matters* (things that would cause dialogue), they are to avoid *quarreling* (making critical remarks) about one another. Instead, they are to *accept* others. It means to welcome them despite feeling differently about various issues.

Eating food was the issue that created this lack of goodwill among Christians; but, of course, food really was just a symptom of the problem. There seem to be some parallels between this situation and the one in Corinth (1 Corinthians 8–10). Had the food been prayed over to the demons and idols? Some thought that if the meat at the table had been prayed over to the idols in the meat market, then the only appropriate response on the part of a Christian was to become a vegetarian. Others felt that idols were nothing, so it did not matter. The meat eaters would *treat with contempt* (scorn) the vegetarians, and the vegetarians would *judge* (condemn) the meat eaters.

Another issue concerned the honoring of special days (cf. Colossians 2:16). This is teased out more in Romans 14:7-8, 10, and 12. Days and feasts were inextricably linked in the Old Testament. But since God accepted

both weak and strong, the church must do so, as well. God can make both *stand*.

De-Stress Others

Romans 14:13-18

It is not enough to accept others. The next step toward righteous relationships is determining not to pass judgments on others or to cause people to stumble in their faith. This is where a Christian conscience comes into the discussion. Believers are not acting in love when they do not care about someone else's conscience (1 Corinthians 8:11-12).

Paul stated his own opinion about the issue in this passage. Since Jesus declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19), Paul (and Peter in Acts 10) said that *nothing is unclean in itself* (i.e., the Levitical dietary code is fulfilled—its job has been accomplished). But that does not deal completely with the issue. A person must go to bed with his or her own conscience. Some believers can be *distressed* (grieved) by the seeming liberties of others. It is another issue if the weak person makes this a term of the gospel (see the Epistle to the Galatians). But if it is a matter of disrespecting another's conscience, then that believer is no longer acting in love. After all, the kingdom is larger than food. It concerns *righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*.

Edify Others

Romans 14:19-23

It is not enough to accept others and de-stress others. The next step toward righteous relationships is making *every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification*. The *work of God* that is the fruit of righteousness is not about food—though food can enhance relationships. Paul circled back to his own opinion again of all food being clean. But he quickly added that causing others to stumble will not edify anyone. Verse 21 puts a high priority on not doing *anything* that would cause someone to stumble in their faith. Eating meat or drinking wine or doing anything else could actually be sin. The goal is to build up believers—not make them fall.

Some things are better kept quiet—just between the believer and God. Paul even put a beatitude on the person who learns this (v. 22b). Eating or abstaining from eating must come from a posture of faith. In fact, faith actually interfaces with our conscience in such a way as to be a moral umpire on our relationships. ■

DISAGREEING WITHOUT BEING DISAGREEABLE

BY DAVID FAUST

The Bible says, “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry” (Ephesians 4:26), but anger rules the airwaves 24 hours a day. Someone is constantly upset on Fox News and CNN—just for different reasons. Talk shows boost their ratings by provoking controversy, and social media thrives on it. Yet, God’s Word cautions, “Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels” (2 Timothy 2:23).

How can we honor the Lord when conflicts arise? Is it possible to hold firm convictions without destroying relationships? A time-honored slogan says, “In essentials, unity; in opinions, liberty; in all things, love.” Several principles found in Romans 14 can help us put this slogan into practice.

Remember who is the boss. The apostle Paul asks, “Who are you to judge someone else’s servant?” (Romans 14:4). I can’t barge into a GM plant and tell the workers how to make cars, force a restaurant’s chef to change the menu, or march onto the football field and tell the quarterback and wide receiver what plays to run. They don’t report to me. “Each of us will give an account of ourselves to God” (v. 12). The Lord is in charge.

Build others up, don’t trip them up. “Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister” (v. 13). Is glorifying God and loving others more important to us than our own rights and preferences?

Know when to keep your opinions to yourself. It’s OK to stand up for your convictions. “Do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil” (v. 16). But that doesn’t mean you should spew your private views all over the internet. We don’t have to join every argument and take sides in every controversy. Sometimes it’s best to keep our mouths shut (and our fingers off the computer keyboard) while we ponder

and pray about an issue. “So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God” (v. 22). Alexander Campbell wrote, “But men cannot give up their opinions, and, therefore, they never can unite, says one. We do not ask them to give up their opinions—we ask them only not to impose them upon others. Let them hold their opinions; but let them hold them as private property. The faith is public property; opinions are, and always have been, private property.”

Keep the main thing the main thing. First-century Christians disagreed about eating certain foods and observing special days, but secondary issues like these didn’t need to divide the body of Christ. “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (v. 17).

In Christ we’re free to disagree about matters of opinion, but we’re not free to be uncharitable or to divide the church over minor matters. “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (v. 19).

Father God, show us how to speak the truth in love. Grant us courage to stand up for our convictions and wisdom to distinguish biblical essentials from our personal preferences. Teach us to prioritize what matters most. Fill us with the fruit of the Spirit so we can resist the hostility and quarrelsomeness so prevalent in our culture. Help us to conduct ourselves with godliness and respect even when we disagree so we can honor the Prince of Peace in whose name we pray. Amen.

Personal Challenge: Do a media fast. For one week, avoid the news on TV and radio, and don’t read it on your laptop or cell phone. Stay off social media for a week. Ask the Lord to clear your mind and adjust your attitude so you can express your opinions in a way that honors his name. ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. How did you experience God's patience this past week?
2. Whom did you tell about God's grace last week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Romans 14:1-5, 13-23** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to restate the passage in their own words in a minute or less.

3. What verse stood out to you? Why?
4. Let's dig deeper into the passage:
 - What surface-level issues were people in the church having with one another?
 - What deeper issues may have been behind those problems?
 - In general, how should we treat people—especially other Christ followers—who see debatable issues differently than we see them?
 - Go through the passage and inventory the instructions given to the church for how we should respond (what we should and shouldn't do) when we disagree with others. Name and then discuss each one, focusing on how these mandates would have affected the original recipients.
 - One of the guiding precepts of Christian churches is, "In essentials, unity; in opinions, liberty; in all things, love." How can that principle help us when disputable matters come up?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. What do you learn about living as a part of the body of Christ and God's kingdom?
8. How can we as a group live out the main principles from this passage—without quarreling over disputable matters! (v. 1)?
 - Are there any specific issues discussed in this passage that we as a group should address? If so, which ones, and how should we address them?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. In what area of your life do you need more of God's peace or joy this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Romans 3:9-31** as we continue studying Romans in a new unit that focuses on being "justified." You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. **L**