

The Christian Life



SABBATH—DECEMBER 23

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Romans 14–16.

MEMORY VERSE: “Why do you try to say your Christian brother is right or wrong? Why do you hate your Christian brother? We will all stand before God to be judged by Him” (Romans 14:10, NLV).



The important rule of *sola Scriptura* means that the Bible alone has the power to tell us what we should believe.

WE ARE NOW in the last part of our study about Romans. The book of Romans helped start the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation was a time in the 1500s when people began to “wake up” to Bible truths. More than any other book, Romans shows us why we are Protestants and why *we must stay that way*. As Protestants and Seventh-day Adventists, we believe in the rule of *sola Scriptura*. *Sola Scriptura* means the Bible alone has the power to tell us what to believe. The Bible taught us the important truth that we are saved by faith. This truth caused Luther to break the power of Rome. This truth is found in Paul’s letter to the Romans.

What is the best way to say what Paul’s letter means? Perhaps, the jailer in Acts 16:30 says it best: “‘What must I do to be saved?’” (NLV). The book of Romans answers that question. But the answer the Bible gives was not the same one that the church gave to people in Luther’s time. And so, the Reformation began. Here we are today because of the things that happened back then.

How did Paul end this letter? Paul is Luther’s spiritual father and our father too. We are Paul’s spiritual children. So, what truths did Paul leave for us in his letter?

WEAK IN FAITH (Romans 14:1–3)

Romans 14:1–3 deals with the church’s ruling about eating meats that had been offered to statues. The Jerusalem Group made big decisions for the church at the time. The Group said that non-Jewish believers should not eat foods offered to statues (Acts 15). But there was always the chance that meats sold in public markets came from animals offered to a god (read 1 Corinthians 10:25). Some Christians did not care about that possibility at all. But other Christians cared. So, what would happen if there were the smallest chance that meat had been offered to gods? Then these Christians could choose to eat vegetables instead.

Their reasons for not eating meat had nothing to do with being healthy. Paul does not hint in these verses that God put an end to the food laws between clean and unclean meats. That is not the topic here at all. So, we cannot take Romans 14:2 to mean that any animal can be eaten. Other New Testament verses support this idea that unclean meats are still unclean and must not be eaten.

So, what does Paul mean in these verses by saying to “receive [accept]” those whose faith is weak? He means to accept those persons fully as church members. Do not argue with them. They should be allowed to have their own ideas.

What important rule does Romans 14:1–3 teach us?

It is important to understand that in Romans 14:3 Paul is not pointing out the faults of people “whose faith is weak” (Romans 14:1, NIV). Notice that Paul does not give these people advice about how to become strong either. Why? Because “God has accepted them” (Romans 14:3, NIV).

How does Romans 14:4 explain Romans 14:1–3?

We need to remember the rules we studied today. We should not judge what is in someone’s heart. (Not that we could do that anyway.) But there are times when we need to judge if a person’s actions are wrong or right, yes? Or must we say and do nothing when something bad happens? Isaiah 56:10 says that “the leaders who are to guard the people” are the same as dogs who “[do not] know how to bark” (ICB). How do we know when to “bark”—or say something—and when to stay silent? How do we avoid going too far in either one of these two things?



The church ruled that non-Jewish believers should not eat foods offered to statues of gods.

STANDING IN GOD'S COURTROOM (Romans 14:10)

Read Romans 14:10. As this verse shows us, why do we need to be careful about how we view others?

We often view others unkindly. We almost always scold them for doing the same things we do ourselves. But the wrong thing we do does not seem so bad to us as when others do the same thing. We might believe our own lies about ourselves. But we do not fool God. Jesus warns us: “ ‘When you say what is wrong in others, your words will be used to say what is wrong in you. Why do you look at the small piece of wood in your brother’s eye, and do not see the big piece of wood in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, “Let me take that small piece of wood out of your eye,” when there is a big piece of wood in your own eye?’ ” (Matthew 7:2–4, NLV).



“ ‘How can you say to your brother, “Let me take that small piece of wood out of your eye,” when there is a big piece of wood in your own eye?’ ”

Paul points to Isaiah 45:23 in Romans 14:11. What does this Old Testament verse mean?

The verse from Isaiah agrees with the idea that *everyone* must appear before God our Judge. The words “every knee” and “every tongue” (NLV) hint at the teaching that every person must answer to God for his or her own life and actions (Romans 14:12). No one can answer for another person.

Think about all we have read. What does Paul mean in Romans 14:14?

Paul is talking again about foods offered to statues. Again, the problem here is not about foods that are wrong to eat. Paul is saying that there is nothing wrong in eating foods that were offered to the statues of gods. After all, what are these statues anyway? They are nothing (read 1 Corinthians 8:4). So, who cares if the food was once offered to a stone carving of a frog or a bull made of wood?

At the same time, a person should not be forced to go against his or her beliefs. This fact is something that the “strong” believers did not seem to understand. They hated the carefulness of the “weak” believers. So, the strong believers did things that made the weaker believers “trip and fall” in their walks with God.

WE MUST NOT CAUSE PEOPLE TO SIN
(Romans 14:15–23)

Read Romans 14:15–23 (read also 1 Corinthians 8:12, 13). What is the most important idea found in these verses in Romans? What important rule can we take from them that we can use in all parts of our lives?

In Romans 14:17–20, Paul gives us the correct way of looking at the different parts of the Christian life. Yes, diet is important. But Christians should not quarrel about another person's choice to eat vegetables instead of meats that had been offered to statues. Instead, Christians should think about "being right with God" and the "peace and joy given by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17, NLV). How might we use this idea to help answer questions about diet in our church today? The health message and our teachings about diet are gifts. But not everyone agrees exactly about the best way to follow that message. So, we need to respect everyone's differences.

Paul adds something very interesting in the middle of all this talk about how we need to let people follow their own ideas in somethings. He says, "Your beliefs about these things should be kept [held in] secret between you and God" (Romans 14:22, ICB). What exactly is Paul warning us against here? How does this verse help us not to go too far in trying to change other people?

Have you heard someone say, "It is no one's business what I eat or what I wear or what kind of fun I enjoy"? Is that true? Nobody lives separate from others. What we do and say and even what we eat has power to change others for good or for bad. It is not hard to see how. Think about someone who looks up to you. What if that person sees you doing something wrong? Your example could cause him or her to do that same thing. We fool ourselves if we think that what we do or say is not that important. To say that you did not force that person to do anything is no excuse. As Christians, we have duties to each other. What if our example leads someone away from God? Then we are to blame.

Would you feel comfortable with having other people follow your example in all parts of their lives? What does your answer say about how you are living yours?



What we do and say and even what we eat has power to change other people for good or for bad.

HONORING SPECIAL DAYS (Romans 14:4–10)

So far, Paul talks about how we must not point out faults in other people whose views are different from our views. Paul also warns against being a bad example. Next, in Romans 14:4–10, Paul talks about special days that some people want to honor and other people do not.

Read Romans 14:4–10. How should we understand what Paul says in these verses? Does he say anything about the fourth commandment? Why not?

Which days is Paul talking about? Was there a quarrel in the church about which days to honor? It seems so. We get a hint of what the quarrel was about in Galatians 4:9, 10. Here, Paul scolds the Galatian Christians for continuing to “follow teachings about special days, months, seasons, and years” (ICB). Some Jewish Christians insisted that these days should be honored. These Jewish Christians were false teachers. They told the non-Jewish Christians in Galatia that they needed to be circumcised. To be circumcised means that the extra skin at the end of the male sex organ is cut off. These false teachers also wanted the Galatians to follow other rules from the law of Moses. Paul feared that these false teachings and the quarrels about the feast days could harm the church at Rome. Or maybe the real problem in Rome over the feast days was that Jewish Christians had a hard time believing they no longer needed to honor these days. So, maybe that is why Paul says: *Do as you please about the feast days. The important thing to remember is not to point out faults in people whose ideas about the days are different from yours.* It seems that some Christians wanted to make sure they were doing everything right. So, they decided to honor one or more of the feast days. Paul said to let these Christians honor these feast days if they felt they must.

Also, there is no reason to believe that Romans 14:5 is talking about the seventh-day Sabbath. All quarter we have studied how Paul put a lot of importance on obeying the law. So, these verses in Romans 14 cannot be used to say that the seventh-day Sabbath no longer needs to be obeyed. Peter warned against people who would twist Paul’s writings to mean things Paul never meant (2 Peter 3:16).

How can you experience more fully what the Lord meant for the Sabbath to be?



Peter warned us about people who would twist Paul’s writings to mean things that Paul never meant (2 Peter 3:16).

FINAL WORDS (Romans 15:1–3)

Read Romans 15:1–3. What important Christian truth do these verses teach us?

How do these verses show us what it means to be a follower of Jesus? What other verses in the Bible teach this same idea? Most important, how can you live this truth in your life?

Read the ending of Paul’s letter. Pay close attention to Romans 15:5, 6, 13, 33. What words does Paul use at the end of his letter?

Romans 15:5 says, “the God Who helps you not to give up and gives you strength” (NLV). This wording points us to how God helps His children not to quit. This wording comes from the Greek word *hupomone*. *Hupomone* means “being patient” and “long lasting.” The word for “hope” (Romans 15:4) may be written as “giving hope to” or “encouragement.” The God of encouragement is the God who encourages us. The God of hope is the God who gives hope to humans. The God of peace is the God who gives us peace. We will find peace in God.

Paul makes many personal greetings. Then he brings his letter to a close in Romans 15:25–27. How does he end it?

Paul ends his letter in praise to God. All Christians can safely trust in God. We can trust that God has accepted us as His children. We can trust that by faith God makes us right with Himself. We can trust that His Holy Spirit leads us.

We know that the Lord led Paul to write this letter in answer to a special problem at a special time. But we do not know everything the Lord showed to Paul about the future. Paul knew “many people [would] turn away from God” (2 Thessalonians 2:3, NLV). But exactly how much more did Paul know? The Bible does not say. So, we do not know if Paul had any idea about the important part his writings would have in the last days. But in the end, the most important thing is that the truth in Romans led to the start of the Protestant churches. Paul’s writings continue to give us reasons for faith and hope on an earth filled with people who “follow the beast” (Revelation 13:3, NIV).



Paul’s writings continue to give us reasons for faith and hope among people who “follow[s] the beast” (Revelation 13:3, NIV).



Bring your needs to Jesus and ask for His help. And then He will show you exactly what to do.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “I saw that God’s people would be in danger if they looked to us [Brother and Sister White] to guide them. Instead, God’s people should look to Him. God’s people must not think that they should come to us with their problems and heavy loads to receive our advice. Instead, God invites His people to come to Him when they are tired and weighed down by heavy loads. Jesus is their kind and loving Savior. He will help them. . . . Many Christians come to us with the questions: ‘Shall I do this thing?’ ‘Shall I take part in that business plan?’ ‘Shall I wear this clothing or that clothing?’ I answer them: You say you are followers of Jesus. Then study your Bibles. Read carefully about the life of our dear Savior when He lived on the earth. Copy His life. Then you will not wander away from the path you should walk in. We refuse to tell anyone what they should do or not do. What would happen if we told you what to do? Then you would look to us to guide you. Instead, go to Jesus for yourselves.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [Messages] for the Church*, volume 2, pages 118, 119, adapted.

“We must not wait for people to tell us what to do. We must not depend on humans for advice. The Lord will teach us our duty. . . . So, how will you know what to do? First, decide in your heart that you will do nothing that will make God unhappy. Next, tell God what you need and ask for His help. Then you will know exactly what to do.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 668, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① Think about some of the ideas we studied this week. Then answer the questions below:

- Ⓐ How do we stay loyal to our beliefs? At the same time, how do we stay loyal to the Bible without pretending we have all the answers?
- Ⓑ How do we stay loyal to what we know is right without trying to force others to believe the way we do? At the same time, how do we help people who are making mistakes? When should we say something to them? And when should we say nothing to them at all?
- Ⓒ How do we stay free in the Lord? At the same time, why must we remember that we must be good examples to everyone who looks up to us and also to the people around us?

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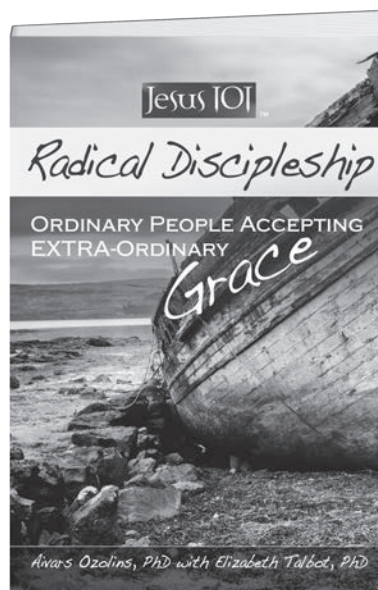
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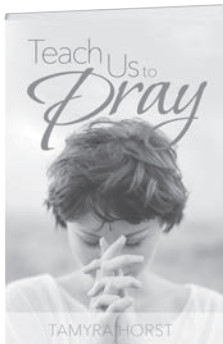
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