



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Letter of St. Paul to the Romans

Chapter 14

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Introduction

- In this chapter St. Paul discusses the relationship between strong and weak brethren
- He admonishes the strong to be careful in their dealings with the weak, and the weak not to judge the strong (1-4)
- Each one should do what they do as service rendered to the Lord (5-9)
- There is no place for judging one another for the Lord will be the judge (10-12)



Introduction

- It is of primary concern not to put stumbling blocks in a brother's way (13)
- The last half of the chapter emphasizes the importance of not encouraging the weak brother to violate his own conscience
- The strong should be willing to forego personal liberties to build up their weaker brethren (14-23)



The Law of Liberty (14:1-13)

- The weak faith. Not firmly established; not fully instructed in Christian knowledge
- Take him into your assembly, without discussing nor passing judgments on any doubts he may have
- Disputes over doubtful questions must not be in the way of Christian fellowship
- Differences had risen over food e.g. meat offered to idols



The Law of Liberty (14:1-13)

- Others believed that a transformed man should eat only vegetables, like in Eden
- Despise: look with contempt on what he considers the weakness of the other
- Judge: condemn as guilty of sinful practices
- God has taken him into His church
- Since God has received him, he is God's servant, and his accountability is not to anyone but to God



The Law of Liberty (14:1-13)

- In spite of what some of you consider wrongdoing, he shall stand, for God is able to keep him
- Some Jewish converts believed that the Jewish Sabbaths and new moons should be kept sacred
- Let each act as he thinks right
- If he thinks he ought to observe the days, let him do as his conscience demands
- If he thinks otherwise, let him not observe them



The Law of Liberty (14:1-13)

- It is regarded unto the Lord if he keeps it is so because he thinks it is the Lord's will
- If another refuses to keep it, because he believes it is the Lord's will that he should not, his non-keeping is to the Lord
- He who obeys what he regards is the Lord's will, either eating or abstaining, does it with reference to the Lord



The Law of Liberty (14:1-13)

- No Christian should be self pleasing, but live with the conscious aim of pleasing the Lord
- We are the Lord's
- While living, the aim must be to do the Lord's will, and even when we die we will be fully submissive to His will
- We are not at our own disposal
- For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived



The Law of Liberty (14:1-13)

- The life of a Christian is a new life that springs out of Christ's death; we die with Him; we rise with Him
- Since our life comes from Him, and springs from His death and resurrection, He is then our Lord, whether we are alive or dead
- Christ, the Lord of all, is the Lord of your brother
- He shall judge him and us alike



The Law of Liberty (14:1-13)

- We are not the judges, for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ
- For it is written. In Isa 45:23
- The passage quoted declares that the whole world will yet make humble acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God
- God's eternal sovereignty gives Him the right to call every mortal to account
- So, we should leave judgment to God



The Law of Liberty (14:1-13)

- Since God is to judge us all, brethren should not condemn each other for differences of opinion over some untaught question
- Rather condemn severely putting a stumbling-block in a brother's way
- Stumbling block: Anything which might cause a brother to fall



The Law of Love (14:14-23)

- The conviction is that of a mind in communion with Christ, enlightened by His Spirit
- No food is unclean by its own nature that makes it a sin to partake of it
- The legal distinction between clean and unclean animals is abolished
- If one, uninstructed, considers anything unclean, it is so before his conscience
- It is wrong for him to eat it



The Law of Love (14:14-23)

- If your brother's feelings are hurt with your food because he thinks it is sinful to eat, it would be charitable for you to abstain from it for his sake
- The effect upon him of seeing you do what he regards as sinful, may be destructive to him
- It is kinder to give up meat than to risk his destruction
- If Christ died for him, you surely can do that much



The Law of Love (14:14-23)

- You have greater knowledge than these weak brethren, and know that nothing is unclean; that is good
- But if you strictly insist on your right to do what the weak regard as sinful, your good will be evil spoken of
- The kingdom of God's essence is not in external things



The Law of Love (14:14-23)

- It consists of righteousness: justification, the forgiveness of sins
- Peace: reconciliation to God, and peace of soul as the result
- Joy in the Holy Spirit: the rejoicing of those who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit
- Seek these rather than to eat and drink what you will



The Law of Love (14:14-23)

- Serve Christ: it is "Christ" whom we serve in so doing
- These things are the things in which God delights, and men are approving
- Hence, love gives up what grieves a brother
- Love considers what builds up and makes a brother strong
- A rigid insistence on eating meat which is so offensive to some of the brethren may split the church



The Law of Love (14:14-23)

- All kinds of food are morally clean
- It is morally unclean to him who eats with hurt to his conscience
- If eating any kind of food, or drinking wine, stand in the way of your brother's peace and security, it is better to abstain from both
- Deny yourself rather than offend a brother
- No Christian ought ever to set an example that may destroy another



The Law of Love (14:14-23)

- Are you strong in the faith, and possess knowledge that the weaker brethren have not?
- Let God take note of it, but do not display it before the weak
- If one allowed that he had the right to eat all kinds of meats and did it to the injury of his brother, he would condemn himself, because he trampled on the law of love



The Law of Love (14:14-23)

- He has no faith, or does not believe that it is right to eat meat
- Hence he is condemned by his own conscience
- The context shows that St. Paul means that whenever actions are done by a Christian which he does not believe are right, he sins in doing them
- If he is doubtful whether they are right, he must not do them



Conclusion

- How are strong and weak brethren to treat each other?
- What is important according to verse 5?
- In all matters, whom is it we should try to please?
- Who will be the Judge in such matters?
- What is important according to verse 13?
- What elements are crucial to the kingdom of God?
- How far should one be willing to go to avoid causing a brother to stumble?
- If we violate our conscience, what are we guilty of?