

**Romans 14:1-23**  
**(Isaiah 25:6-9; Mark 2:13-27)**  
**“A Call to Responsible Freedom”**

## **Introduction**

Here we find a practical application of the call to love one another. Paul concludes the preceding passage with the words, “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (13:14). But what are we to do when we disagree on what it means to “make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires”? How are we to live at peace with one another when we conscientiously disagree on matters of behavior and practice?

Throughout this letter, and throughout all of his letters, Paul is unequivocal in his insistence that we all agree on the heart of the gospel message: namely, that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. He is also unequivocal about the ongoing relevance of God’s moral law as a picture of the life of love that the gospel calls us to live. Having told us that we are no longer under law as a means of being righteous before God, Paul nonetheless calls us to love one another and so fulfill the law, for the law is an expression of what it looks like to love the Lord and to love one another. However, he comes now to the question of secondary matters where Christians may have principled disagreements, disagreements shaped by our cultural context or by our family backgrounds or experience, but not clearly addressed by Scripture. What are we to do to avoid being torn apart?

In this passage, Paul seems to have in view issues facing those Jewish converts who were taught to keep kosher with regard to food and to observe the Sabbath and the various annual celebrations of Israel. When he addresses these same issues in writing to the church at Corinth, the problem seems more Gentile-based, dealing particularly with food and drink prepared at pagan temples. In both cases, Paul is concerned with those whom he calls “the strong,” (with whom he identifies: see 15:1), and those he terms “the weak.” In both Rome and Corinth, there was apparently conflict and division caused by the refusal of the two groups to welcome one another as brothers and sisters in Christ and to put the needs of the other before one’s own needs, which is the essence of “agape” (self-sacrificial) love.

In every age, the church has faced the same problem between those who enjoy freedom in Christ and those who continue to believe that holiness and separation from the world means a list of behavioral rules for serious Christians. Of course, these lists differ: for one group it is no drinking or dancing, for another it is no recreation on the Lord’s Day, for another it is no musical instruments in worship, and so on. So Paul’s words have great contemporary relevance in teaching us what it means to live at peace with one another, loving one another with the self-sacrificial love with which Christ has loved us.

## Body

### 1. First, let's be clear about the problem: the strong and the weak.

- The strong (like Paul – see 15:1) have been set free in Christ from scruples that once bound them. They consider all foods the same and all days the same. Their unique temptation is to despise the weak as not understanding our freedom in Christ.
- The weak are still bound by certain scruples concerning food and drink and holy days and seasons. They consider some foods to be unclean and some days more holy than others. Their unique temptation is to pass judgment on the strong as not being sufficiently serious about holiness and separation from the world.

### 2. Secondly, let's be clear about the solution: “Pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (14:19).

- Welcome one another as family, remembering that in Christ God has welcomed us (14:1-4).
- Only take a stand when you are fully convinced of your position and are able to pursue it in order to honor the Lord, remembering that in Christ we are no longer living for ourselves, but for the Lord (14:5-9).
- Do not judge one another, remembering that we will all stand before the judgment seat of God (14:10-12).
- Do not cause one another to stumble, remembering that we are called to love one another with *agape* (self-sacrificial) love (14:13-16).

## Conclusion

*The key* to all this is found in the final verses, where Paul reminds us that the Kingdom of God is not about these disputable matters, but about “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (14:17-23). So live in responsible freedom. Remember that the gospel is paramount. Live according to your own convictions, shaped by meditation on God’s Word, prayer and Christian fellowship. But do not seek to impose your views concerning secondary matters on other Christians. Just because my conscience is bound with regard to certain disputable matters does not mean that your consciences must be bound. We will all stand before the living God and give account. So let’s leave it to him to accept or condemn. Welcome one

another, love one another, and “pursue what makes for peace and mutual uupbuilding.”

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