

**Romans 14**  
**Christian Liberty**  
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Boy, is this subject of Christian Liberty one of great controversy! It is also an area in which Christians quickly judge each other on the basis of their individual understanding of what God intends us to do and not to do. Many children were brought up thinking that dancing was of the Devil and so was wearing lipstick. There certainly are some basic Biblical reasonings that can be used to support that dancing is a sin, but usually it is not just the dancing but what goes on between the two people as they are dancing. If there is sexual lust going on then certainly that is a sin. But people can dance together without such happening and we need to be careful how we judge. There are two excellent “judging” Scriptures that we should always consider:

*Matt 7:1 “Do not judge lest you be judged.”*

*John 7:24 “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”*

These verses seem at “first light” to be in conflict, but they are not. Also we hear the Matthew Scripture thrown at us many times by the world as they think that they have found out how to counter our Christian attacks at what the Bible says are sins. What both verses are telling us is that we are to judge only by Christian standards. Paul tells us in this chapter and the first half of the next chapter how we are to live and interact with other people in this fallen world.

We also treat people inside the Body of Christ differently than those who are outside of the Church:

*1Cor 5:11” But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one.*

*1Cor 5:12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church?*

*1Cor 5:13 But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.”*

**Rom 14:1 “Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.**

**Rom 14:2 One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only.**

**Rom 14:3 Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him.”**

Jesus also elaborated on this topic:

*Mark 7:14 "And after He called the multitude to Him again, He began saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand:  
Mark 7:15 there is nothing outside the man which going into him can defile him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man.  
Mark 7:16 [ "If any man has ears to hear, let him hear."]  
Mark 7:17 And when leaving the multitude, He had entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable.  
Mark 7:18 And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him;  
Mark 7:19 because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.)  
Mark 7:20 And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man.  
Mark 7:21 "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries,  
Mark 7:22 deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness.  
Mark 7:23 "All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.""*

There certainly are many ways in which different Christians can live in this world and still be serving the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. We should beware of thinking too highly of ourselves as Paul has previously warned us. For me to think of myself as one of strong faith really is dangerous for God can quickly put me in a situation to show me that I am not so strong in my faith. Pride even in spiritual ways – perhaps especially in spiritual ways – can be very dangerous for our spiritual health. God allowed man to eat meat after the flood and there is no occasion in the Bible where God forbade man to eat meat as a sign of great spiritual obedience or evidence of great faith. Since faith is the enabling power of God and works its way out in the lives of God's children in various ways as he/she matures, then nobody can say that by faith they will not eat meat since God has allowed the eating of meat. The verse clearly states that it is by faith that a man may eat all things and then goes on to say that one who is weak may only eat vegetables. The words "who is weak" here is actually only one Greek word and it is sometimes interpreted as "sick" and other times as "weak". The word implies a lacking of something and, in this case, is a lacking of the development of the conscience. The Christian conscience is something that is continually under development as we grow spiritually. Ideally our conscience would be identical to the will of God in every aspect of our life. But regardless of the development of our conscience, we should never regard someone with a less Biblically developed conscience than our own to be thought of as inferior to us. Both of us have been accepted by God and both of us are a "work in progress" as we strive in the world to have a Christ-based conscience. We can learn from each other and we should always have that attitude. However we must never let our development of our conscience be negatively influenced by a worldly wisdom.

**Rom 14:4 "Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand.**

**Rom 14:5 One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.**

**Rom 14:6 He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.**

**Rom 14:7 For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself;**

**Rom 14:8 for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.**

**Rom 14:9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.”**

Only God is the real judge for only God can see clearly another person's heart. We stand before the judgment of God only and indeed Jesus is the one who will make us stand before the judgment seat of God because of His righteous that is imputed to us. We must not judge someone who worships on Saturday as inferior to us if he/she has the major points of Christianity correctly understood. We also must not let the person who insists that Sunday be called the Sabbath be thought of as inferior to our understanding that Sunday is the Lord's Day and that the Sabbath was only for Jews relationship with God. Actually we should regard every day as a day to worship God, but we should have one day that we come together as a group of God's children to worship Him. Whatever we do we should do in a way that is thankful to God. Since all of God's children have died to ourselves and now only live for Him, we should not let our Adam nature dictate anything that we do whether it is in a way of eating or in a particular way of worshiping. Indeed Jesus Christ is Lord of those who have died and of those who are still living.

We must remember a few items relating to these topics:

- 1.) No other Christian answers to us.
- 2.) God has already accepted the other Christian as he/she is. This is not to say that God will not continue to work in the life of that person, but remember item 1.) as we interact with them.
- 3.) God gives His grace to all of His children and He gifts them according to His wisdom and not according to our determination of their needs.
- 4.) We are all accountable to God and will stand in judgment before Him. This certainly should temper our judgment!

**Rom 14:10 “But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.**

**Rom 14:11 For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall give praise to God."**

**Rom 14:12 So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God.”**

Our thoughts should only be upon how we act and react during every day for one day we will indeed be before the judgment seat of God. Praise God we will be allowed to spend eternity with Him because of what Jesus did for us, but we will also be judged by the

righteous eye of God for all that we have done and said while we were here living in the world. If we can keep in our minds that we are accountable only for ourselves before God who sees all that we do and think, then we will not have an occasion to regard our Christian brother or sister with contempt. Certainly there are Christians on earth who live lives much more righteous than we do and there are Christians who have not yet the full meaning of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man really sink into their minds. But we are not the final judge of anyone else. We can certainly help others to live more Christian lives but we have to be absolutely certain that we have a clear understanding of what such a life is and we have to have applied this knowledge with the wisdom of God to ourselves first. Let “he who is without sin cast the first stone” then takes on a clearer meaning and application to ourselves. We know that homosexuality is forbidden by God, but we must be careful how we act toward those individuals. Anyone who practices sin is not a child of God so first the person must be born again and it is only God who can do that. So we love our enemies and pray for their salvation and we mentor them in the Christian life style once God has raised them from the spiritual dead.

**Rom 14:13 “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this-- not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.**

**Rom 14:14 I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.**

**Rom 14:15 For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.”**

Verse 14 almost seems to be teaching relativism, but of course it must not for such is not Biblical. Just because someone thinks something is unclean does not make it unclean before God and just because someone thinks something is clear does make it clear before God. There are absolutes and they have been defined by God. Even though someone may be convinced that something is wrong in itself does not mean that it is wrong. I will use the drinking of an alcoholic beverage as an example. The Bible is clear that it is ok to drink a small amount of an alcoholic beverage if it helps our health but the Bible is also very clear that becoming drunk is a sin. I and my wife have decided not to drink any alcoholic beverage at all as an example that people can not drink at all and still be very happy and enjoy life. We have chosen this path because of the many problems in the world caused by the abuse of drinking alcoholic beverages. We don't condemn our Christian friends who drink a small amount of wine with their meals and we don't want them to condemn us for being “narrow minded” as some have. We each have to stand before God and we feel very comfortable with our choice. Now use eating meat as an example. We don't eat a lot of meat because of our digestive problems but we do eat meat. If we invite someone to dinner who we know is a vegetarian we would never serve meat to them in a manner that belittles them. It is better for us to not eat meat than to offend them and put a stumbling block in their path.

**Rom 14:16 “Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil;  
Rom 14:17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.**

**Rom 14:18 For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.”**

After all, the kingdom of God indeed is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Jesus grew up in the favor of God and man and certainly we can do the same but not with the same degree of success. Jesus certainly should be our example in this area as well as all others.

*Luke 2:52 “And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”*

I strongly believe that God is telling us to focus on righteous, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit and not spend any of our time with criticism of other Christians because of some of their choices that do not violate the core of being a Christian. In one of my papers I have attempted to look at what are points on which we must agree and to isolate away from those points the “pernts” on which we can agree to disagree. I have usurped some of my article “Christians Beating Up Christians” that is published on <http://LivingTheology.com>

In my opinion, it is actually fairly easy to decide upon some points. I will list some below. Remember that if someone does not agree with these points, we cannot have Christian fellowship with them. Am I saying that people who do not agree with these points are not Christians? Yes, I am for the Bible is very clear on these Points.

- The fact of the virgin conception of Jesus Christ is certainly a point. If Jesus had Joseph as His biological father then He was not God and He was no savior for anyone. He had Mary as his biological mother so He was truly fully man and fully God. Only God could pay the sacrificial price for our sins.
- He must have lived a sinless life while on earth. If He sinned at all then He was not God for God cannot sin.
- The fact that He really physically died on the cross must be a point upon which we can insist that Christians believe. If He only swooned, then there was no death sacrifice as required for our sins.
- We must also insist upon the fact that He was actually physically raised from the dead. His resurrection proves that the Father accepted His full payment for our sins.
- We must also believe that salvation is by faith alone and not based at all on any works by us.

#### **Pernts**

- Whether or not the pastor wears a robe. Certainly there are some very good reasons for the pastor wearing a robe to show dignity and respect for the office of pastor and to help set the mood for the congregation in coming before the Holy God for worship. But surely this is not a point to cause separation between Christians.

- The color of the carpet! What arguments such an issue has caused in some congregations, but we must admit that this is indeed a pernt.
- When Jesus will come again is something that even Jesus Himself said that He did not know so certainly we cannot know when that wonderful event would occur.
- The actual mode of baptism is not something that should separate Christians from non-Christians. Certainly the Baptists have some Biblical evidence for immersion, but the thief on the cross was surely saved (or Jesus lied) and he was not baptized at all. The mode gets a bit “sticky” because we probably don’t want to immerse an infant and that gets into the question of when one is baptized. At this time, I would rather not lift up that so let’s assume that if one is baptizing an infant they are either sprinkled or very carefully immersed!
- To use wine or non-alcoholic juice in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. There have been many arguments over whether one should ever drink alcoholic beverages, but we must agree that the Bible allows one to use a small amount of alcohol:  
*ITim 5:23 “No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.”*  
 I know that people have said that this verse is actually referring to wine as medicine, but for now let us just take this Scripture at face value. So since a small amount of wine is Biblically allowed, it certainly does not matter whether one uses wine or grape juice in the Lord’s Supper celebration. Most churches do not use wine, but certainly this is not a salvation issue.
- Personally I think that we could now put as a pernt whether one drinks a small amount of wine or not. Many people, including my wife and I, have decided not to partake of any alcoholic beverage at all. But many Christians do drink wine with their meals and the Bible does not prohibit such activity. For the reason of offending a weaker brother or sister, for a witness, and to protest the widespread alcohol problem in the world are reasons that Carol and I have decided not to drink alcohol at all. However, we do not have this issue as a Point.
- The use of the word “tithe” is to me a pernt. I wrote a paper on this issue and it is available on my web site. I do believe that the tithe no longer has an application within the Christian church. As I said in my paper, I think that what we should give now is 100%, not 10%. The 10% is a good measuring point for if we cringe at trusting the Lord enough so that we hoard the 10% for ourselves, then we have not made any progress toward letting go of 100%. Many people are very adamant about carrying over the word and its 10% meaning into the Christian church but to me it is a pernt. Since the average giving of a member of a Christian church member in the U.S. is about 4%, it seems that many people are being hypocritical in insisting on carrying forward the word into the Christian church. In my understanding of the 100% rather than the 10%, the average church member is even further from the standard than the person using the word tithe.
- The Sabbath is another term that tends to divide church people. Some people say that we should continue to use Saturday as the Sabbath and worship on that day. Other people say that the Sabbath is now Sunday after the resurrection of Jesus on that day. Other people say that the Sabbath is no longer a term used in the Christian church and that Sunday is the Lord’s Day and we should worship Him

on that day but not call it the Sabbath. John Calvin taught this Lord's Day terminology as a complete break from the Jewish form of worship and is discussed in his "Institutes of the Christian Religion". Sunday worship termed the Sabbath is taught in Westminster Confession of Faith and is taught in most reformed churches. But people like James M. Boice support the Lord's Day position. I do not think that this argument is worth being a point, but some do and I think that such people are wrong. Personally I hold to the Lord's Day interpretation but I attend a PCA church that uses the term Sabbath for Sunday worship. I would not make such a distinction a dividing line between Christians and non-Christians and therefore this distinction is a pernt. Certainly the Bible clearly tells us that the Sabbath was created as a sign between the Jew and God:

*Exodus 31:17 "It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed."*

- Some people hold that one must not believe in the rapture and some insist that we must believe in the rapture. I think that this is a pernt and I refuse to get caught up on an argument on this issue. I think such issues are spoken of strongly by Paul in the following:

*Titus 3:9 "But shun foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law; for they are unprofitable and worthless."*

*Titus 3:10 Reject a factious man after a first and second warning,*

*Titus 3:11 knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned."*

- Others? I am sure that there are many more "pernts" and that some people will be upset at me calling some of the above pernts, but I am at peace with the Lord on this issue and I will not let someone cause me to stumble. Just be sure that all of your points and pernts are Biblically based and there will be much more peace and joy in the Body of Christ.

**Rom 14:19 "So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.**

**Rom 14:20 Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense.**

**Rom 14:21 It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.**

**Rom 14:22 The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.**

**Rom 14:23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin."**

Our conscience is extremely important and it must be developed entirely by the Word of God. We mold our conscience as we properly develop our mind and we have previously studied how that is to be done.

*Rom 12:2 “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

We each are responsible for seeking those things that make for peace and the edification of fellow believers. It is my opinion that God has called me to help in this process by the writings that He gives me. My prayer for everything that I write is that it might bring at least one person closer to a fuller understanding of how we are to walk in this world. The treatment of our fellow believers is extremely important. It is much better to deny ourselves of something that is pleasing to us and that we know is not sinful, if by denying ourselves that thing our brother or sister is edified. When we are absolutely sure that our actions are in the path of the Father then we have no condemnation of ourselves because we know that we have no condemnation of God. What a freeing, wonderful, satisfying life we can have when it is totally guided by the will of God. When our conscience is clear on any particular topic then there is no doubting and therefore no sin because our actions are based upon faith, a gift of God.

Amen!!

### **References**

1. All Bible quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, Moody Press, 1975.
2. James Montgomery Boice, “Romans, Volume 4, The New Humanity”, Romans 12 - 16, Baker Book House, 2001.
3. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “Romans, Exposition of Chapter 13, Life in Two Kingdoms”, Banner of Truth Trust, 1 Murrayfield Road, Edinburgh EH12 6EL, 2002. (different chapter, but edifying writings about similar topics)
4. John R. W. Stott, “Your Mind Matters”, InterVarsity Press, 1972.
5. Harry Blamires, “The Christian Mind”, Servant Publications, 1978.