

Romans 14:1-15:13

Developing Unity Amidst Differing Levels of Faith/Understanding of Foods and Holy Days

1. We **do not know** absolutely what Paul knows about the Roman church problems
2. We **do not know** if Paul is speaking directly to problems in the Roman church
3. We do know that this section is similar to 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1
 - a. Differences:
 - i. 1 Corinthians credits "strong" with having "knowledge"
 - ii. 1 Corinthians clearly addresses idols and food sacrificed to idols. Romans does not mention idols or pagan temples.
 - iii. The conscience is mentioned in 1 Corinthians, but not in Romans.
 - iv. In Romans the "weak" are eating only vegetables and observing holy days.
 - v. In Romans the "weak" avoid meat in general, but not specifically meat sacrificed to idols.
 - b. Similarities:
 1. Weak vs Strong
 2. The "strong" can cause the "weak" to stumble. The "weak" sit in judgment on the "strong"
 3. Paul considers himself a "strong" and does not condemn the "strong" for being "strong" (14:14; 14:20; 15:1). But, warns the "strong" not to cause their brothers to stumble. Paul promotes love and unity above their own rights.
4. We do know that Paul is writing in the year **57 AD** and that after the death of Emperor Claudius in **54 AD** the Jews began to return to Rome. The Jews were expelled from Rome in **49 AD**. The church of Rome had been without Jews for five years. This would have allowed the Christian church in Rome to become fully Gentile in their lifestyles, rituals and observances (similar to Paul after his conversion). But, beginning in 54 AD the Jews and Jewish Christians began to return to Rome and rejoin the church in Rome. It is likely there were tensions between the Gentile Christians lifestyle and the Jewish Christians (and, their followers) in areas concerning the Law of Moses: Food and Days. And, possibly this tension was reaching a boiling point by 57 AD.
 1. The Jews who had accepted Christ would not be welcomed in the Jewish community in Rome.
 2. The Jewish Christians would have to associate and live among the Gentiles where food (meat) was not kosher and days (Sabbath) were not honored. This would force the Jews to eat only vegetables and privately observe their holy days.
 3. This would not be a problem that was unique to the Roman church, but would be true at some level in every city that had Gentile and Jewish believers.

There are basically six explanations given by scholars to explain why Paul wrote this section and what is going on in these verses:

1. "Weak" are Gentile Christians who are following pagan fast days
2. "Weak" are Christians who practice ascetic lifestyle for some reason
3. "Weak" are Jewish Christians (and, their Gentile followers) who observe the Mosaic Law
4. "Weak" are Jewish Christians who have developed a unique ascetic religious system
5. "Weak" are Christians, like in Corinth, who feared meat in the marketplace tainted by idols
6. "Weak" are Jewish Christians (and, their followers) who avoid certain foods and observe certain days in continued obedience to the Mosaic Law

- There appears throughout the Roman letter to be two groups addressed: Jews and Gentiles
 - 11:17 - Gentiles should not boast over Jews
- In 15:8-13 Paul is going to summarize this unity
- The term for “weak” is based on Paul’s use of the Greek word ***koinos*** which means “common” and “unclean” and is used in 14:14 to describe the “weak” believer’s attitude towards food.
- The “weak” are believers and Paul calls for them to be accepted, not rejected as unbelievers. The “weak” are believers with faith, but not yet possessing a full understanding of the faith they have embrace.
- There is NO mention of food sacrificed to idols, and this is combined with holy days and the avoidance of wine (Romans 13:17, 21) as in the vow of a Nazarite.
- Meat and wine had to be kosher. This combined with holy day observance seems to point to a Jewish issue.

It is important to recognize the command to the “strong” to “receive” the “weak”

- 14:1 begins with “receive”
- 15:7 repeats “receive”

An important principle is found in 14:3 where we are to “receive” or “accept” the one who God has “received” or “accepted”.

POINT: This section is NOT a command to accept all those who claim to be Christian and all the practices accepted by Christians. Paul calls for tolerance towards those to whom God is tolerant.

There must be a saving relationship in place for this “acceptance” and “receiving” to take place in the church. These “weak believers” are just that: True believers whose faith has not fully been understood or developed. The “weak” believer is NOT an unbeliever nor a believer who has rejected the Truth.