

Bible Reading Notes

the good way

31. 'How to avoid spiritual squabbles'

Romans 14.1-15.7

Monday 9th September – Sunday 15th September

The 'downside' of Paul's encouraging believers to use their minds (see [Rom.12.2](#)) is that they will start to *think*: they'll start to think through the appropriate biblical response to different issues. That in itself is hardly a 'downside', of course! But it does mean that sometimes the different members of a fellowship will come to very different conclusions – and can end up 'squabbling'.

This whole passage has to do with what's translated as 'disputable matters' in the NIV, and 'opinions' in the ESV (Rom.14.1): that's to say, 'grey areas', where those who hold firmly to the truths of Scripture as the authoritative Word of God Himself nonetheless differ as to how such truths are to be applied. *The Message* speaks of 'fellow believers who don't see things the way you do'.

There were issues of this sort in the church in Rome which clearly had the potential to spark 'squabbles' and to occasion division and recriminations within the fellowship (Should you eat meat if it might have been offered to one of the Roman pantheon of gods? Should you observe special days?)

This is an immensely helpful passage in teaching us how to handle such issues (and there are always such issues) in a way that avoids us falling out with each other?

Read the whole passage, and if short of time concentrate on '**days**' (2), (3) and (4).

1) Monday 9th September – ‘grey areas’

Read [Romans 14.1-4](#)

“.. without quarrelling over disputable matters ..” (Rom.14.1)

We’re to *live* the gospel, and demonstrate its grace – not least in the context of ‘disputable matters’ where you can argue the case from Scripture for two contradictory views. We’re to welcome, not war against, one another in such cases.

What would be instances of such ‘disputable matters’ in the church today?

Why do such ‘disputable matters’ often become occasions of strife and division within a fellowship?

Prayer: *Oh, Master, grant that I may never seek so much to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love with all my soul.*

2) Tuesday 10th September – fully convinced

Read [Romans 14.5-12](#)

“.. each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind ..” (Rom.14.5)

In such all such ‘disputable matters’ where the *application* of first principles is less than self-evident, here’s the first guideline given by Paul. Prayerfully think it through and seek God’s will, until clear in your own mind as to what under God you should do.

Why is it so important that we should each be fully convinced in our own mind in relation to this sort of issue?

In ‘grey areas’ where there are different views, how should you go about becoming ‘convinced’ in your own mind?

Surely the more that believers are ‘convinced’ in their own minds on a matter, the more likely they are to contend against one another? How can that be avoided?

What reasons does Paul give for insisting that we neither ‘judge’ nor ‘treat with contempt’ those who “don’t see things the way you do”?

Prayer: *Help me to learn well from Your Word, O God my Father; to listen well to Your Holy Spirit; and to look constantly to Your beloved Son. Make me always teachable!*

3) Wednesday 11th September – acting in love

Read [Romans 14.13-18](#)

“.. the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking ..” (Rom.14.17)

Secondary issues are never to be an occasion for squabbles. Respect the convictions of those who take a different view from you: aim not to judge them, nor offend them, nor to make them stumble in their walk with the Lord. They're His, and dear to Him!

What steps might you take to remove an overly critical spirit which is so often part and parcel of our sinful nature?

In what ways might you and your views become a 'stumbling-block' to other believers?

How will the hallmarks of the kingdom of God – 'righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' – find expression in your life today?

How do you decide what are 'primary' issues (on which – if Paul is anything to go by! – there's no room for disagreement) and 'secondary' issues (where we are to respect the differing convictions of others)?

Prayer: Guard me, O God, from being preoccupied with non-essentials: help me rather to esteem highly, and to cherish carefully, those for whom Christ died.

4) Thursday 12th September – mutual edification

Read [Romans 14.19-23](#)

".. make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification .." (Rom.14.19)

You are a pastor! You have a pastoral responsibility towards your brothers and sisters in Christ, a commitment in Christ to build them up in their knowledge and love of the Lord. What can you do or say to 'strengthen their hand in God' and see them grow?

What does Paul envisage in using the phrase 'mutual edification'?

In what ways and by what 'efforts' are we able to work to secure such mutual edification and a real 'peace' among the members of a fellowship?

In what ways is it possible to 'destroy the work of God' in a person's life, according to what Paul writes here?

What does Paul mean by keeping your convictions on such disputable matters 'between yourself and God'?

Prayer: Forgive me, my Lord and Saviour, for my ugly stubbornness – for being more keen to prove myself right than to help my fellow believers grow and thrive.

5) Friday 13th September – for their good

Read [Romans 15.1-4](#)

".. everything that was written in the past was written to teach us .." (Rom.15.4)

“We are God’s handiwork” ([Eph.2.10](#)): the Spirit of God is transforming His people into the likeness of Jesus, shaping our lives by both the example of the Lord Jesus (v.3) and the teaching of Scripture (vv.3f), and cultivating in us thereby a resilient, selfless grace.

What does Paul mean by referring to those ‘who are strong’?

In what ways has the teaching of Scripture shaped and indeed changed the way you live, particularly in how you relate to and engage with others?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, You have been so kind and patient towards me, bearing with my many failings day by day: help me to show that same kindness and patience to others.*

6) Saturday 14th September – to God be the glory

Read [Romans 15.5-6](#)

“.. so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify (God) ..” (Rom.15.6)

As the Catechism insists from the start, your bottom-line purpose is, along with your fellow believers, to bring glory to God – with a common mind, renewed by the Spirit and informed by His Word, and with a single, harmonious voice offering praise to God.

Why does Paul refer to the Lord here specifically as ‘the God who gives endurance and encouragement’?

Read Phil.2.1-11: how would you describe ‘the same attitude of mind .. that Christ Jesus had’?

Prayer: *One with Thyself, may every eye in us, Thy brethren, see that gentleness and grace that spring from union, Lord, with Thee. May my life today be lived for Your glory.*

7) Sunday 15th September – accepted

Read [Romans 15.7](#)

“.. accept one another, just as Christ accepted you ..” (Rom.15.7)

How do you bring glory to God? Back to where you started ([14.1](#))! Accept, or welcome, your fellow believers. What Jesus has done in relation to you, you’re to do in the way you relate to others – for all their (and your!) eccentricities, flaws, and different views!

The statement that ‘Christ accepted you’ could easily be understood as a ‘green light’ for living as you please: how is such misunderstanding avoided?

In what ways can the way in which you relate to your fellow believers be seen to ‘bring praise to God’?

Prayer: *How wonderful it is to know that You, my Lord Jesus, welcome sinners such as me! May that knowledge stir me always to show my fellow believers such acceptance.*