

KINGDOM.

LESSON 44

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray for God's guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about preaching God's kingdom to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) [QUIET TIMES] EZEKIEL 36, 37, 38 and 39
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Take turns and share (or read from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (Ezekiel 36, 37, 38 and 39). Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) [KEY VERSES IN ROMANS] (17) ROMANS 12:17
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Review two by two.

(17) Romans 12:17-18. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

4	BIBLE STUDY (85 minutes) [THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS] ROMANS 14:1-23
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Introduce. Make use of the five steps method of Bible study to study **Romans 14:1-23** together.

Romans 14:1 to 15:6 teaches the Christian's responsibility with respect to Christians whose faith is (or rather: convictions are) weak or strong. In this context, it is not their faith in Jesus Christ unto salvation that is meant, but their convictions concerning what they may or may not do as Christians! Their subjective faith determines their personal opinions, convictions or beliefs concerning disputable (controversial) matters.

But note, a Christian who has "a strong faith" in the matter of disputable (controversial) things, may at the same time have "a weak faith" in other spiritual matters, like knowledge of Christian truths, prayer, faithfulness or fervour in the Christian ministry. Likewise, a Christian who has "a weak faith" in the matter of disputable things, may at the same time have "a strong faith" in the other spiritual matters.

STEP 1. READ.	GOD'S WORD
LET US READ Romans 14:1-23 together. Let us take turns to read one verse each until we have completed the reading.	

STEP 2. DISCOVER.	OBSERVATIONS
<i>Consider.</i> WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU? Or WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE TOUCHES YOUR MIND OR HEART? <i>Record.</i> Discover one or two truths that you understand. Think about them and write your thoughts in your notebook. <i>Share.</i> (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, take turns to share). Let us take turns to share with one another what each of us has discovered. (Remember: In every small group, the group members will share different things)	

14:1-2

Discovery 1. The disputable (controversial) matters among Christians.

(1) The non-disputable matters.

In Paul's letters, he writes to Christians in different situations. For example:

- In his letter to the Corinthians, he deals with the problem of Christians going to court, Christians tolerating disobedient Christians in their midst, marriage and divorce, etc.
- In his letter to the Galatians, he deals with the false teaching of Jews that Christians could be saved through doing the works of the law.
- In his letter to the Colossians, he deals with the false teaching of Gnostics that the human spirit had to be liberated from the human body, especially through the exercise of stringent asceticism.

About all these matters there is clear teaching in the Bible. These are NOT disputable matters!

(2) The disputable (controversial) matters.

There are, however, disputable matters among Christians. In his letter to the Romans, Paul deals with the issue of disputable matters. “Disputable matters” are matters about which there is no or little teaching in the Bible. In spite of this there are Christians who hold strong opinions, convictions or beliefs about these matters and consequently have arguments or disputes. The apostle said, “Accept him whose faith is weak without passing judgement on disputable matters” (Greek: *me eis diakriseis logismón*).

In Rome the Christians came from different backgrounds and they held different opinions about certain matters. Their differences of opinion degenerated into the strong Christians looking down on the convictions of the weak and the weak Christians judging the convictions of the strong.

Opinions are views that are held as probable, while convictions are settled beliefs. But in Rome, some people regarded their opinions as absolute convictions! The Christians in Rome had different opinions about what they may eat or not eat (clean and unclean food) and about which day is a religious festival (a Sabbath, a fasting day, a Passover, etc.). They quarrelled about whether a Christian might eat everything or only vegetables (Romans 14:2). And they quarrelled about whether a Christian should regard one day as more sacred than another day or consider every day alike (Romans 14:5).

The possible background of these disputes was probably *the ceremonial law* of the Old Testament with which Christians, who were formerly Jews or proselytes, were acquainted. The ceremonial law in the Old Testament revealed God’s requirements with regard to how his people should approach him and worship him. It contained regulations about holy persons (priests and Levites), holy places (tabernacle and temple), holy times (Sabbath days, religious festivals) and holy actions (sacrifices, circumcision, clean foods, ablutions, first-born, first fruits, tithes, etc). The religious teachers of the Jews added 613 other man-made laws to these and regarded their laws as compulsory for all Jews.

Thus, especially Jews and Jewish proselytes that had later become Christians still regarded such laws as very important or even compulsory. They had not yet understood that at his first coming Jesus Christ had changed (Hebrews 7:12), fulfilled (Matthew 5:17), cancelled (Colossians 2:14) and abrogated (abolished) (Ephesians 2:14-15) the ceremonial law and had rejected (Mark 7:1-13) all man-made laws of the Jewish religious leaders! On the other side non-Jews who had become Christians did not regard these laws as important or compulsory. That is how arguments about personal opinions came about.

The matter of differences in their opinions was complicated when the Christians on both sides began to regard their personal opinions as absolute convictions! The opinions on disputable matters were in themselves not wrong. But when people through their personal opinions (or church traditions) make powerless (Greek: *akuroó*) (present continuous tense) (NIV: nullify) (Mark 7:13; Galatians 3:17) the Word of God, enforce (Acts 15:1) their personal opinions on other Christians, look down upon or condemn (Romans 14:3) the people who held such opinions, then the commandment to accept one another in love is violated on both sides (Romans 14:1)!

(3) Disputable (controversial) matters among Christians today.

In our day, Christians may regard the following matters as disputable matters:

- Should Christians celebrate all the Christian festivals throughout the year or only some of them?
- Should Christians baptise people in one particular way?
- Should Christians celebrate the Lord’s Supper every week or only a few times every year?
- Should Christians attend church meetings twice on the Lord’s Day or go to church every day?
- Should Christians only sing the Psalms in the Bible or may they compose and sing new spiritual songs?
- May Christians use different musical instruments in the worship service (Psalm 150)?
- May Christians make music in different ways, clap their hands during singing, dance or shout during the service?
- Should church leaders wear distinct clerical robes?
- Should Christians wear particular kind of clothes that distinguish them as Christians?
- Should Christian men have short hair or beards?
- Should Christian women wear a shawl or hat on their head?
- May Christians wear jewellery, drink alcohol, dance, play games of chance (with dice) without gambling, watch television or the movies, etc.
- May women talk within the official church meetings?
- May people with homosexual orientation participate in the activities of the church?
- Are drug addicts and prostitutes welcome to attend church meetings?
- Should Christians get involved in politics and the community?
- Should Christians be concerned about environmental issues like conservation of water and global warming?
- Should Christians care about how much fish they catch, how many cattle they raise for the meat industry, how much agricultural land they use for producing fuel for cars or tobacco for cigarettes?
- Should Christians help protect the rainforests, hardwood, birds, animals, insects, etc.
- May Christians approve of the weapons industry because it boosts the economy?
- May every human being buy and carry a gun (the second amendment in the USA) (Matthew 26:52)?

- Etc.

Christians need to have personal convictions about these things! But Christians also need to realise that other Christians could and may have different convictions about these things!

14:3-4

Discovery 2. The attitudes Christians should have with respect to the disputable matters.

Verse 1 calls particular Christians “weak in faith”. In this context, it is not their faith in Jesus Christ unto salvation that is meant, but their faith concerning what they may or may not do as Christians! Their subjective faith determines their personal opinions, convictions or beliefs concerning the disputable matters. There are Christians whose personal faith forbids them to eat certain foods and there are Christians whose personal faith allows them to eat everything.

By the descriptions “weak” and “strong”, no contempt is intended, but only distinction. Paul calls the faith that forbids people to do certain things “a weak faith”, because that kind of faith is more susceptible to stumbling and destruction by the conduct of Christians whose faith allows them to do those same things.

(1) Christians with a strong faith may not pass judgement on Christians with a weak faith.

Romans 14:1 says, “Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgement on disputable matters.” This part of the apostle Paul’s exhortation is for Christians with a strong faith. They may not make judgements concerning the thoughts or opinions of Christians with a weak faith. The strong may not make distinguishing statements concerning the scruples or different convictions of the weak. For example, they may not make negative statements about their beliefs about what they eat or drink or about which days they regard as more important than other days. They may not look down upon or despise such people (Romans 14:3).

(2) Christians with a weak faith may not condemn those with a strong faith.

Romans 14:3 says, “The man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does.” This part of the apostle Paul’s exhortation is for Christians with a weak faith. They may not judge or condemn Christians with a strong faith for eating differently than they, or dressing differently than they, or singing differently than they. God has accepted Christians with a strong faith and therefore Christians with a weak faith may not condemn them as being “second-class Christians” or “no Christians” at all! They may not regard them as “disobedient” or “unspiritual” Christians. God has accepted the strong Christian and weak Christians may not condemn what God approves or reject whom God has accepted.

Romans 14:4 says, “Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand”. The weak Christians are exhorted not to meddle in the domestic affairs of the Lord who has accepted the strong Christians with their lifestyle of greater freedom.

The weak Christians tended to regard the exercise of freedom on the part of Christians with a strong faith as “worldliness” or as “backsliding”, even as “backsliding” from the faith. The weak Christian thought that the life-style of the strong Christian was subject to Christ’s disapproval. But Paul says that the Lord of the Church determined the house rules and norms and the house occupants were not allowed to judge one another with their own norms and rules. He admonishes the weak Christians to let go of their censorious judgement of strong Christians. The Lord approves of the lifestyle of strong Christians and will see to it that the strong Christians remain standing in their faith.

STEP 3. QUESTION.

EXPLANATIONS

Consider. WHICH QUESTION ABOUT ANYTHING IN THIS PASSAGE WOULD YOU LIKE TO ASK TO THIS GROUP?

Let us try to understand all the truths in Romans 14:1-23 and ask questions about the things we still do not understand.

Record. Formulate your question as clearly as possible. Then write your question in your notebook.

Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, let each person first share his question.)

Discuss. (Then, choose a few of these questions and try to answer them by discussing them together in your group.)

(The following are examples of questions the students might ask and some notes about the discussion of the questions.)

14:5-9

Question 1. How should Christians regard their own personal opinions or convictions concerning the disputable (controversial) matters?

Notes.

(1) Christians should be fully convinced in their own minds about the disputable (controversial) matters (Romans 14:5)

There are two extremes and both must be avoided.

On the one hand, there are churches who demand conformity. When church leaders or members demand conformity in disputable matters, God’s goal is missed, namely, to love one another and accept diversity! The apostle

Paul motivates Christians to accept diversity in the church and to tolerate one another's convictions about disputable matters (as eating meat and drinking wine) (verse 23).

On the other hand, there are Christians who lack personal convictions. The apostle Paul says that each Christian should be "fully convinced in his own mind" (Greek: *tó idió noi pléroforeó*) (command, present continuous tense) about the various disputable matters because that is the only way he can do these things or not do these things consciously for the Lord. Each Christian not only has the right to have a personal opinion or conviction in these matters, but God demands that each Christian should be clear about his convictions and live according to his convictions.

(2) Christians should let their whole conduct be determined by doing everything as to the Lord (Romans 14:6).

In the realm of freedom (where the Christian may choose and decide) a Christian's conduct is not unreligious. Whatever a Christian does or refrains from doing is "to the Lord". He is never destitute of the consciousness that he is serving the Lord (1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17,23). The inner attitude with which a particular conviction is practised or refrained from being practised is what is important in God's eyes.

The proof that the personal convictions and the resulting conduct of both strong and weak Christians are acceptable to God is that both strong and weak Christians give thanks to God (Matthew 15:36; Acts 27:35; 1 Corinthians 10:30), no matter whether they do things in an unlimited or limited way. "For everything God created is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer"! The created things are acceptable to God, when:

- they are used in accordance with the clear teaching of the Bible (1 Timothy 4:5)
- they are utilized with personal conviction (Romans 14:5)
- the Christian has prayed about them (1 Timothy 4:4; Proverbs 3:6).

By thanking God, Christians manifest their sense of indebtedness to God and their devotion to Christ.

(3) Christians may defend their personal convictions constructively (Romans 14:16).

"Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil". What the strong Christian considers good is his freedom with regard to what he eats and drinks, or with regard to how he views the festival days of the Old Testament. The strong Christian does not need to feel that his freedom in a disputable matter is judged by the conscience of a weak Christian, because he thanks God for his freedom (1 Corinthians 10:29-30).

Instead, the strong Christian should do whatever he does and the weak Christian should refrain from doing something he disapproves of to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). The strong Christian is free to enjoy what God has created to be received with thanksgiving. Thus the strong Christian should not feel guilty, rejected or ashamed, because he holds certain convictions, which weak Christians reject. When his convictions are attacked or rejected by weak Christians, the strong Christian may defend his convictions constructively and in a loving way.

(4) Christians should keep their personal convictions about disputable (controversial) matters between themselves and God (14:22).

"Whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God." Strong Christians may not parade or protest their rights and freedoms with regard to the disputable matters to the detriment of weak Christians! However, strong Christians have the right to hold such convictions and they may not surrender their convictions! If they would surrender their convictions, they would do so without faith, and that would be "sin" (Romans 14:23).

14:10-14

Question 2. How should Christians view the personal opinions or convictions of others concerning the disputable (controversial) matters?

Notes.

(1) Christians should not judge (condemn) the personal opinions, convictions or beliefs of others with respect to the disputable matters (Romans 14:10-12).

All Christians will one day stand before God's judgement seat and give an account of their own life to God. Christians will not give an account to God how other Christians have lived, but they will have to give an account how they themselves have lived! "God will bring every deed into judgement, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." "And Jesus says, "I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgement for every careless word they have spoken" (Matthew 12:36).

Therefore, Christians should not judge or look down upon the personal convictions or conduct of other Christians in the area of the disputable matters. God has forbidden Christians to judge people outside the Christian Church. That remains God's prerogative (Matthew 7:1-2; 1 Corinthians 5:12-13). God has also forbidden Christians to judge other Christians, except in the case of obvious sin (cf. Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 1 Timothy 5:20). Christians should rather judge their own critical attitudes and loveless conduct, judge whether they have lived in accordance with their own convictions, and judge whether they have refrained from judging others for their different convictions!

(2) Christians should distinguish between what is objectively true and what certain Christians regard as subjectively true (Romans 4:14).

What is clearly commanded, prohibited or taught in the Bible is objectively true. And what is believed to be true, even when there is no clear teaching in the Bible about the matter, is subjectively true. Only the objective truth in the Bible is the basis for doctrine and life. The subjective truth of other people is the basis of showing them love.

For example, Jesus clearly taught that all food is “clean” (Mark 7:15,19). And the apostle Paul also taught that everything God created is “good” and nothing should be “rejected” if it is received with thanksgiving (1 Timothy 4:4-5; cf. Romans 14:14,20). The apostle Paul holds to the truth that all food is clean and may be eaten as an objective truth that is taught in the Bible. This objective truth is also his personal subjective truth.

However, although the objective teaching in the Bible regards all kinds of food as “clean”, there are Christians who have the subjective conviction that certain food is “unclean.” A weak Christian may know the objective truth that all food is “clean”, yet subjectively not believe that all food is “clean”. For example, he finds it impossible to eat pork. Or he is absolutely against drinking alcohol. When strong Christians relate to weak Christians they need to take into account not only the objective truth in the Bible, but also the subjective, personal conviction of the weak Christian!

The situation is similar with respect to idols (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:4,7). Many Christians know that an idol does not really exist and that there is no God but the living God of the Bible. Other “gods” only exist as man-made images or as ideas devised by the human mind. However, not every Christian knows this or has this conviction! Some Christians are still so accustomed to idols that they subjectively regard food offered to idols as “unclean”! The distinction is thus between the biblical teaching and the personal conviction. The distinction is between “what is true objectively” and “what is regarded as true subjectively”! Christians should know the biblical teaching about the disputable matters, but nevertheless should reckon with their own subjective feelings and opinions as well as with the subjective feelings and opinions of other Christians about these matters. Only in an atmosphere of love, acceptance and mutual respect can Christians build one another up in the area of their subjective opinions or convictions.

1 Corinthians 8:4-13 says, “So then about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing, at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called Gods whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’) yet for us there is but one God , the Father, from whom all things came, and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. But food does not bring us near to God: we are no worse, if we do not eat, and no better if we do. Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, wont he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against your brother in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat cause my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.”

14:15-20a

Question 3. What attitude should Christians have with respect to the disputable (controversial) matters?

Notes. By the descriptions “weak” and “strong”, no contempt is intended, but only distinction. Paul calls the faith that forbids people to do certain things “a weak faith”, because that kind of faith is more susceptible to stumbling and destruction by the conduct of Christians with a “strong faith” that allows them to do such things.

(1) Christians should let their conduct be determined, not by their rights or their freedom, but by love (Romans 14:13,15).

All Christians (whether strong or weak) must have the same faith or convictions in matters which the Bible commands, prohibits or teaches. These matters are not “disputable matters”! About things the Bible clearly commands, prohibits or teaches no one is permitted to have his own opinion! No one has the right to suppress the truth or twist the truth by their godlessness and wickedness (Romans 1:18,25).

Strong Christians have the right and freedom to have opinions or convictions about disputable matters (thus, matters that are NOT commanded, prohibited or taught in the Bible). However, they have no right or freedom to express or exercise that right or freedom when it causes a weak Christian to stumble in his faith. The law of love is far more important than the law of rights and freedom!

A strong Christian may not publicly express his opinion or conviction concerning a disputable matter when it causes the weak Christian to stumble in his faith. He may also not exercise his right or freedom in the area of disputable matters in the presence of weak Christians. When he nevertheless misuses that right or freedom, he destroys his brother. Therefore, whenever a Christian is present who has a weak faith in a particular matter, a strong Christians may not express or exercise that conviction. Personal rights and personal freedoms within the Christian Community are not as important as showing love towards a Christian who has an opinion or conviction with regard to a disputable matter.

(2) Christians should let their conduct be determined by what edifies the other person

(Romans 14:13,15).

Christians may not destroy one another (Romans 14:15). They may not destroy God's work in another Christian (Romans 14:20). The word "destroy" (Greek: *apollumi*) is a very strong word (1 Corinthians 8:11). However, here it does not refer to apostasy from the Christian faith and also not to eternal perdition.

All sin is destructive. When a strong Christian exercises his right and freedom with regard to a disputable matter without considering the opinion, conviction or belief of the weak Christian, he is acting destructively, that is, he sins against the brother and against God. The sin of the strong Christian is that he violates the demands of love and that he fails to exercise concern for the religious well-being of his brother. His loveless conduct is the cause that the weak Christian stumbles in his faith concerning the disputable matters. It is the cause that the opinion or conviction of the weak Christian with regard to a disputable matter is being destroyed.

Also when the weak Christian allows his religious conviction to be overturned by the conduct of the strong Christian, he acts destructively towards himself, that is, he also sins against himself and against God. The sin of the weak Christian is that he violates his personal religious conviction and his conscience. If the weak Christian would continue to violate his personal convictions and conscience, and if this breach of fidelity is not repaired, it could lead to serious problems in his faith and in his personality. Nevertheless, also in his case, the Lord is able to make him stand (Romans 14:4).

The strong Christian should consider the effect that his convictions and conduct could have on weak Christians. Neither the strong nor the weak Christian may take refuge behind the biblical doctrines of the security of Christians and the final perseverance of Christians. Weak Christians are still God's workmanship (Ephesians 2:10) and God is not yet finished building him up. Therefore, strong Christians may not break down the faith and convictions of the weak Christians by the loveless display of their own rights and freedom.

(3) Christians have the responsibility, not to promote their own rights and freedom, but to promote God's kingdom (Romans 14:17-19).

When the rights and freedom of the strong Christian become the cause of damage to the weak Christian, then his rights and freedom come into disrepute. What is essential in God's kingdom is not holding strong opinions or convictions on disputable matters, but to promote "love" (John 13:34-35) and "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). The kingdom of God is the realm to which all (strong and weak) Christians belong, the sphere in which God's sovereign rule is recognised and his will is supreme! It is the world to which a Christian belongs.

When questions of food and drink become the chief concern, then it becomes apparent how far the thoughts and behaviour of people have strayed from the interests of God's kingdom. The Christian responsibilities in God's kingdom are to do what is right in God's eyes, to promote peace in personal relationships, to only do what edifies others, so that everyone may experience joy. Only by doing these things, Christians serve Christ, are well pleasing to God and are approved by other people, especially non-Christians (Romans 14:18-19). Inconsiderate conduct on the part of strong Christians has tremendous repercussions in the estimate and judgements of non-Christians. Christians should not give the enemy occasion to speak reproachfully of the Christian Church. Doing what is right in God's eyes and harmony in relationships are the two things that must govern the attitude and conduct of Christians in the fellowship of the church.

14:20b-23

Question 4. What is the relationship between one's convictions concerning the disputable (controversial) matters and sin?

Notes. Both strong and weak Christians have opinions, convictions or beliefs about disputable matters. However, when a person does not live according to them, he sins.

(1) Christians may not do anything against their personal convictions.

Romans 14:20 literally says, "It is wrong for a man, who eats (by what he eats) (causes himself or the other to) stumbling (Greek: *proskomma*)." According to some interpreters the reference is to a weak Christian who eats and drinks against his own conscience. His behaviour shows that he is not acting with conviction. He sins, because "he doubts while he eats." He is condemned because he does not act in faith. And everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). According to others, the reference is to a strong Christian who gives offence to the weak Christian by what he eats and drinks (he cause him to stumble in his convictions). The behaviour of the strong Christian causes agonies of doubt. Both translations are possible, but the last is better. The weak Christian stumbles when he eats against his own personal conviction, that is, when he eats without a clear conscience and without faith (Romans 14:14,23).

Therefore, in Romans 14:21, the strong Christian is exhorted not to do anything that would ultimately cause the weak Christian to stumble. It says, "It is better not to eat meat (that was first offered to the idols as a sacrifice and consequently sold on the market) or drink wine (that was first offered to the idols and afterwards sold on the market) or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall (Greek: *proskoptó*). The weak in faith were convinced that eating and drinking what had been offered to idols, was "polluted" (Romans 14:14).

In this respect it is good to remember the words of Jesus Christ, “Nothing outside a man can make him “unclean” by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him ‘unclean’” (Mark 7:15-23).

(2) Christians must do all things from faith, that is, according to their personal convictions.

Strong Christians have the right to hold strong opinions or convictions about their freedoms and to exercise their freedoms in the disputable matters (Romans 14:22). However, they may not surrender their personal convictions, because if they do, they would act without faith (Romans 14:23). They may also not parade or protest their rights and freedoms to the detriment of weak Christians. Instead, they must keep their opinions and convictions about the disputable matters between themselves and God (Romans 14:22).

Weak Christians have the right to hold different opinions or convictions about the same disputable matters and refrain from doing what the strong Christians do (Romans 14:22). However, they too may not surrender their personal convictions, because if they do, they too would act without faith (Romans 14:23). They may not do anything about which they have doubts or about which their conscience condemns them. Although weak Christians may be tempted by the example of strong Christians to violate their own convictions, they remain responsible that all their actions is done from a personal conviction. Romans 14:23 says, “The man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.” When a weak Christian nevertheless violates his own conscience and does something he is convinced he should not do, he is acting without faith. Doing anything without faith is sin.

That is why both strong and weak Christians must only do those things that they subjectively (personally) believe is right. It is only by faith that Christians stand firm.

STEP 4. APPLY.

APPLICATIONS

Consider. WHICH TRUTHS IN THIS PASSAGE ARE POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS?

Share and record. Let us brainstorm with one another and record a list of possible applications from Romans 14:1-23.

Consider. WHICH POSSIBLE APPLICATION DOES GOD WANT YOU TO TURN INTO A PERSONAL APPLICATION?

Record. Write this personal application down in your notebook. Feel free to share your personal application.

(Remember that people in every group will apply different truths or even make different applications of the same truth. The following is a list of possible applications.)

1. Examples of possible applications from Romans 14:1-23.

- 14:1,3. The strong Christian should accept the scruples, opinions, convictions or beliefs of the weak Christian in disputable matters without passing judgement and without looking down upon him or his scruples.
- 14:3. The weak Christian should not condemn the strong Christian for holding different opinions, convictions or beliefs concerning the disputable matters.
- 14:5,23. Both weak and strong Christians should be fully convinced about what they subjectively believe is true and right for themselves concerning the disputable matters. They should only act in any area when they believe that it is true and right for themselves!
- 14:6-9. Whatever a Christian does in the area of disputable matters, he should do it to the Lord and thank the Lord.
- 14:10-12. Christians should live in a way that shows that they are fully aware that they have to give an account of their personal lives before the judgement seat of God.
- 14:13,20. Strong Christians should make up their minds never to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of weak Christians and never to destroy God’s work in them.
- 14:14. Although all food is clean in itself, a weak Christian should only eat what he believes is clean for himself.
- 14:15,21. A strong Christian should refrain from eating meat or drinking wine whenever it causes distress to any weak Christian that is present.
- 14:15. The conduct of strong Christians should be determined, not by their rights and freedoms, but by their love for God, their neighbour and themselves.
- 14:16,22. Strong Christians should not allow weak Christians to speak evil of disputable matters that they consider to be good. They should also not condemn themselves that they hold such opinions, convictions or beliefs.
- 14:17,19. The conduct of Christians is determined by God’s kingship that requires them to do what is right in God’s eyes, to live in peace with people that have different opinions and to build one another up.
- 14:22. Strong and weak Christians should keep their opinions or convictions regarding the disputable matters between themselves and God.

2. Examples of personal applications from Romans 14:1-23.

I want to be more careful not to criticise, judge, condemn or look down upon the opinions of other Christians in the area of disputable matters.

I want to be more careful not to say or do anything that may cause another Christian to stumble in his Christian faith.

STEP 5. PRAY.**RESPONSE**

LET US TAKE TURNS TO PRAY ABOUT ONE TRUTH THAT GOD HAS TAUGHT US in Romans 14:1-23. (Respond in your prayer to what you have learned during this Bible study. Practise to pray only in one or two sentences. Remember that people in every group will pray about different issues.)

5**PRAYER** (8 minutes)

**[INTERCESSION]
PRAY FOR OTHERS**

Continue to pray in groups of two's or three's. Pray for one another and for the people in the world (Romans 15:30; Colossians 4:12).

6**PREPARATION** (2 minutes)

**[ASSIGNMENT]
FOR NEXT LESSON**

(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples, build the Church and preach the kingdom.
2. Preach, teach or study Romans 14:1-23 with another person or group of people.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time from half a chapter of **Daniel 2, 3, 4, 6** each day.
Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. **(18) Romans 13:8.** Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. Teaching. Prepare **the parable of "the ten virgins"** in Matthew 25:1-13.
Make use of the six guidelines for interpreting parables.
6. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. Update your notebook on preaching God's kingdom. Include your notes on quiet time, your memorisation notes, your Bible study notes and this preparation.