

ROMANS: RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH FROM START TO FINISH

X. Righteousness Applied To Life And Service, Romans 12:1-15:13

G. Righteousness Applied To Guarding Other Believers' Consciences

(Romans 14:13-23)

I. Introduction

- A. The theme of the epistle to the Romans is that God's righteousness is available to man by faith from start to finish (Romans 1:16-17; Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 441).
- B. This belief is often not accepted in Christendom: Some claim that one must have faith plus works to be justified, and others say that though we are justified by faith, we cannot righteously live a godly life by faith.
- C. In Romans 14:1-12, Paul directed his readers not to judge weaker believers, but in Romans 14:13-23, he took another step in urging his readers to protect the consciences of weaker believers by the way they lived.
- D. We thus study Romans 14:13-23 for our insight and application (as follows):

II. Righteousness Applied To Guarding Other Believers' Consciences, Romans 14:13-23.

- A. In summing up his teaching in Romans 14:1-12, Paul in Romans 14:13a asserted, "no longer let us keep on judging or condemning one another" (present subjunctive with *krinomen*) on debatable issues. Then, he shifted to direct his readers to act with self-restraint toward weaker believers when he wrote that they should not place a stumbling block (*proskomma*, lit., "something a person trips over") or obstacle (*skandalon*, lit., "trap, snare," or "anything that leads another to sin") in another believer's path, Romans 14:13b. (Ibid., p. 493)
- B. To illustrate what he meant by this directive, Paul stated that he was persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is no food that was unclean for a believer in Christ today, but to a weaker believer who regards any food to be unclean before God, to him it is unclean and sinful to ingest, Romans 14:14.
- C. Accordingly, if a spiritually weaker believer who thinks some foods are sinful to eat is offended by a stronger believer's taking the liberty to ingest those foods, the believer who uses his liberty in Christ to eat those foods to the offense of the weaker believer does not act in a loving manner, Romans 14:15a. Paul thus told the stronger believer not to harm the conscience of the weaker brother for whom Christ died by ingesting the foods in question, Romans 14:15b. Stronger believers should thus not let what they consider to be good, namely, the liberty to ingest the foods in question, be spoken of as evil by weaker believers, Romans 14:16.
- D. "After all, food . . . is not the sum and substance of the kingdom of God. But . . . righteousness (upright living), peace . . . and joy in (the sphere of) the Holy Spirit . . . are essentials of Christian fellowship and harmony," Romans 14:17. (Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 493-494) Paul's statement here recalls Christ's claim that man was not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man, cf. Mark 2:27. In other words, God never meant for rules to be an end in themselves, but the means to expressing godly relationships in the Lord.
- E. If a believer then considers how not to "ruin" or wound the conscience of a weaker believer in refraining from exercising his liberties in the Lord, his service to Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men, including fellow weak believers, Romans 14:18. (Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T.)
- F. We should then practice what makes for peace in edifying fellow believers rather than destroying the discipling work of God in other believers for the sake of using our liberty before God to eat foods that are offensive to the weak, Romans 14:19-20. Indeed, it is good neither to eat meat nor to drink wine or to do anything else by which a brother in Christ is made to stumble in his walk, is offended in conscience or is made spiritually weaker, Romans 14:21.
- G. To make the application practical, Paul directed that believers who have the faith to exercise liberties should rejoice before God that they have those liberties, Romans 14:22. However, if a believer struggles with doubt over whether to exercise a certain liberty regarding a certain practice, he is guilty of sin for exercising that liberty because he functions without faith in God, and any activity performed without faith in the Lord regarding that activity is to be avoided as sin, Romans 14:23.

Lesson: *Though spiritually strong believers know that they have the liberty in Christ to live free of the dictates of the Mosaic Law's restrictions on people in the Old Testament and free of the taboos of the consciences of weak believers fresh out of paganism, they must not exercise those liberties if it wounds the consciences of the weak.*

Application: *(1) May we be sensitive to how exercising our liberties in Christ affect other believers around us so that if we discern that we offend their consciences, we then restrain from exercising those liberties. (2) May we then not live to ourselves for our own gratification but live unto the Lord in relating with consideration for others.*