

# ***Salvation by Faith Alone: The Book of Romans Christian Living***

Lesson #13 for December 30, 2017

Scriptures: Romans 14-16.

1. Romans 14 deals with the question of what is acceptable practice for a believing Christian. The particular question being discussed was food offered to idols. There are several very significant issues involved. Do we need to judge others in order to set them straight?
2. Read Romans 14:1-5. First of all, we need to understand that the issue was not vegetarianism. Paul was writing from Corinth. In Corinth almost all of the roads entering the city had pagan temples on them. It was expected that if one was bringing flesh food or alcohol into the city for sale, he would stop at one of those pagan temples and offer a portion of the commodity as an offering to the idol, thus dedicating all of it to that idol. The question for Christians was: "Is it acceptable to purchase food in the market and eat it if that food may have been offered to such an idol?" Furthermore, those pagan temples received much more meat and wine than the priests could consume. So, they opened up "restaurants" connected to those temples to prepare and sell some of the meat that they had received. Would it be acceptable for a Christian to eat a meal in such a restaurant? What did they think would happen if he did? Was he worshipping that idol? On one side, those who had come from pagan backgrounds believed that eating such food was in some way worshipping that idol. Others asserted that those idols were nothing more than chunks of stone, wood, or metal; and the idols could not affect the food in any way! But, that's not all. There were also the laws of kosher that some Jewish Christians still honored.
3. Read Acts 15:28-29. The issue was made somewhat more complicated by the fact that Paul had previously attended the Jerusalem Council where it had been decided:

<sup>28</sup>The Holy Spirit and we have agreed not to put any other burden on you besides these necessary rules: <sup>29</sup>eat no food that has been offered to idols; eat no blood; eat no animal that has been strangled; and keep yourselves from sexual immorality. You will do well if you take care not to do these things. With our best wishes.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Acts 15:28-29). New York: American Bible Society.

These very explicit instructions had come from church headquarters.

4. Since Paul was in Corinth dealing with mostly Gentile believers there and writing a book to the Roman believers who were also largely Gentiles, was he free to ignore the advice given at the Jerusalem Council even though the decisions at that conference were inspired by the Holy Spirit? (See Acts 15:28.) To get the full context, one must read 1 Corinthians 8&10 (especially 1 Corinthians 8 & 10:23-11:1). Paul was clearly overriding the decision made by the "general conference" in Jerusalem and recognizing that the cultural situation he was dealing with required a different approach. Paul was suggesting that what matters is not so much the eating of the meat which may have been offered to an idol, but how one relates to other members in the Christian church. Is that the way we should relate to church authority? Some would call such an approach "situation ethics." Is that ever appropriate for a Seventh-day Adventist Christian?

**1 Corinthians 8:1-13:** <sup>1</sup>Now, concerning what you wrote about food offered to idols. It is true, of course, that "all of us have knowledge", as they say. Such

knowledge, however, puffs a person up with pride; but love builds up. <sup>2</sup>Those who think they know something really don't know as they ought to know. <sup>3</sup>But the person who loves God is known by him.

<sup>4</sup> So then, about eating the food offered to idols: we know that an idol stands for something that does not really exist; we know that there is only the one God. <sup>5</sup>Even if there are so-called "gods", whether in heaven or on earth, and even though there are many of these "gods" and "lords", <sup>6</sup>yet there is for us only one God, the Father, who is the Creator of all things and for whom we live; and there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things were created and through whom we live.

<sup>7</sup> But not everyone knows this truth. Some people have been so used to idols that to this day when they eat such food they still think of it as food that belongs to an idol; their conscience is weak, and they feel they are defiled by the food. <sup>8</sup>Food, however, will not improve our relations with God; we shall not lose anything if we do not eat, nor shall we gain anything if we do eat.

<sup>9</sup> Be careful, however, not to let your freedom of action make those who are weak in the faith fall into sin. <sup>10</sup>Suppose a person whose conscience is weak in this matter sees you, who have so-called "knowledge", eating in the temple of an idol; will not this encourage him to eat food offered to idols? <sup>11</sup>And so this weak person, your brother for whom Christ died, will perish because of your "knowledge"! <sup>12</sup>And in this way you will be sinning against Christ by sinning against your Christian brothers and sisters and wounding their weak conscience. <sup>13</sup>So then, if food makes my brother or sister sin, I will never eat meat again, so as not to make my brother or sister fall into sin.—*Ibid.*\* 1 Corinthians 8:1-13.

**1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1:** <sup>23</sup> "We are allowed to do anything," so they say. That is true, but not everything is good. "We are allowed to do anything"—but not everything is helpful. <sup>24</sup>None of you should be looking to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

<sup>25</sup> You are free to eat anything sold in the meat market, without asking any questions because of your conscience. <sup>26</sup>For, as the scripture says, "The earth and everything in it belong to the Lord."

<sup>27</sup> If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you decide to go, eat what is set before you, without asking any questions because of your conscience. <sup>28</sup>But if someone says to you, "This food was offered to idols," then do not eat that food, for the sake of the one who told you and for conscience' sake — <sup>29</sup>that is, not your own conscience, but the other person's conscience.

"Well, then," someone asks, "why should my freedom to act be limited by another person's conscience? <sup>30</sup>If I thank God for my food, why should anyone criticize me about food for which I give thanks?"

<sup>31</sup> Well, whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do it all for God's glory. <sup>32</sup>Live in such a way as to cause no trouble either to Jews or Gentiles or to the church of God. <sup>33</sup>Just do as I do; I try to please everyone in all that I do, not thinking of my own good, but of the good of all, so that they might be saved.

**11** Imitate me, then, just as I imitate Christ.—*Ibid.*\* 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1.

5. It is interesting to compare Paul's approach in this setting to that of Daniel as recorded in Daniel 1. Review the story. While Seventh-day Adventists have often used the example of Daniel as proof that vegetarianism is God's first choice of diet, in fact, the primary reason why Daniel rejected the king's diet was because the food and drink had been offered to the Babylonian gods. Proof of this is found in Daniel 10:2-3 where Daniel suggested that on other occasions when he was not in mourning, he did occasionally eat meat and drink wine! Thus, by refusing to eat the king's food, Daniel and his friends were rejecting the Babylonian gods. And after three years, they were better looking, healthier, and smarter than any of the others. Did that have anything to do with food offered to idols?
6. In Romans, Paul was speaking to believers in Rome saying that those who were strong in their faith could eat whatever was sold in the market without asking any questions with regard to conscience. That was not a discussion about what was healthy. In Paul's day, he believed that taking this approach was saying that by eating the meat, one rejected the idols because he did not believe that offering the food to them affected the food in any way. Thus, Daniel and Paul did opposite things but for the same reason—to reject idols. What will Paul and Daniel have to say to each other in heaven? While Daniel was rejecting the Babylonian gods, fortunately, he also was eating the healthiest diet. Both Daniel and Paul were doing what Paul recommended in Romans 14; i.e. think through the issues, discuss it with your friends, pray for guidance, and then act in the most intelligent way you can.
7. Paul was saying that we need to keep in mind the judgment day. That day is much closer now that it was in the days of Paul. Ellen White said:

I have been shown that many who profess to have a knowledge of present truth know not what they believe. They do not understand the evidences of their faith. They have no just appreciation of the work for the present time. When the time of trial shall come, there are men now preaching to others who will find, upon examining the positions they hold, that there are many things for which they can give no satisfactory reason. Until thus tested they knew not their great ignorance. And there are many in the church who take it for granted that they understand what they believe; but, until controversy arises, they do not know their own weakness. **When separated from those of like faith and compelled to stand singly and alone to explain their belief, they will be surprised to see how confused are their ideas of what they had accepted as truth.** Certain it is that there has been among us a departure from the living God and a turning to men, putting human in place of divine wisdom.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*,\* vol. 5, 707.2; *CWE*\* 39.3; *AG*\* 30.3; *GW*\* 298.3; *LDE*\* 70.1; *Mar*\* 45.2. [Bold type is added.]

8. Paul did not have any questions about whether what he believed was solidly based on the truth. He did not care who disagreed with him! See Galatians 1:6-9.
9. Some of our Christian friends have used Romans 14 along with 1 Corinthians 10:25; Mark 7:18-19; and 1 Timothy 4:1-5 to suggest that the Seventh-day Adventist emphasis on a healthy diet is no longer required by God. How should we interpret those verses? Read in their full context, they are passages talking about people who for conscience or ceremonial reasons did certain things which they thought were right. If the only reason why you avoid certain items of food is for ceremonial reasons, then perhaps these verses do apply to you! Idols do not have the power to “hex” food. Does one become ceremonially unclean by touching or eating such foods? What about David eating the bread from the sanctuary

which was to be eaten only by the priest?

10. Those who are familiar with the Adventist Health Study and other related research projects are aware that following a healthy Adventist lifestyle can add up to 10 years to one's life. A young person might be inclined to say: "I don't care to live 10 more years at the end of my life in some nursing home!" It turns out that if you eat the healthier diet when you are young, you stay "young" longer. So, the years you add will be healthy years—not just 10 more years at the end in a nursing home!
11. There were also apparently some formerly-Jewish believers in Rome who were encouraging the Christian believers to adopt the keeping of certain ceremonial sabbaths. At one time, there were quite a number of those ceremonial sabbaths. Paul placed the keeping of those ceremonial sabbaths in the same category as eating food offered to idols.
12. But, there is another major issue to consider. The Jerusalem Council took place not to establish the basic foundation principles of Christianity—which it clearly did not address at all—but to establish criteria that would make it comfortable for formerly-Jewish Christians to worship together with formerly-Gentile Christians! It was all about getting along at church and not being repulsed by sitting next to another person who followed different ceremonial rules. Remember that in the early years, they almost always ate at least one meal together after worshiping together.
13. So, Paul went on to say that those who have a judgmental attitude—and from either side of the argument are condemning their opponents—are destroying the very peace and harmony God intended for Christian churches. What happens when a church chooses up sides and begins throwing verbal darts at each other? Today, the arguments might be over dress or jewelry or what kind of music to play in church. Those are not core issues.
14. Honestly now, considering the full span of history especially since early Christian times, is it the seventh-day Sabbath or the ceremonial sabbaths that have created the most controversy? Through the history of our world, far more controversy has arisen over the seventh-day Sabbath than over any ceremonial sabbath. Why is that? Satan understands very well that a correct understand and observance of the seventh-day Sabbath will lead people to honor and admire our true Creator and God. That is a far bigger issue than any involving a ceremonial sabbath, and Satan knows it. He will do anything to prevent our correct worship on God's holy day. The real issue is how we worship God on that day.
15. Does that mean that we are free to condemn those who do not observe the seventh-day Sabbath in just the way we do? Of course not! We may try to present the truth to them in a winning and convincing way; but, even if they are not persuaded when we have done our best, it never gives us permission to condemn them. It never helps to beat people over the head with one's arguments. That would just drive them away. You cannot antagonize and persuade at the same time!
16. While vegetarianism is indisputably a healthier lifestyle for most of us, it should not become a matter of condemnation either! Remember that Abraham and Sarah fed beef to the LORD and two angels. (Genesis 18:6-8) Did the LORD refuse to eat it? Not at all! Did the LORD ask for a second helping? Jesus fed thousands of people fish. (Matthew 14:13-21; 15:32-38) Jesus even created fish for His disciples to eat. (John 21:9) Or, should we say as one student did when asked: "Why do you think Jesus fed the disciples fish on the beach?" He replied: "I understand that He was living up to all the light He had!" No! It was what they were accustomed to eating. He also ate fish after His resurrection! (Luke 24:42-43)

Christ never worked a miracle except to supply a genuine necessity, and

every miracle was of a character to lead the people to the tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. **The simple food [367] passed round by the hands of the disciples contained a whole treasure of lessons. It was humble fare that had been provided; the fishes and barley loaves were the daily food of the fisher folk about the Sea of Galilee.** Christ could have spread before the people a rich repast, but food prepared merely for the gratification of appetite would have conveyed no lesson for their good. Christ taught them in this lesson that the natural provisions of God for man had been perverted. And never did people enjoy the luxurious feasts prepared for the gratification of perverted taste as this people enjoyed the rest and the simple food which Christ provided so far from human habitations.—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*\* 366.1. [Bold type is added.]

17. It was not a time for a lecture on health reform! Does this mean that our message on diet is not important? Of course not! As usual, we must interpret everything we read in the Bible in the context in which it was written. The question there was: “How can former-pagans worship and eat together with former-Jews without getting upset by each other’s behavior?”
18. Read Romans 14:19-23. Paul discussed eating food offered to idols, keeping ceremonial sabbaths—even keeping the true Sabbath—and then he went on to effectively say: “Please do not do anything that will upset others within the church. If you have special beliefs about what is permitted and what is not permitted, keep that between yourself and the LORD.”
19. What is implied by Romans 14:22-23? If you feel guilty about doing something, does that make it a sin? Would it be damaging to your conscience? And why would God condemn such people? And then Paul concluded by writing: “**Anything that is not based on faith is sin!**” What does that teach us about faith and sin? If we lack faith and love, we sin.
20. God wants our minds to be as clear as possible and our thinking to be as good as possible. What if we have our minds preoccupied with something that we have done that gives us a guilty conscience? Can we be thinking clearly about the truth?
21. There are three definitions of *sin* in the New Testament. We usually refer to 1 John 3:4: “Sin is the transgression of the law,” (*KJV*) or more correctly as it should be translated, “Sin is lawlessness” or “rebelliousness.” But, what about the definition in James 4:17 (*GNB*): “So then, if we do not do the good we know we should do, we are guilty of sin.” Is there any limit to the good we know we should do? But, in Romans 14:23 (*GNB*) we read: “Anything that is not based on faith is sin.” What does that imply? If faith is a relationship with God that helps us to become more like Him on a daily basis because by beholding we become changed, then sin would be anything that separates us from God. (Isaiah 59:2) If we are moving closer to God with the help of the Holy Spirit, we are acting in faith. If we are moving further away from God by following the Devil’s example and our own selfishness, we are sinning. Sin and faith are opposites. This is the most basic definition of *sin* and *faith* in the entire Bible. In what way does this verse serve as a conclusion to our discussion about food offered to idols? If we really claim to be Christians, we need to orient our lives to the standards that we have been given by God. Our lives are to be based on “principle.” If we operate contrary to God’s principles, we are moving farther away from God.
22. Paul proceeded in Romans 15:1-6 to speak to the “strong” to remind them that it is their duty to help the weak rather than to destroy their faith by putting stumbling blocks in their way. If we take the loving approach, we are helpful. If we take the selfish approach, we are destructive.

23. Read Romans 15:7-13. Paul began to summarize by repeating his earlier points that the gospel was given to the Jews, (Romans 3:1-4) but also that it was intended for the Gentiles. His proof was that it says so in the Scriptures—the Old Testament! (2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49; Deuteronomy 32:43; Psalm 117:1; Isaiah 11:10) So, the gospel is clearly intended for both Jews and Gentiles.
24. Paul was not apologizing for speaking so boldly about what he believed. He had set as a goal for himself to preach the gospel in places where no one had done so before. Do not forget how Paul felt about the core issues in the gospel! (Galatians 1:8-9) That brought him to Romans 15:22-33 where he spelled out his plans to visit Rome and to travel on to Spain. But, first he had to make a visit to Jerusalem to carry the large sum of money that he had collected among the Gentiles to help the suffering and poor among the Christians in Palestine. This was going to turn out to be Paul's last book written in complete freedom. When he got to Jerusalem, he was arrested and imprisoned and finally transferred to Rome where he appeared before Nero.
25. Some people wonder how Paul could know so many people in Rome having never been there. It reminds us of the famous ancient saying, "All roads lead to Rome." No doubt, Paul had worked with numerous people particularly in Asia Minor and Greece who had decided to visit Rome or perhaps to move there for business reasons. Some may even have traveled there hoping to spread the gospel.
26. What are we supposed to do with Paul's words in Romans 16:16 (*GNB*): "Greet one another with the kiss of peace." In some parts of the world, that would seem very natural. In other areas, they would expect a big hug. In conservative England, it might be better as J. B. Phillips suggested in his translation of the New Testament: "Give one another a hearty handshake all round for my sake."
27. Notice that Paul was still working with Timothy who sent his greetings. But, how do we explain Romans 16:22 (*GNB*): "I, Tertius, the writer of this letter, send you Christian greetings." Was Paul not the author of Romans? Certainly, he was. However, that was not the issue in this section. Tertius was simply the secretary or amanuensis that Paul had been using.
28. Then, Paul concluded with a glorious prayer of praise. (Romans 16:25-27)
29. Romans is, no doubt, the most comprehensive and far-reaching declaration about the gospel in all of Scripture. It focuses particularly on the implications of the life and death of Jesus Christ. Those implications are broad and deep. It would have enormous implications for the Christian church if Christians read it regularly and sought for an ever deeper understanding of its many meanings. In Romans we see Paul's answers to such critical questions as: Why did Jesus have to die? Has God given up on His friends, the Jews? What is the meaning of baptism? Since all human beings are sinners, is there any basis for us condemning each other? And when dealing with such delicate matters as eating food offered to idols, what is the right approach for Christians? This lesson has enormous implications for conservatives and liberals in the Christian church today.
30. Imagine how different things would be on this earth if all Christians lived out the principles outlined in the book of Romans!

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