

QUESTIONABLE THINGS, PART 1

TEXT: ROMANS 14:1-12

INTRODUCTION:

1. Romans chapter 14 deals with “doubtful disputations” (14:1), or “questionable things.”
2. Certain things are clearly wrong (13:9, 13), and where the Bible is clear we must take our stand.
3. But there are certain areas of conduct on which the Bible has no clear word. This chapter provides some helpful guidelines.
4. In each local church there are mature believers (“We then that are strong” – 15:1) and there are also weak believers (“him that is weak in faith” – 14:1).
5. Oftentimes these two groups disagree on how the Christian is to deal with questionable things. For example, some Jewish Christians still cling to special holy days and Old Testament dietary laws, while Gentile believers believe that is unnecessary (cf. 14:5-7).
6. In I Corinthians 8, Paul deals with a similar problem– whether or not to eat meat that had been offered to idols.
7. Paul explains that we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. But he goes on to explain that when certain believers see Christians eat meat that had been offered to an idol, “their conscience being weak is defiled” (I Corinthians 8:4, 7).
8. Here is an important principle – we should try not to offend our brothers and sisters in Christ (cf. Romans 14:19-21).
9. This is all part of the “law of love” (cf. 13:8-10).
10. When something is doubtful, it is always wiser to take the safer side. And if others do not see it our way, we need to be patient with them.

I. WE SHOULD NOT ENGAGE IN DOUBTFUL DISPUTATIONS (14:1).

1. We are to receive the weak but sincere believer into fellowship, but we should not quarrel with him upon matters of no importance.
2. There has been some disagreement among Christians as to the identity of the “weak in the faith” Christian (14:1).
3. W.H. Griffith Thomas says “weak” does not refer “to any essential or inherent defect of character, but simply to the lack of true spiritual breadth and moral perception” (*St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*).
4. Albert Barnes said it refers to “those who had scruples about the propriety of certain things, or that might have peculiar prejudices and feelings as the result of education or former habits of belief.”
5. Barnes said they are “not fully established, or not with so clear and enlarged views about Christian liberty as others might have.”
6. H.A. Ironside said the “weak in the faith” refers to “those whose uninstructed consciences cause them to be in trouble as to things indifferent” (*Romans*).
7. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, “Circumstances had thus arisen which troubled the Christians and were causing dissension, and so it becomes necessary for St. Paul to inculcate the spirit of Christian love by means of mutual forbearance in things indifferent” (*St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*).
8. Many of these “weaker” Christians were Jews who were unwilling to give up certain rules regarding food and days (14:2, 5, 6).
9. Though these Scriptures refer to food and days, we can apply these principles to other questionable things. For example, some Christians will not eat in a restaurant on the Lord’s Day.
10. Some Christians will not eat in a restaurant that serves alcohol.
11. Some Christians do not own a television.
12. I respect Christians with strong convictions but when the Bible is not clear we are not to judge those who see things differently.
13. I am not referring to things that are clearly wrong –like getting drunk (I believe in total abstinence), or watching television programs that are dirty or use bad language, etc.
14. We must take a stand against sin. But some things are not clearly right or wrong (14:1-4).

II. WE SHOULD NOT JUDGE OTHER BELIEVERS (14:3, 10).

1. The strong must not despise the weak.
2. The weak must not be critical of the strong.
3. The Christian (whether he be a Jew or a Gentile) who realizes he is free to “eat all things” (14:2) must not despise the Christian who avoids certain foods (14:2, 3).
4. On the other hand, the Christian that “eateth not” should not judge “him that eateth” (14:3).
5. “Despise” means to “set at nought” (14:10). Same Greek word.
6. Romans 14:4 says, “Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?” Paul is using the relationship between a master and his servant to illustrate his point. The Lord is our Master, and we have no right to judge one of His servants.
7. “For God is able to make him stand” (14:4b).
8. Here is what J. Vernon McGee had to say about this Scripture.
"Paul asks, ‘What right have you to judge another man’s servant?’ What right have you, Christian friend, to sit in judgment on another Christian’s conduct when it involves something that is questionable? Are you God? Is that person accountable to you? Paul says, ‘He is not accountable to you. He is accountable to God. He is going to stand before his own Master.’ Can you imagine being a dinner guest in someone’s home and the servant brings in cold biscuits. You say to the servant, ‘What’s the big idea of bringing me cold biscuits?’ And you chide — in our common colloquialism, bawl out — the servant! May I say to you, there would be an awkward silence in that home. That person is not your servant. Maybe she should not have served cold biscuits, but it is not your place to say so. I have a notion that the lady of the house will go back to the kitchen and will tend to the matter. Now maybe you disapprove of my conduct in one of these doubtful areas. I don’t have to account to you; you are not my master. I am responsible to Jesus Christ. He is my Master” (*Thru the Bible*).

III. THE CONTROVERSY OVER DAYS (14:5-10)

1. Romans 14:5, 6 is referring specifically to Jewish Christians who felt compelled to observe the Saturday Sabbath and other special days associated with Judaism.

2. The book of Galatians deals with this (cf. Galatians 4:9, 10).
3. In the epistle to the Galatians, observing days and months and times and years is referred to as “bondage” (4:9) because the Judaizers did so as a condition of salvation or sanctification.
4. But here in Romans 14, the “weaker brethren” observed these days, not as a condition of salvation or sanctification, but as a matter of conscience.
5. Therefore, we should not judge him for his sincere convictions. “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind” (14:5b).
6. We can apply this passage today to the way some Christians make a big ado over Easter (and so-called “Good Friday”) and Christmas and other days, while others scorn them.
7. When I was living in Virginia, I mentioned to some Baptist friends that many Baptist churches in New York had “Good Friday” services. My Southern friends were shocked. They considered it a Roman Catholic or Episcopal holy day.
8. Many Protestant churches make much about the seasons of Lent and Advent but Baptists ignore these days and seasons.
9. Many churches think it is very important to have a Christmas Eve service but most Baptists do not consider it important.
10. Just about every year someone will give me an article, or send me an email describing how Christmas is a pagan holiday, etc.
11. “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind”(14:5b).
12. No man has the right to impose upon others his own convictions. When people try to do this it never works. Each Christian should have his own personal convictions, and then he should follow the dictates of his own conscience in matters not specifically commanded or prohibited in Scripture.
13. Before we conclude, let me say that I do not think these references to days (14:5, 6) apply to the Lord’s Day. While some may take their Sunday observance too far, God has given us the Lord’s Day for our blessing. Therefore, I believe Christians should do everything they can to avoid working on Sunday. Furthermore, I believe worldly chores and recreations should be avoided.
14. D.L. Moody said the Lord’s Day “is just as practicable and as necessary for men today as it ever was – in fact, more than ever, because we live in such an intense age.”
15. If it was “such an intense age” over 100 years ago when D.L. Moody said that, what about this crazy, hectic day and age in which we live?

16. “For none of us liveth to himself...” (14:7). As Christians we cannot live for self. We cannot live our lives apart from Christ (14:8).

CONCLUSION:

1. The great principle taught here is the Lordship of Christ (14:8). The solution to these disagreements among Christians is total surrender to the Lordship of Christ (14:7-9).
2. Our relationship to Christ is based upon on His death and resurrection (14:9).
3. We will stand before the judgment seat of Christ some day and give an account (14:10-12).
4. These verses can be summarized this way – “Judge not thy brother, for God will judge him. Judge thyself, for God will judge thee” (Godet).