

## Romans

Dr. Charles “Buddy” Parrish  
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Romans 14:21-15:6



Romans 14:21 – 15:6

Vss. 21-23

- Staying with his theme, Paul offers some practical advice. He understands too well just how fragile a young faith may be and also how fragile a church may be. The Apostle also understands that the Original Sin is just as potentially deadly to us as it was to Adam and Eve. And to be clear, that mortal sin is Pride.
- You can well understand when the church requires celibacy of her priests that sexual temptation becomes the obvious most common fatal temptation. But to say it is the Original Sin as the church at least implied for centuries is to deny what is clear in scripture, that Adam and Eve ingested what was forbidden because they wanted to “be like God” (Genesis 3:5) and we’ve been pridefully trying to make ourselves to be gods ever since.
- At issue here is the use and misuse of Christian freedom. As with every freedom comes equal responsibility. So in vs. 21 Paul is saying, “Yes, the meat is clean and the wine is clean. I eat and drink it myself. **BUT**, I will limit myself, restrict myself, if I even **think** that something I am doing may cause damage to someone else’s faith!”. Baptists have been teased for 300 years for being “tea totalers”, but the reason Baptists have traditionally abstained from alcohol is not because alcohol by itself is evil. Paul instructs Timothy to “use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments” (1 Timothy 5:23), as Baptists have been well aware. No, Baptists have primarily abstained from alcohol so that they would do nothing “by which your brother stumbles”. The national debate 100 years ago on Prohibition is looked upon as quaint today, but alcohol abuse destroys more lives, marriages, and families than anything else. Arguing that other drugs should be legal because alcohol is legal is like arguing that we should have cobras since we already have rattle snakes. So one could argue that there is no valid reason why they shouldn’t have alcohol while they are out in public, but if others who are weak in their faith see this and stumble in that faith because of it, then our public display is a sin.
- Another way of understanding vs. 23 is that if someone **believes** that this or that is a sin, then it **IS** a sin. Again, we smile amused at the idea of dancing or card playing being a sin, let alone boys and girls swimming together or holding hands as they walk along, but there are people and places where these things are still seen as sins, and so they are to them! And if we pridefully show our more highly advanced faith by doing what others consider a sin, then we are sinning.

Romans 15:1-3

- To be clear, when Paul speaks of “we who are strong”, he is speaking of those who are strong in their faith, strong in The Way of Christ, those who are mature in their faith. Therefore, as in all of life, those who are mature are to care for those who are not, as a parent would care for a child or an older sibling care for one who is younger. And the goal of the one who is more mature is to do whatever is necessary to help the weaker one grow. When they can no longer walk, you carry them. When they are hungry, you feed them. “Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves.” When this doesn’t happen, as in Corinth, Paul gets really frustrated. In 1 Corinthians 3:1-2, Paul says he couldn’t even speak to them as mature Christians, but “as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, for you were not yet able to receive it. **Even now** you are not yet able...”.
- If a church is to grow and be strong in the faith, those who are mature in their faith must not push to get what pleases them only, but ask, “What do we need to do to reach those who are weak and help them to grow in their faith in Christ?”, setting aside their own wants and likes and wishes. We are to first please our neighbors for their good, so that they may grow in The Way. Again, Christ is our model. He took the criticisms and pain thrown at the disciples on Himself when they were not yet strong enough to take it.

#### Vss. 4-6

- So often people who are **supposed** to be mature complain, “I’m just not getting fed at church”. The problem is that as one who is mature, live a spiritual grown-up, you are supposed to be able to feed yourself, not looking for someone else to feed you. First and foremost you have the Scriptures that were “written for our instruction...and encouragement”, so that as we study and persevere “we might have hope”!
- Second, those who are mature understand the importance and power of Prayer and the active work of the Holy Spirit in us. Thus as we study God’s Word and pray, He gives us the strength to persevere and the encouragement we need to face every day with joy and hope.
- And more, because it is the same Holy Spirit working in all of us, He brings us to be all of one mind so that we as a church are closely united in Christ, so that we may worship, and serve, and speak with one voice glorifying the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.