

LIVING BY GRACE

STUDY SEVEN

Extending Grace to Let Others Be

Selections from Romans 14

One of the most beautiful people to be around is a Christian who's easy to live with.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

GOD did not stamp all of us out of the same mold. He delights in variety and encourages us to be the individuals He created—unique in personality, interests, gifts, appearance, and style. Shouldn't we encourage variety too? If we live by grace, then we will.

Some Christians, however, require that we all be alike—not just united in the essential doctrines of the faith but also uniform in the nonessentials. They use *comparison* to measure everyone by a singular standard of godliness and *control* to manipulate people through fear, threats, and criticism. They tolerate only one style of music or fashion, one way to manage money, one way to rear children, one way to worship, and one list of dos and don'ts for what to eat, where to go, and what to do.

How do we avoid these legalistic pitfalls? Grace. We've been learning to live by grace as we serve God in the power of the Spirit. In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll shift from the vertical to horizontal, from our relationship with God to our relationships with people. God poured His grace *into* us to flow *out* of us as we extend His grace to others. Paul's teaching in Romans 14 offers guidelines on how to do just that.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Grace goes both ways. If you expect others to show you grace, then you should show grace in return. In prayer, ask for God's wisdom to live free from others' opinions and to free others from yours.

Father, thank You for freeing me from condemnation through Christ. Now, free me from the condemnation others might impose on me. Give me wisdom through my study of Your Word to know how to treat others with the grace you have so lavishly shown me. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Romans 14 concerns the tension between Jewish and gentile Christians in the early church. Although Jesus had declared all foods "acceptable in God's sight" (Mark 7:19), converted Jews may have felt uneasy eating non-kosher gentile food—particularly meat from animals sacrificed to idols. Likewise, gentile Christians who gave up pagan festivals may have looked sideways at the Jewish Christians who continued celebrating Jewish holy days.

Conflicts over *diet* and *days* divided the Roman church, and so Paul showed the church members how to ease the friction in their relationships by applying a dab of grace.



Observation: Putting Grace into Action

Read *Romans 14* slowly and thoughtfully, observing carefully the flow of thought. Reading a passage aloud helps to focus your thoughts and tune out distractions. Use the following questions to help you observe the details of Paul's teaching.



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Conflicts Over Diet and Days—Romans 14:1–9

What are the two commands in *Romans 14:1*?

How did Paul describe the two types of Christians in *14:2*?

In *14:3*, in addition to accepting, Paul commanded the meat-eaters to “not look down on” the meat-abstainers. Reversing the roles, how should those who didn’t eat meat show grace toward those who did? What basis did Paul give for this command, according to *14:4*?



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The subject shifts from which foods to eat to which days to worship. Some claimed, “one day is more holy than another,” while others shrugged, “every day is alike” (Romans 14:5). Rather than squabbling over days, what did Paul say was most important, according to *Romans 14:5–6*?

Although the Christians differed on food to eat and days to worship, they were aligned at the heart level. What deeply held beliefs united these opposing Christians in *14:7–9*?

God alone is qualified to judge. He’s equipped to do what we’re not equipped to do.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Condemnation and Contempt—Romans 14:10–13

What a mess it must have been. The rule-keepers condemned those with liberty, and those with liberty showed contempt to the rule-keepers. Condemnation and contempt didn’t exactly promote harmony in the church! How did Paul correct the believers in *Romans 14:10–13*?



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We nullify grace when we put people into categories and then, of all things, break our friendship with them if they continue to do those things we don't agree with.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Way of Grace—Romans 14:14–23

Paul told his readers to repent, essentially—to “stop condemning each other” and start living “in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall” (Romans 14:13).

What lesson in grace did Paul give in *Romans 14:14–16*?

What characteristics of life in the kingdom of God should guide all our interactions, according to *14:17–19*?

According to *14:20–22*, when should those who are strong in faith curb their liberty?



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Finally, what general principle did Paul give all believers in *Romans 14:23*?

Don't flaunt your liberty. If you care about others, you won't needlessly offend them.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Some Biblical Guidelines That Magnify Grace

These matters Paul addressed in Romans 14 fall into the broader category of grey areas—morally neutral behaviors that God has not declared right or wrong. In these areas, God liberates us to follow the leading of the Spirit in our walk with Him, and yet, sometimes, we must limit our liberty for the sake of love. What principles can we draw from Romans 14 to help us extend grace to one another in our new life in the Spirit? Write down the principles you discover in the following verses.

Principle One: Accept

The problem in the Roman church was not a food problem. It was a love problem, an acceptance problem—which still exists in churches today. Reread *Romans 14:1–4*, then write down a principle you discover.

Without grace in relationships, a heated reaction can erupt over any grey-area issue: music styles, makeup, jewelry, movies, dancing, food, drink, houses, clothes, spiritual practices, and the list goes on. Accepting Christians who don't act like we act or think like we think is basic to letting them be themselves as they follow the leading of the Spirit.



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Principle Two: Follow

Write down a second principle based on *Romans 14:5–8*. Focus on how Paul allowed freedom for the Lord to guide.

“We belong to the Lord,” Paul stated (*Romans 14:8*). Give people freedom to grow at the pace God leads them, to fail sometimes, and to learn from their own mistakes.

Principle Three: Refuse

What principle about not judging others do you discover in *Romans 14:9–12*?

Freeing others means that we never assume a position we’re not qualified to fill, namely, that of judge. We have blind spots. We don’t know all the facts. We can’t perceive people’s true motives. And we certainly don’t know God’s will for someone else’s life.



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Principle Four: Express

What overarching principle about limiting our freedom for the sake of love can you find in *Romans 14:13–23*?

We should have unity in the essentials. But in nonessential areas where Scripture does not declare something to be wrong, we are to give room for people to believe as they wish and act as they feel comfortable. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Similar Issues in the Corinthian Church

Correlating Scripture validates the truth we've discovered in one passage using a text from another passage. What similar instruction did Paul deliver to the Corinthian believers in *1 Corinthians 8:1–13*?

In Corinth, the “weak” former idol-worshippers were in danger of stumbling if they saw strong believers “eating in the temple of an idol” (8:10). It was a different situation in Rome, but Paul’s guidelines were the same there as in Corinth. Extend grace to one another in love—especially on morally neutral issues in which Christians honor God in different ways.

In the family of God, love must rule. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Application: Actions That Promote Grace

In summary, we magnify grace in our relationships when we accept one another, let the Lord direct others' lives, refuse to judge others, and express liberty wisely—all governed by the rule of love.

Let's consider a few actions that will put these guidelines into practice.

- *Concentrate on things that encourage peace and assist others' growth.* As Paul said in Romans 14:19, "Let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up."
- *Remember that sabotaging saints hurts the work of God.* When we tear down our fellow believers, we "tear apart the work of God" (Romans 14:20).
- *Determine where you stand, and then follow your convictions.* "Don't feel guilty for doing something [you] have decided is right" (14:22). Follow the leading of the Spirit with confidence.

What is the Lord revealing to you about grace and love in your relationships? Through which of these biblical principles and guidelines may He be speaking to you regarding a need in your life?

How can you apply the principle to a particular relationship today?



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Imagine if all your relationships were characterized by acceptance, allowing God to direct people, refusing to judge, and expressing liberty in love. You and those around you would have freedom to be the unique individuals whom God designed, moving to the rhythm of the Spirit—relaxed, carefree, light, joyful—delighting in the dance of grace.

Close your time opening your heart to God. He loves you as no other person can. Breathe in His acceptance and grace so you can live out acceptance and grace toward the people in your life.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for Your care, which is constant and overflowing, totally free of comparison and control. Thank You for Your kindness that frees me from those who intend to trap me under restrictions and control me with shame. I am Yours today, released to follow Your will and be the person You created—free to dance in Your arms of grace. In Jesus' name, amen.

