Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Receiving One Another with Understanding, Part 1
Scripture: Romans 14:1
Code: 45-108

INTRODUCTION

A. The Danger of Sin

All Christians are aware of the power of sin to devastate a church body. Sin can cripple the church's function, destroy its harmony, sap its strength, and negate its testimony. Throughout the New Testament is a ringing call for the purity of the church.

1. The instruction of Christ

In Matthew 18:1517 Jesus gives the following instruction for dealing with the sin of a brother in Christ. First you must go to him and tell him his sin. If he doesn't listen to you, you're to take witnesses. If he doesn't listen to them, you're to tell the whole church. If he doesn't listen to the church, the church is to consider him as an unbeliever. That passage is necessary because sin has such a crippling effect on the body of believers.

2. The instruction of Paul

a) In 1 Corinthians

(1) The apostle Paul reminds the church at Corinth that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (5:6). The littlest sinful influence will have a pervasive effect in the church, like yeast does in a loaf of bread.

(2) Before coming to the Lord's table a man should "examine himself" to see if there is sin in his life (11:28).

b) In 2 Corinthians

Paul says, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (7:1).

c) In 2 Thessalonians

Paul says to "withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly" (3:6).

d) In Romans

In the book of Romans are many injunctions for the purity of the church. They begin in chapter 12, after Paul delineated the meaning of justification by grace through faith in the preceding eleven chapters.

(1) Our relationship to God. Romans 12:12 says, "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by your mind."

(2) Our relationship to the members of the body (12:38).

(3) Our relationship to everyone. Paul says we are to show love, kindness, understanding, and affection toward everyone (12:910). We should rejoice in hope and pray diligently for everyone (v. 12). We are to give to people who are in need (v. 13). Verse 14 says, "Bless them who persecute you." Verse 20 says to feed your enemies. Verse 21 says, "Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

(4) Our relationship to the government. We are to have an exemplary relationship to the government, which means we submit to the authorities and pay our taxes (13:17).

(5) Our relationship to our neighbors. Romans 13:10 says, "Love worketh no ill to its neighbor." We are to owe no debt, except the debt of love (v. 8).

Paul closes chapter 13 by telling us how urgent it is to live a pure life. We should take stock of where we are and change our lifestyle if need be by casting off the works of darkness and putting on the armor of light (v. 12). Verse 13 says, "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in reveling and drunkenness, not in immorality and wantonness, not in strife and envying." Romans 1213 is a call for purity in the church. Righteousness, not sin, is the proper response to justification by grace through faith. Verse 14 concludes, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."

The church must be pure. That's why there is a need for church discipline. That's why we're to confess our sins to one another (James 5:16). We read the Word of God that sin might be exposed. We pray that the Spirit of God might reveal to us anything in our lives that isn't right. We're to offer reproof, instruction, guidance, and wisdom to one another to assist in the spiritual growth and purity of the church.

B. The Danger of Discord

However, sin is not the only problem the church faces. There exists in all churches the potential conflict between strong and weak believers. Although not strictly a sin problem, it can result in sin. In Romans 14:1[en]15:13 Paul discusses the unity of believers.

A Melting Pot of Diversity

Within the church are people at all different levels of life, both physically and spirituallyyoung people to old people. Some people have been saved fifty years; others have come to know Christ within the last fortyeight hours. Some come from irreligious, atheistic, or humanistic backgrounds; others come from devout Roman Catholic families. Some used to be Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses. Some come from legalistic fundamentalist churches, and others come from loose, freewheeling churches.

Such diversity is a good thing, but it tends to bring about clashes. The church is not only made up of Christians at every level of maturity, but we all have one thing in common as well: although we have been redeemed, we are hindered by our flesh (Rom. 67). (Nevertheless, according to Romans 8, victory is ours through the Holy Spirit.) It is as important to deal with the conflict of diverse people, all with unredeemed flesh, as it is to deal with overt sin. Some have said to me, "Why don't the ladies wear hats?" They are concerned because they came from a background where the ladies wore hats. Others have asked me, "Why don't you have any candles?" It is difficult for them to worship without candles because that has been their lifetime of experience. Some have been offended by certain hairstyles because some churches judge a person's spirituality by the length of his hair. Some are offended by certain styles of music. Some don't have a problem with drinking while others view it as a vile sin. There are some who wouldn't miss the latest movie while others wouldn't darken the door of a theater for fear that God would strike them dead, like Ananias and Sapphira, at the box office!

Within the church today are new Christians holding onto old habits and traditions. It takes time before they can let go of such things because they're so ingrained. People have preferences in things from dress to music to diet to entertainment. That was true in the early church, and it is even more true in the church in America because we are such a melting pot of diversity.

Preferences aren't necessarily a sin issue, but can become serious when people in the church can't get along with each other because of their preferences. So in Romans 14:1[en]15:13 Paul talks about the importance of unity.

1. The issue

It is essential to maintain unity in the church.

a) Ephesians 4:3Paul said the church is to be "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

b) Colossians 3:14Paul said, "Above all ... put on love, which is the bond of perfectness."

c) John 13:35Our Lord said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Jesus prayed that we would be one, not only in our redemption but also in demonstrating that redemption to the world by our love for one another (John 17:21). However this love comes with difficulty because the church is made up of such diverse groups of people.

2. The illustrations

a) Acts 20:35Paul said the following to the elders at the church at Ephesus: "I have shown you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak." It is the strong who are to be conscientious about helping the weak.

b) Galatians 6:1Paul said, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault [the weak believer], ye who are spiritual [the strong believer] restore such an one in the spirit of meekness."

c) 1 Thessalonians 5:14Paul said, "We exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly." The "unruly" lack caution regarding their freedoms in Christ. They tend to be undisciplined. That's why they need to be warned. Paul then says, "Encourage the fainthearted." The "fainthearted" are those who are fearful of exercising their liberty. Paul concluded by saying, "Support the weak, be patient toward all men."

First John 2:13 tells us about infants, young men, and fathers in the faith, in the all on a continuum of spiritual growth. If we're to love each other as we should, we need to understand Paul's instruction in Romans 14:1[en]15:13.

3. The implications

a) Between strong and weak

(1) The definitions

(a) The strong

Liberated brothers and sisters in Christ fully understand what it means to be free in Christ they don't cling to meaningless traditions and forms of religion. They understand fully that they are free from sin, death, hell, and Satan. They understand they are not obligated to follow holy days and ceremonies. They know they are free to make choices dependent on how the Spirit of God moves in their hearts. Such people are strong in the faith.

(b) The weak

These individuals continue to hang onto the rituals and ceremonies of their past, refusing to let go. They don't believe they have freedom in Christ to do otherwise. Such freedom threatens them, so they prefer remain as they are.

(2) The temptation

(a) The contempt of the strong

The strong are tempted to look down on the weak as legalistic, faithless people who get in the way of those who are trying to enjoy their liberty. They resent the weak for labeling their rightful freedoms in Christ as sin.

(b) The condemnation of the weak

The weak tend to condemn the strong for what they see as an abuse of liberty. However they are not in the position to judge since they don't understand what Christian liberty is.

b) Between Jew and Gentile

As Christians we are free from the penalty of sin, the power of death, the punishment of hell, and from the persuasion of Satan. We are free to worship and adore God, be forgiven, and go to heaven. But there's another dimension to our freedom in Christ in the New Covenant: we are free from all the Old Testament ceremonial laws. We are not free from the Ten Commandments or any other moral laws given in the Old Testament because God is the same God. But we are free from the external ceremonial rules and rituals, for they were attached only to a period of time and the people of Israel.

The church at Rome was made up of two groups of believers:

(1) Christians from a Jewish background

Some Jewish Christians still adhere to the traditions they were raised in. If that problem exists today, you can imagine what a problem it was in Paul's day. Many Jews who had been saved out of Judaism found it next to impossible to let go of their ingrained traditions, such as the observation of dietary

laws, feast days, new moons, and sabbaths. Throughout their lives they were expected to take part in those rituals. Acts 21:20 implies that most Jewish believers were still bound to the law of Moses. Their consciences put unnecessary bonds on their liberty in Christ.

(2) Christians from a pagan background

Other Christians in the church at Rome had been saved out of pagan idolatry. Like many of the Jewish Christians, they too were limited in their Christian freedom because of their pagan practices. Many Gentiles were excusing themselves from eating certain foods that may have been given to idols. Those foods were too much a part of the pagan orgies for them to enjoy.

But there were mature, liberated believers in the church at Rome from both groups who were not bound in there conscience by any of those things. They kept no sabbath, observed no dietary laws, and ate and drank whatever they wanted without regard for either Jewish law or pagan religion. The legalistic believers saw such as sinful and condemned their liberty. The liberated believers saw the weak as sinfully bound to rules and traditions and despised their unbelief.

The conflict in the church at Rome was between the legalistic believer who saw liberty as sinful and the liberated believer who saw legalism as sinful. Paul gave four principles to deal with that conflict: receive one another with understanding (Rom. 14:1 12), build up one another without offending (14:1323), please one another as Christ did (15:17), and rejoice with one another in God's plan (15:813). Let's look at the first principle.

I. THE RECEPTION (14:1)

"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations."

A. The Conflict

1. Identified

a) Kosher Jews

The Jews had been raised to do what was kosher, which comes from the Hebrew word kashar, meaning "fit" or "right." The primary focus of kashar is on diet and the observation of special days. Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 detail the dietary restrictions. When Daniel was taken into captivity in Babylon he was told to eat the king's food, which wasn't kosher (Dan. 1:5). Verse 8 says Daniel decided not to eat it. He and his three friends, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael, would not compromise their Jewish convictions. They were right in maintaining the dietary laws because God had ordained them, and they still were valid at that point in the history of Israel.

b) Pagan Gentiles

The Gentiles were used to pagan festivals. The kind of celebration that takes place at Christmas today is more akin to the pagan feast of Saturnalia than it is to anything having to do with the birth of Christ. Pagan festivals were basically drunken, gluttonous orgies. Their past experience with paganism drove many new Gentile converts away from things they were free to do as Christians.

2. Illustrated

a) In Galatians 2

(1) The confrontation

Verse 11 says, "When Peter was come to Antioch, I [Paul] withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." Paul was the kind of guy who said what needed to be said. On that occasion Peter needed to be confronted because he was a significant person in the Christian realm. He was uniquely an apostle of Christ in a way that even Paul had not experienced. Peter lived and walked with Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. Yet Peter did something that brought about a rebuke from Paul.

(2) The cause

Verse 12 tells us what Peter did: "Before certain men came from James [the brother of the Lord and the leader of the church in Jerusalem], he [Peter] did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them who were of the circumcision." Peter was afraid of what the Jewish visitors would think. That led him to deny the liberty he had in Christ by not sharing in a meal with the Gentile converts.

(3) The cessation

(a) Of the dietary laws

The Jewish dietary laws had been set aside in Acts 10:912. The Lord sent a vision to Paul of a sheet from heaven containing animals that were both clean and uncleanthose that could be eaten and those that couldn't. The Lord told Peter, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat" (v. 13). Peter said, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean" (v. 14). The Lord replied, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou uncommon" (v. 15). The Lord had just eliminated all dietary restrictions.

(b) Of the Sabbath

The Lord eliminated the significance of the Sabbath also when He said, "The Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day" (Matt. 12:8). As far as the Jewish leaders were concerned, Jesus overtly violated the sabbath and broke their traditions. He rose from the dead on the first day of the week and established a new era in which the Sabbath no longer has any significance. Peter was aware of that because he had been with Christ, saw Him after the resurrection, and knew the church initially met on the first day of the week (John 20:19).

(4) The confusion

When the Jews arrived from Jerusalem, Peter put himself back under Mosaic law, so Paul rebuked him for retreating from his liberty in Christ. He knew Peter's actions would bring confusion. Galatians 2:13 says, "The other Jews dissembled in like manner with him insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their hypocrisy." Peter influential leadership caused the other Jews to withdraw from the Gentiles, and Paul could foresee a fracturing of the church.

(5) The correction

In Galatians 2:14 Paul says, "When I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" Peter was wrong. That so great a leader as Peter could be mislead illustrates the tremendous pressure for the early church to hang onto Judaism.

Acts 15:135 details the events surrounding the Jerusalem Council. Some of the church leaders wanted to hold to Judaism, especially a group known as Judaizers, who claimed a person couldn't be a Christian unless he kept the Mosaic law and was circumcised physically. Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, said that some of the Jews at Rome ate only fruit for fear of eating something unclean (cited by Charles Hodge, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977 reprint], p. 417). But the dietary laws had been abrogated long before. Jesus said, "There is nothing from outside of a man that, entering into him, can defile him; but the things which come out of him" (Mark 7:15). The pressure was on the Jews to maintain their heritage, and understandably they clung to it.

b) In 1 Corinthians 8

This chapter gives insight into tensions Gentiles experienced in the early church, and sheds light on tensions in the church today.

(1) A synopsis of the problem

Verse 1 begins, "Now as touching things offered to idols." Here is a synopsis of the problem in Corinth: a typical pagan worshiper would go to the temple of a pagan deity or to a festival and bring a sacrifice. He would offer vegetables, fruit, meat, or drink at the altar. A portion of would be consumed in a ceremony, part would be eaten as a meal, and whatever was left would be sold in the market the next day so the priests could make money off it. Anyone shopping at a temple market would be purchasing food that had been offered to idols.

A pagan who had been transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ was understandably ashamed of his past involvement in idolatry. Being served food that had been offered to, say, the god Serapis could bother him greatly. Not eating that meal would offend the host, especially if he was a Jew who wasn't bothered by idols. On the other hand, a Gentile host could offend a Jewish guest by offering him pork or any other animal that wasn't kosher.

(2) A summary of the principles

The problem within the Corinthian church was what to do with meat offered to idols. So Paul gave them some principles to guide their decisions.

(a) Love must prevail

First Corinthians 8:13 says, "Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. But if any man love God, the same is known of him." Paul was saying, "Don't force your knowledge on a person; rather, force your love on him." If you will offend him by doing something, then don't do it. Be sensitive. Knowledge is fine, but love should prevail.

(b) Idols are nothing

Is there such a thing as a false god? No. So whatever is offered to a false god is offered to nothing. Verse 4 says, "As concerning, therefore, the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one." There is no reason to be concerned about something offered to nothing, but that was hard for many to understand. Verses 56 say, "Though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth (as there are gods many, and lords many), but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him."

Verse 7 gives a different perspective, "However, there is not in every man that knowledge; for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled." If the weaker brother eats meat sacrificed to idols without understanding why

he can, he will defile his conscience because it tells him not to eat it. A man's conscience is controlled by his mind. It does not act independently of what he knows; it is simply set in motion by his mind. The mind is the engine; the conscience is a flywheelit is engaged by the mind. Thus when a weaker brother was convinced in his mind that the meat before him had been offered to a real idol, yet he ate it, his conscience reacted negatively to what he knew about that meat. That's why Paul says not everyone knows that an idol is nothing (v. 7).

(c) Food is not important

Verse 8 says, "Food commendeth us not to God." God couldn't care less about what you eat in terms of its religious impact. I'm sure you know God doesn't want you to eat something that will ultimately shorten your life or your ability to function as a human being. But God is not concerned with the kind of food you eat. Some people think vegetarians are spiritual and meat-eaters are not, but that's not true. Verse 8 continues, "For neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse." Paul means that eating meat offered to idols won't make you any better or any worse.

(d) Liberty must not offend

Verse 9 says, "Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours becomes a stumbling block to them that are weak." If your liberty offends someone, don't exercise it. The people in the Corinthian church needed to hear that because some, having been saved out of paganism years before, were now buying their meat at the temple butcher shop without it bothering them. In turn they would invite new converts for dinner and offer them meat that had been offered to Zeus the night before. The new converts couldn't eat it without thinking they were worshiping a false god. The liberated believer would then try to convince the weak believer that they were free in Christ to eat whatever they wanted to. But verse 11 says, "Through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?" Would you want to devastate someone for whom Christ died? Of course not! Verse 12 says, "But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ." Paul concludes, "Wherefore, if food make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend" (v. 13).

From those two passages we see that many Jewish believers were obsessed hung up on maintaining Jewish traditions, and many Gentile believers were obsessed with breaking away from pagan traditions. The potential for conflict in the church existed over those issues.

B. The Command

Romans 14:1 refers to "him that is weak." The present participle is used, indicating one who is being weak in the faith. It is a failure of faith at a given moment or circumstance, not necessarily a permanent state. The article is present: he is weak in <u>the</u> faith. He is not weak in saving faith, but in

the faith necessary to believe he is free to enjoy any kind of food or day, and cut off any connection from the past.

1. The sacrifice of the strong

Paul tells the strong to "receive" the weak in faith. The Greek word translated "receive" means "to take to oneself," and is preceded by the preposition pros, which intensifies that meaning. Paul is commanding the strong to embrace the weak into their love and fellowship. Those with a clear understanding of Christian freedom should reach out and receive those with a lesser understanding.

A Day With the Amish

My wife, Patricia, and I had a wonderful time visiting Lancaster, Pennsylvania some years ago. It is a beautiful part of our country. "Grace to You" is heard on a radio station there, and God has blessed our ministry in that area. Among the people who live in the Lancaster area are the Amish. They live by a different set of standards than many of us. The women wear their hair pulled back and knotted behind the head. They are a domestic people. Many own beautiful, prosperous farms. But they do not believe it is right to travel by any vehicle powered by a motor, so they ride in horse carts.

We visited many of those farms while we were there because Patricia was looking for some quilts, and the Amish are known for theirs. We noticed as we visited one farm after another that there were no televisions, radios, or electrical appliances of any kind. And certainly there were no automobiles. But curiously, we often saw an Allis-Chalmers combine, an engine-powered harvesting machine, being pulled by horses! That was a little inconsistent to say the least.

When we visited one Amish farm in particular, we met a man who led us into his barn to show us his car, which he kept under secret cover. He also had a radio. Somewhat sheepishly he said to me, "I'd like to ask you some Bible questions. I've been listening to you on the radio and I really appreciate what you teach." It was obvious to us that he had come to know Christ. Many of the Amish do not know Christ; they know only a form of religion. This man was fighting his liberation in Christ. He was starting to let go of some things while still holding onto others. He was letting it be known that he had a radio, and I think he had driven his car in the daytime. He wanted to know all about the book of Revelation because the Amish never interpret it. Patricia and I sat in the kitchen and answered question after question about the book of Revelation and the Second Coming of Christ. As we talked, I could see it was going to be very difficult for this man to ever fully understand the freedom he could enjoy in Jesus Christ. If someone were to play a tape of Christian rock for him, or make him buy a three-piece pin-striped suit, he would be devastated.

There are many Christians like that Amish man, and we must love them all. We certainly don't want to do anything to offend them. That's what Paul is saying in Romans 14:1. If there is to be a loving unity among the body of believers, it must start with the strong. The strong must be willing to sacrifice their liberties. I rejoice in doing so because I want to do all I can for the sake of those who might be offended by my liberty. I want to receive them fully into the fellowship. So be sensitive to those who believe people ought to live a certain way, dress a certain way, and restrain from certain habits. Wait until they can grow to understand their emancipation in Jesus Christ.

Paul's Harsh Words

Paul was gentle in his approach to the Romans on the subject of Christian liberty, but he strongly rebuked the Galatians and Colossians.

1. To the Galatians

In Galatians 1:8-9 Paul says, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." Paul is pronouncing a curse on anyone who preaches another gospel. The issue Paul is addressing is a distortion of the message of redemption. In Galatians 4:8-9 he says, "Nevertheless then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after ye have known God, or rather are known by God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, unto which ye desire again to be in bondage?" After Paul preached the gospel in Galatia, Judaizers followed and said that grace can't save a person, claiming that true salvation must be accompanied by circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic law. In verses 10-11 Paul adds, "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain." In Galatians 5:1 he concludes, "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty with which Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." In verses 3-4 he says, "I testify again to every man that is circumcised .... Christ is become of no effect unto you."

Why was Paul so bold in his approach? Because the Judaizers were teaching the Galatian church that Mosaic law and ceremony were necessary for salvation. Paul blasted that as another gospel. However, the Roman church was not advocating those things as part of salvation--they believed in salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone.

2. The Colossians

In Colossians 2:16-17 Paul says, "Let no man, therefore, judge you in food, or in drink, in respect of a feast day, or of the new moon, or of a sabbath day, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." Why did Paul tell the people to avoid those things? Because people were saying

that to be a true Christian all those things had to be observed. They advocated those things as elements of salvation. Paul defiantly rejected that. But in the Roman church those things were not being claimed as necessary elements of salvation; they were merely vestiges of their past religion, and thought necessary for spiritual growth.

2. The submission of the strong

In Romans 14:1 Paul says to receive the weak, "but not to doubtful disputations." The strong should not receive the weak to pass judgment on their opinions and argue with them. The purpose in receiving our weaker brothers is to love them.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What can sin do to a church?

2. What instruction does Christ give for dealing with sin in the church (Matt. 18:15-17)?

3. What are some of the injunctions Paul gave in Romans for the purity of the church?

4. What is another serious problem the church faces in addition to sin? Explain.

5. How do you define a strong believer?

6. How do you define a weak believer?

7. How are each of those believers tempted?

8. As Christians, what are we free from?

9. Describe the kinds of people who existed in the church at Rome. In what ways did their backgrounds limit them?

10. What four principles does Paul give in Romans 14:115:13 for dealing with the conflict between weak and strong believers?

11. Describe the confrontation that took place in Galatians 2:11. Why did it occur?

12. Where in Scripture do we read that it is no longer necessary to observe the Jewish dietary laws and the Sabbath?

13. What does the incident in Galatians 2:11-14 indicate about the pressure that existed for the Jewish Christian?

14. Summarize the problem existing in Corinth with regard to strong and weak believers.

15. What principles did Paul present to the Corinthians for dealing with the problem of meat offered to idols? Explain.

16. Explain how a man's conscience is controlled by his mind.

17. According to Romans 14:1, what does Paul command the strong to do? Explain.

18. Why was Paul was gentle to the Romans but harsh with the Galatians and Colossians over the issue of Christian liberty?

Pondering the Principles

1. Romans 12--13 discuss the believer's relationships with God and man. Review that section (see pp. 1-2). How would you best characterize your relationship with God, with other believers, with your neighbors, with the government, and with all people? Analyze each relationship. Slowly read Romans 12--13. What are the areas you need the greatest improvement in? Commit yourself to making changes in those areas beginning this week. Remember, your commitment to be obedient in those areas affects the purity of the entire body of Christ.

2. In Romans 14:1 Paul implores strong Christians to receive those who are weak in the faith. What is your level of commitment toward a Christian who has little understanding of his liberties in Christ? Are you making sacrifices of your liberties on his behalf? To help keep you mindful of your responsibilities in this area, memorize 1 Corinthians 8:9: "Take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak" (NASB).

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