

# Romans – Fall 2023 D-Groups

*For Wednesday, November 8*  
**Romans 14:1 - 15:13**



## The Big Picture - Romans 14:1 - 15:13\*

*(Throughout the Fall, we're making our way through the entire book of Romans. This week, we're focusing on the unit as a whole, not just a smaller portion of the text.)*

- \* ***Before working through this week's text, please read through the material below first. We're encouraging you to write down some observations as you're reading the text this week. It should help us better grasp the message of God's Word in this section.***

We continue on in this section of practical instructions from Paul. Recently, we've looked at this "umbrella summary" in 12:1-2 that offers an overview for what we read into chapter 15. Overall, this chunk of text is speaking about the life we live as those who are motivated by God's mercy. The Gospel that sets us free from sin's eternal consequences and even its ongoing power should shape the way we live as those who have placed our faith in Christ! That includes our response of obedience to relational instructions under the overarching banner of **LOVING others** (see 12:3 into chapter 13).

Once we get to chapter 14, Paul is specifically addressing relationships *within* the church, an extension of this emphasis on love (see also 12:3-8, 13). At this point, he tackles an underlying reality of division among the believers in Rome. At this point, it's helpful to remember that the Jew/Gentile distinction was largely responsible for the conflict. Throughout Romans, Paul's strategy has been to offer the reminder that when it comes to our problem of sin and God's salvation solution in Jesus, "there is no distinction." Yet, when it comes to practicalities of how faith should be expressed, the two groups were certainly divided in many ways. Specifically, the debate seems to center around issues like what foods are okay to eat and what days should be considered special. Understandably, the Jewish believers took their cues from the OT Law ... and expected others to do the same. Meanwhile, the Gentile believers leaned on their "freedom in Christ" and rejected such boundaries. We may not deal with these same issues in the 21<sup>st</sup> century American church; and yet, that's not to say there isn't great relevance to this material for how we live in Christian community today.

Ultimately, this section addresses what we're going to call "**matters of opinion**" (*i.e.* "debatable matters" or "gray areas"). When it comes to how we follow Jesus and carry-out a life of faith, there are some definitive truths and boundaries. Certain doctrines are part of the package and not up for debate. Likewise, certain behaviors or lifestyles are outside of what God's Word clearly reveals to be His will. *(And, as a side note, just because some Christians today - and even church groups as a whole - want to create confusion by turning clear teaching into "matters of opinion," that doesn't mean they are or should be!)* **Such black-and-white matters are not Paul's concern here.**

Yet, within the boundaries provided in Scripture, there really are quite a few of these issues that are not explicitly established for us - not black-or-white, but gray. That's the focus in this section: when God's Word doesn't lay out the specific answer, we're left with these "**matters of opinion.**" Remember 12:2 - the umbrella summary for this section; in that verse, part of what happens through

the Holy Spirit's work of transformation - by renewing our minds - is that we are able to discern God's will for us. In other words, all of the specifics are not fully provided for us. So, that means there are these "**matters of opinion**" where people are going to disagree with others even within the faith. Yet, as we lean on the Holy Spirit's guidance, we come to certain *personal* convictions - where each one of us has decided to draw his or her own lines. Beyond that, we develop *personal* preferences for how faith should be expressed best. Within the overall boundaries God has revealed in His Word, part of having freedom in Christ means we have freedom to draw such lines in separate places. That can be uncomfortable for some of us; and yet, that's how it works in a life of faith in Christ.

That's where Paul's words from 14:1-15:13 come in. Through this text, he offers great guidelines for how we disagree well when such issues arise - allowing room for different opinions on such matters while still maintaining unity with others. Even more, he provides valuable reminders for handling *any* form of conflict, especially within the church. Indeed, if you're living in Christian community with others and experiencing the inevitable reality that people land in different places on different issues, then these words offer great insight for how to handle that situation.

### **READ Romans 14:1-15:13 and reflect on the questions below as you do**

***What are some 21<sup>st</sup> century issues that fall into the category of "matters of opinion" like Paul addresses here (again, it's areas where we can have opinions/preferences that are not the same as other believers ... where there is "freedom in Christ")?***

***What seems to be the overarching goal that Paul is aiming for here?***

Paul's solution is clearly not that everyone has to come to the same conclusion on these matters of opinion. Even if/when there are differences, the broader goal can still be accomplished!

***What are some of the principles and instructions Paul offers for how believers can navigate through these types of issues when they arise (many of them seem like good instruction for conflict in general, not just that which stems from such "matters of opinion")?***

***How does Paul ground all of this in the Gospel (remember the overall context/message of this letter) and the grace God has shown us in Christ?***