

Paul tells the Christians to think about how people should behave during the day. When the night has ended, people should wake up in order to work. In the same manner, Christians should not be lazy as they wait for *Christ to return. God has given them important duties to carry out.

Paul compares the work of Christians to the work of soldiers. A soldier cannot behave in the manner that he himself would choose. He must be loyal and he must obey his captain. Christians too cannot behave in any manner that they themselves might prefer. Instead, they must behave in the manner that pleases God. Soldiers need to put on special clothes for a battle. Those clothes will protect them as they fight. And Christians too need to prepare in a special way to do God's work (verse 14; 1 Thessalonians 5:8; Ephesians 6:11-18).

When Paul writes about the 'dark night', he is thinking about the power of the devil and the power of *sin. John used a similar description in John 1:5. (Job 24:13-17 explains this idea. Many evil people would wait until nightfall before they carried out their wicked schemes. For example, most thieves prefer to steal by night. They are afraid of daylight, because people may recognise them.) But Paul writes that the dark night is nearly over. So the opportunity for people to do evil things is nearly over. *Christ defeated the power of *sin and the devil when he died for us. And our *salvation will be complete when he returns.

Verses 13-14 When St. Augustine read these verses, they changed him. He became a Christian and he began a new life. Paul writes a list in verse 13 to show how people should not behave. He mentions some evil activities that often happen by night. People have parties where they are greedy. They drink so much alcohol that they cannot even control their own behaviour. They have sex with the wrong people and in the wrong manner (Romans 1:26-27). They argue. They are jealous.

People do such things by night. Then they feel sorry when the next day begins. They feel ill because they ate too much. They are ashamed because the alcohol caused them to do stupid things. They have upset their husbands or wives. They have made their friends angry.

But Christians should not do such things. It is as if those activities belong to the night. But Christians do not belong to the night, if 'the night' means *sin and the devil. Christians belong to *Christ. 'The day when *Christ will return is almost here' (verse 12).

So Christians must always choose right behaviour. They must live in the manner that pleases God. They must live as *Christ wants them to live. They must not even think about things that would satisfy their *sinful human desires.

Chapter 14

Christian freedom 14:1-12

v1 Accept people whose *faith is weak. But do not argue with them about their opinions. **v2** Some people believe that they may eat anything. But other people eat only vegetables because their *faith is weak. **v3** Nobody should be cruel to the person who does not dare to eat something. And that person should not accuse anyone who decides to eat that food. Remember that God has accepted that other Christian. **v4** You have no right to *judge someone else's servant. Only the master can decide whether his servant's work pleases him or not. And that other Christian will please the *Lord, because the *Lord will support him. **v5** Some people think that one day is more special than another day. Other people think that every day is the same. Each person should be completely clear in his own mind what he should do. **v6** He who thinks that one day is special does so to give honour to the *Lord. Someone who eats meat gives thanks to God. And so he gives honour to the *Lord. And the person who does not eat meat is trying to please the *Lord. That person also gives thanks to God. **v7** The life or death of any person among us is not a matter for that person alone. **v8** If we live, we live to give honour to the *Lord. If we die, we die to give honour to the *Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the *Lord. **v9** *Christ died and he came back to life for this reason. It was so that he might become our *Lord in life and in death. **v10** You should not accuse another Christian. You should not be cruel to that person. We shall all stand in front of God when he acts as judge. **v11** *Scripture says,

‘ “You can be sure that I live”, says the *Lord.
 “So you can be sure that everyone will kneel in front of me.
 And every person will give honour to God.” ’

v12 So each of us will have to explain to God the things that we have done.

There were many disagreements between the Christians in Rome. The Christians could not agree whether they should be obeying the *Jewish laws.

Paul has already discussed this subject in this letter. He explains that God gave the law. But the law could not make people *righteous (Romans 3:20). The purpose of the law was to show people that everyone has *sinned (Romans 7:7). Nobody can become *righteous by means of their own efforts (Romans 10:3). Only *Christ, by his death, makes people *righteous (Romans 5:8-9).

Christians should allow God's *Holy Spirit to rule their lives (Romans 8:4). Then they will be living in a manner that pleases God. So the *Jewish law does not control their lives. Instead, the *Holy Spirit controls their lives. But this is not the opposite of the law (Romans 3:31; Romans 13:10). In fact, such people are living in the manner that God always wanted people to live.

God did not give the law so that people could obey lots of rules! Rather, he wanted people to realise that they need to trust him completely. In other words, without *faith in God, it is impossible to please him (Hebrews 11:6).

Paul wanted the Christians in Rome to love each other. He did not want them to argue about rules and customs. He knew that some Christians only had a little *faith. He asked the Christians whose *faith was stronger to encourage those people.

For example, some Christians thought that it was still necessary to obey certain food laws. They thought that they must be careful to keep special *holy days. Those Christians were 'weak in the *faith'. They had not discovered the real meaning of Christian freedom. They were worried that certain practices were still necessary.

Paul considered that he and other Christians were 'strong' (Romans 15:1). Paul did not believe that the *Jewish law ruled him. He had the freedom that God's *Holy Spirit gives. So Paul was free to decide what he should eat. And he did not make any distinction between days. But Paul was very careful about how he used this freedom. He chose to obey the *Jewish law so that he did not offend *Jewish people (1 Corinthians 9:20; Acts 16:3). And Paul would not use his freedom in a manner that might cause another Christian to *sin (verse 21).

Paul did not hesitate to accuse people who denied the essential beliefs of the Christian *faith. But when people have different opinions about certain actions, the 'weak' and 'strong' Christians should respect each other. In things that are not essential to the *faith, a Christian must be free to obey his own conscience. Martin Luther said, 'A Christian is a most free *lord of all (in other words, a free citizen), under no other person.'

Verses 1-4 'Accept' means 'give a welcome'. So people in the church should be kind to a Christian whose *faith is weak. Nobody should *judge him just because he has a different opinion. A Christian might decide to eat only vegetables. Many people did not prepare meat in the proper *Jewish way. So a Christian might not eat any meat. But that person should not argue with someone who eats meat. The first man should not think that the second man is not true to the *faith. Some people feel free to eat whatever they choose. But they must not think that the 'weak' Christian is stupid. Paul gives two reasons in these verses why they must accept the weak Christian:

1. God has accepted him (verse 3).

2. That Christian is *Christ's servant. Only *Christ, his master, can decide whether he is a loyal Christian.

Verses 5-6 The 'weak' Christians wanted to have some special holy days in the calendar. For example, the new moon or the *Sabbath (Colossians 2:16). It is not wrong to have special days for rest, prayer and *worship. But Paul believed that every day is special. It is a gift of time from God and it is an opportunity to serve him.

Some people eat whatever they like. Then they thank God. Other people eat only what their conscience allows them. But they also thank God for their food. So all these people are giving honour to God. Everyone must be sure that he does right things. 'Whatever you choose to eat or to drink, do it all for the *glory of God' (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Verses 7-8 Each Christian's life affects other Christians. He should feel responsible towards them. He should not only think about himself.

Verses 9-12 *Christ died and came back to life. So he is *Lord of people who are dead. And he is *Lord of people who are alive. He is the *Lord of everyone. So the 'weak' Christian is also a servant of *Christ (verse 4). So the 'strong' Christian should not accuse the 'weak' Christian. Everyone will have to appear in front of God for judgement. Paul uses words from Isaiah 45:23. In Philippians (2:10-11) Paul shows that everyone will have to respect Jesus as *Lord. Here the words remind Christians that we are all responsible to God. We must be careful to help those Christians whose *faith is weak. We should not hurt them by our unkind words. Instead, we should love each other.

Christian love 14:13-23

v13 So we should not continue to *judge each other. Instead, decide not to do anything that will cause problems for your *brother. Do not make it difficult for him to live a Christian life. **v14** I am completely sure that no food is actually unclean (unacceptable for Christians to eat). The *Lord Jesus convinced me about this. But someone may think that something is unclean. If he does, then it is unclean for him.

v15 Your *brother may be unhappy because of what you eat. If so, you are not still showing love to him. Do not destroy the *faith of your *brother by what you eat. *Christ died on his behalf. **v16** So do not cause people to say evil things because of something that you believe to be good. **v17** The *kingdom of God is not about food and drink. It is about the *righteousness, *peace and joy that the *Holy Spirit gives. **v18** Everyone who serves *Christ in this way pleases God. And other people approve of them. **v19** So let us work hard to have a calm and content attitude. Let us work hard to encourage each other.

v20 Do not damage the work of God because of food. All food is clean (acceptable). But it is wrong for you to eat anything that causes problems for someone else. **v21** Do not do anything that would cause your *brother to *sin. It is better not to eat meat or not to drink wine if your action would have that result. **v22** So whatever you believe about these things, keep between yourself and God. Do the things that you believe to be right. Act in the way that your conscience directs. And God will approve. **v23** But a person should not eat anything that is against his conscience. If that person eats, he is guilty. That is so because *faith does not direct his actions. And everything that does not come from *faith is *sin.

Verses 13-15 Paul urges the 'strong' Christians to think about their actions. These actions will affect their Christian *brothers and *sisters. Some Christians thought that to eat meat is wrong. Some Christians thought that they ought to obey the *Jewish food laws. They thought that some food was unclean (not acceptable for Christians to eat). Jesus had shown that all food was clean (acceptable) – Mark 7:19. Paul himself, as a Christian, felt free to eat any kind of food. But one Christian's freedom to act might hurt another Christian's conscience. To respect another Christian's conscience in situations like this would be to show him love. A good reason to show him love is that *Christ died on his behalf. Every person is valuable to *Christ.

However, if someone forced that 'weak' Christian not to obey his conscience, that Christian's *faith would become even weaker. His *faith was already weak (verse 1). So other Christians ought to encourage that person. They ought to care about him, because God loves him.

Verses 16-18 Christians must not cause trouble for someone else because of their own personal opinion. They must not think that food and drink are more important than God's *kingdom. To be a member of God's *kingdom is not about food and drink. It is to be in a right *relationship with God. Then the *Holy Spirit will give a person *peace in himself. He will give a Christian the power to have a calm and content *relationship with other people. A Christian will show sympathy for another person's opinion. A Christian will have joy when he makes other people glad.

Verses 19-23 Paul includes himself by the word 'us'. Christians must do everything possible to make the Christian *faith strong. A Christian must not do anything that will cause another Christian to *sin. Paul mentions 'wine' as well as meat. Many Christians feel free to drink a little wine on social occasions. But some believe that they should not drink wine.

Christians do not have to tell everyone their opinions about such matters. But they should always obey their own conscience. To act against one's conscience is a *sin. That is because a Christian must always act in *faith. In other words, a Christian must trust God completely. Without *faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

Chapter 15

Do not try to please yourself 15:1-6

v1 Because we are strong, we should assist weak people. Our *faith is strong, so we should help them to deal with their weaknesses. We should not just please ourselves. **v2** Instead, we should serve other people. We should help them. And we should encourage them. **v3** Even *Christ did not please himself. But as the *scripture says, 'The people, who were insulting you, have insulted me.' **v4** The purpose of these ancient books is to teach us. The *scriptures encourage us. And they teach us to be patient. So we have hope. **v5** Our God gives to us patience and he encourages us. I pray that he will help you to overcome