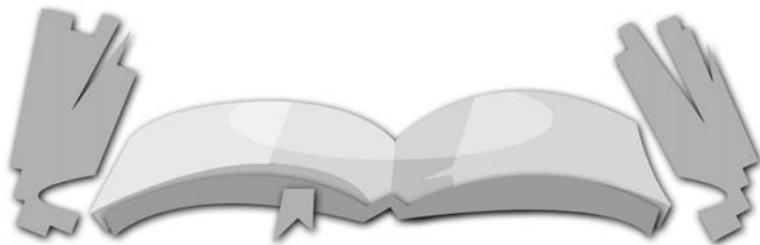


All the Rest Is Commentary



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Romans 14–16.*

Memory Text: “Why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (*Romans 14:10*).

Someone approached a famous rabbi of antiquity and asked him to explain the whole meaning of the Torah while standing on one leg. “Do not do to another,” the rabbi said on one leg, “what seems to you to be hurtful; that is the whole Torah. All the rest is commentary.”

Whether or not one agrees with the rabbi's statement, he does have a point. Some aspects of our faith are foundational and others mere “commentary.” This week's lesson looks at some of that “commentary.” What this means is that all that came before focused very much on the foundational principles of salvation. What is the role of the law—be it the whole Old Testament system or just the Ten Commandments—in the area of salvation? Paul needed to define clearly what are the grounds upon which God accepts a person. Perhaps the whole thing could be summarized by the pagan jailer's question, “What must I do to be saved?” (*Acts 16:30*).

With that explained, Paul now engages in some “commentary.” Though very strong on some points, Paul takes a much freer attitude regarding other things. That's because these things are nonessentials, “commentary,” as it were. Yet, at the same time, though the issues themselves might not have been crucial, the attitude the Christians had toward each other in dealing with these issues was.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 25.*

The Weak Brother

In Romans 14:1–3, the question was the eating of meats that may have been sacrificed to idols. The Jerusalem council (*Acts 15*) ruled that Gentile converts should refrain from using such foods in their diet. But there was always the question as to whether meats sold in public markets had come from animals sacrificed to idols (*see 1 Cor. 10:25*). Some Christians didn't care about that at all; others, if there were the slightest doubt, chose to eat vegetables instead. The issue had nothing to do with the question of vegetarianism and healthful living. Nor is Paul implying in this passage that the distinction between clean and unclean meats has been abolished. This is not the subject under consideration. If the words "he may eat all things" (*Rom. 14:2*) were taken to mean that now any animal, clean or otherwise, could be eaten, they would be misapplied. Comparison with other New Testament passages would rule against such an application.

Meanwhile, to "receive" one weak in the faith meant to accord him or her full membership and social status. The person was not to be argued with but given the right to his or her opinion.

What principle should we take, then, from Romans 14:1–3?

It's important, too, to realize that Paul in verse 3 does not speak negatively of the one "weak in the faith." Nor does he give this person advice as to how to become strong. So far as God is concerned, the overscrupulous Christian (judged overscrupulous, apparently, not by God but by his or her fellow Christians) is accepted. "God hath received him."

How does Romans 14:4 amplify what we've just looked at?

Though we need to keep in mind the principles seen in today's lesson, are there not times and places where we need to step in and judge, if not a person's heart, at least the actions? Are we to step back and say and do nothing in every situation? Isaiah 56:10 describes watchmen as "dumb dogs, they cannot bark." How can we know when to speak and when to keep silent? How do we strike the right balance here?

With What Measure You Mete

Read Romans 14:10. What reason does Paul give here for us to be careful about how we judge others?

We tend to judge others harshly at times, and often for the same things that we ourselves do. How often, though, what we do doesn't seem as bad to us as when others do the same thing. We might fool ourselves by our hypocrisy, but not God, who warned us: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?" (*Matt. 7:1-4*).

Of what significance is the statement from the Old Testament that Paul introduced here? *Rom. 14:11*.

The citation from Isaiah 45:23 supports the thought that *all* must appear for judgment. "Every knee" and "every tongue" individualizes the summons. The implication is that each one will have to answer for his or her own life and deeds (*vs. 12*). No one can answer for another. In this important sense, we are *not* our brother's keeper.

Keeping the context in mind, how do you understand what Paul is saying in Romans 14:14?

The subject is still foods sacrificed to idols. The issue is, clearly, not the distinction between the foods deemed clean and unclean. Paul is saying that there is nothing wrong per se in eating foods that might have been offered to idols. After all, what is an idol anyway? It is nothing (*see 1 Cor. 8:4*), so who cares if some pagan offered the food to a statue of a frog or a bull?

A person should not be made to violate his or her conscience, even if the conscience is overly sensitive. This fact the "strong" brethren apparently did not understand. They despised the scrupulosity of the "weak" brethren and put stumbling blocks in their way.

Might you, in your zeal for the Lord, be in danger of what Paul is warning about here? Why must we be careful not to seek to be the conscience of others, no matter how good our intentions?

Giving No Offense

Read Romans 14:15–23 (see also 1 Cor. 8:12, 13). Summarize on the lines below the gist of what Paul is saying. What principle can we take from this passage that we can apply in all areas of our lives?

In verses 17–20 Paul is putting various aspects of Christianity into proper perspective. Although diet is important, Christians ought not to quarrel over the choice on the part of some to eat vegetables instead of flesh meats that might have been sacrificed to idols. Instead, they ought to focus on righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. How might we apply this idea to questions of diet today in our church? However much the health message, and especially the teachings on diet, can be a blessing to us, not everyone sees this subject the same way, and we need to respect those differences.

In verse 22, amid all this talk about leaving people to their own conscience, Paul adds a very interesting caveat: “Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves” (NIV). What warning is Paul giving here? How does this balance out the rest of what he is saying in this context?

Have you heard someone say, “It is none of anyone’s business what I eat or what I wear or what kind of entertainment I engage in”? Is it really? None of us lives in a vacuum. Our actions, words, deeds, and even diet can affect others, either for good or for bad. It’s not hard to see how. If someone who looks up to you sees you doing something “wrong,” he or she could be influenced by your example to do that same thing. We fool ourselves if we think otherwise. To argue that, well, you didn’t force the person is beside the point. As Christians, we have a responsibility to one another, and if our example can lead someone astray, we are culpable.

What kind of example do you present? Would you feel comfortable with having others, particularly young people or new believers, following your example in all areas? What does your answer say about you?

Observance of Days

In this discussion about not judging others who might view some things differently than we do, and not being a stumbling block to others who might be offended by our actions, Paul brings up the issue of special days that some want to observe and others don't.

Read Romans 14:4–10. **How are we to understand what Paul is saying here? Does this say anything about the fourth commandment? If not, why not?**

About what days is Paul speaking? Was there a controversy in the early church over the observance or nonobservance of certain days? Apparently so. We get a hint of such controversy in Galatians 4:9, 10, where Paul berates the Galatian Christians for observing “days, and months, and times, and years.” As we noted in lesson 2, some in the church had persuaded the Galatian Christians to be circumcised and to keep other precepts of the law of Moses. Paul feared that these ideas might harm the Roman church, as well. But perhaps in Rome it was particularly the Jewish Christians who had a hard time persuading themselves that they need no longer observe the Jewish festivals. Paul here is saying, Do as you please in this matter; the important point is not to judge those who view the matter differently from you. Some Christians, apparently, to be on the safe side, decided to observe one or more of the Jewish festivals. Paul’s counsel is, Let them do it, if they are persuaded they should.

To bring the weekly Sabbath into Romans 14:5, as some argue, is unwarranted. Can one imagine Paul taking such a laid-back attitude toward the fourth commandment? As we have seen all quarter, Paul placed a heavy emphasis on obedience to the law, so he certainly wasn’t going to place the Sabbath commandment in the same category as folk who are uptight about eating foods that might have been offered to idols. However commonly these texts are used as an example to show that the seventh-day Sabbath is no longer binding, they say no such thing. Their use in that manner is a prime example of what Peter warned that people were doing with Paul’s writings: “As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 *Pet.* 3:16).

What has been your experience with the Sabbath? Has it been the blessing it was meant to be? What changes can you make in order to experience more fully what the Lord offers you in the Sabbath?

Fitting Benediction

Read Romans 15:1–3. What important Christian truth is found in these texts?

In what way do these texts capture so much of what it means to be a follower of Jesus?

What other verses teach the same idea? Most important, how can you, yourself, live out this principle?

As Paul brought his letter to a close, what varied benedictions did he utter? *Rom. 15:5, 6, 13, 33.*

The God of patience means the God who helps His children to endure steadfastly. The word for “patience,” *hupomone*, means “fortitude,” “steadfast endurance.” The word for “consolation” may be translated “encouragement.” The God of encouragement is the God who encourages. The God of hope is the God who has given hope to humankind. Likewise, the God of peace is the God who gives peace and in whom one may have peace.

What a fitting benediction in a letter whose dominant theme is righteousness by faith—encouragement, hope, peace! How sorely our present world needs these.

After numerous personal greetings, how did Paul bring his letter to a close? *Rom. 16:25–27.*

Paul ends his letter in a glorious ascription of praise to God. God is the one in whom the Roman Christians, and all Christians, can safely put their trust to confirm their standing as redeemed sons and daughters of God, justified by faith and now led by the Spirit of God.

Paul is thrilled to be the herald of such glorious news. He calls this news “my gospel.” What he means is the gospel he proclaims. But what he preaches has been confirmed by the preaching of Jesus and by the messages of the prophets. It was kept secret, not because God did not want humanity to know, but because people refused light from heaven, preventing God from giving them further light. Moreover, there were some aspects of the plan that people would be unable to grasp until the Messiah came in human flesh. He gave a demonstration, not only of what God is like but also of what humanity may become by laying hold of divine power. The new kind of life would be one of “obedience of faith”; that is, obedience springing from faith in the Lord, who through grace justifies sinners by the righteousness given to all who claim it for themselves.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Unity and Love in the Church,” pp. 477, 478; “Love for the Erring,” pp. 604–606, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5; “Helping the Tempted,” p. 166, in *The Ministry of Healing*; p. 719, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6.

“I was shown the danger of the people of God in looking to Brother and Sister White and thinking that they must come to them with their burdens and seek counsel of them. This ought not so to be. They are invited by their compassionate, loving Saviour to come unto Him, when weary and heavy-laden, and He will relieve them. . . . Many come to us with the inquiry: Shall I do this? Shall I engage in that enterprise? Or, in regard to dress, Shall I wear this or that article? I answer them: You profess to be disciples of Christ. Study your Bibles. Read carefully and prayerfully the life of our dear Saviour when He dwelt among men upon the earth. Imitate His life, and you will not be found straying from the narrow path. We utterly refuse to be conscience for you. If we tell you just what to do, you will look to us to guide you, instead of going directly to Jesus for yourselves.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 118, 119.

“We are not to place the responsibility of our duty upon others, and wait for them to tell us what to do. We cannot depend for counsel upon humanity. The Lord will teach us our duty just as willingly as He will teach somebody else. . . . Those who decide to do nothing in any line that will displease God, will know, after presenting their case before Him, just what course to pursue.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 668.

“There have ever been in the church those who are constantly inclined toward individual independence. They seem unable to realize that independence of spirit is liable to lead the human agent to have too much confidence in himself and to trust in his own judgment rather than to respect the counsel and highly esteem the judgment of his brethren.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 163, 164.

Discussion Questions:

Given some of the themes of this week, how do we as Christians find the right balance in the following cases:

- ❶ Being faithful to what we believe, yet not judging others who see things differently from the way we do?
- ❷ Being true to our own conscience and not seeking to be the conscience for others, while at the same time seeking to help those whom we believe are in error? When do we speak, and when do we keep silent? When are we culpable if we do keep silent?
- ❸ Being free in the Lord and yet at the same time realizing our responsibility to be a good example for those who might look up to us?

Reunited in Christ

by KRISTINA MUELHAUSER

Juma was just a boy when war separated Juma from his family. His mother had traveled to their grandparents' home with her children while their father remained in Juba, Sudan. During the war Juba was captured by the military, and Juma's family couldn't return home. Juma grew up not knowing his father.

But finally peace has come to southern Sudan, and families are reuniting. Meanwhile the city is struggling to rebuild.

It's a time of spiritual rebuilding as well. Recently Seventh-day Adventist pastors, evangelists, and Bible workers from Sudan, the Middle East Union, and the Trans-European Division held city-wide evangelistic meetings to share God's love with the people of Juba.

The truck carrying the evangelists, pastors, and lay evangelists bounced along the dirt road toward Juba. Its wheels stirred up huge clouds of gray-brown dust that settled on everything and everyone nearby. The truck lumbered to a stop in a rubbish-filled open area near the city that would be the site of one of the evangelistic meetings. The evangelists would have to clear the rubbish before they could set up the tent to hold the meetings. Then they would visit the people and invite them to attend.

And the people would come. They are thirsty—not just for physical water, but for the Water of Life the team had come to bring them.

The teams braved heat, dust, and flies as they shared God's love with the people of Juba. When the meetings began and singing filled the air, the people came. They listened to health talks, heard children's stories, and learned of God's love.

The devil tried to destroy the meetings. When high winds blew up just as the pastors began to speak, church members grabbed the tent poles to prevent the tent from blowing away. The wind died down, and rain poured from the sky, although it was the dry season. In another location the tent was almost empty when the meeting was scheduled to start. But the sudden rain sent people to the tent for shelter, and a full house heard the message that night.

So far 45 have been baptized in Juba, including Juma's father. Many more are preparing to join the family of God in this region that has been cut off from the gospel and from the outside world. Please pray for the people of southern Sudan as they seek to reconnect with their families and learn to love their Savior. And praise God for the mission offerings that helped make the Juba evangelism possible.

KRISTINA MUELHAUSER and her husband, Darrel, work as missionaries in the South Sudan Field.

History—both secular and sacred—is often told through stories. Next quarter’s Bible study guide, *Background Characters in the Old Testament*, by Gerald and Chantal Klingbeil, looks at some of the overlooked and forgotten figures in the Old Testament. The lives of these characters might not seem so important, a feeling most of us can identify with. As we study them, let us remember the power of our own lives and examples. Our stories can become powerful tools in our witness to others about what God has done for us. As with these background characters, we become part of the great story of salvation, even if we might not be the main characters in the grander scheme of the cosmic drama that unfolds around us.

Lesson 1—Story and History

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: People and Plots (*Job 1:1–12*)

MONDAY: Where and How? (*1 Sam. 24:1–6, Gen. 39:6–12*)

TUESDAY: From Victory to the “Dark Ages” (*Josh. 3:9–17*)

WEDNESDAY: Of Kings and Princes (*1 Sam. 8:3–20*)

THURSDAY: Rehoboam’s Folly (*1 Kings 12:1–16*)

Memory Text—2 Timothy 3:16

Sabbath Gem: The Bible is so contemporary because it is full of stories. Not legends, not “cleverly devised myths” (*2 Pet. 1:16, ESV*), but historical and personal stories that reveal truth about God and His interaction with fallen humanity. These stories describe real people, battling with real-life problems and interacting with the living God, who offers answers to these problems.

Lesson 2—Caleb: Living With the Wait

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: “The Facts” (*Num. 13:26–14:2*)

MONDAY: Standing Tall When It Counts (*Num. 13:30*)

TUESDAY: Claiming God’s Promises (*Joshua 14*)

WEDNESDAY: Passing on the Legacy (*Ps. 92:12–15*)

THURSDAY: Giving Freely (*Judg. 1:14, 15*)

Memory Text—*Psalms 130:6, 7*

Sabbath Gem: Caleb exhibits strong courage and faith in God. He is a great leader who is willing to take risks and to lead by example. His story is relevant for us as we wait to cross over into the heavenly Canaan.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.