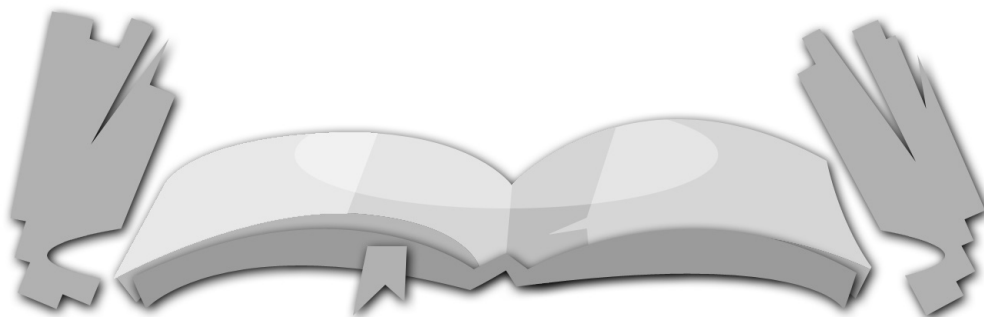


# All the Rest Is Commentary<sup>1</sup>



## SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 18

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Romans 14–16.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Now then, who are you to judge your brother or sister? Why do you look down on them? We will all stand in God’s courtroom to be judged” (Romans 14:10, NlrV).

**SOMEONE ONCE ASKED A FAMOUS RABBI<sup>2</sup> TO EXPLAIN THE WHOLE MEANING OF THE TORAH<sup>3</sup> 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.”

A person may not agree with the rabbi’s statement. But the rabbi does have a good point. Some parts of our faith are truths on which other beliefs are based. And other parts are “commentary.” This week’s lesson discusses some of that “commentary.” Before this, Paul was focused on the important principles (rules) of salvation (being saved from sin). Paul needed to explain clearly what makes a person acceptable to God. Maybe the jailer’s question summarized the whole thing. “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30).

Now Paul moves on to some “commentary.” Paul may be strong on some points. But he goes easy on other things. That is because these things are not as important. They are “commentary.” The issues themselves might not have been important. But the attitude (feeling) the Christians felt toward each other when they were dealing with these issues was.

1. commentary—a series of explanations, instructions, or advice written to help readers better understand the Bible.

2. rabbi—teacher of the Jewish religion.

3. Torah—the law of Moses; also, the writings of Moses, which include the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

**SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 19****THE WEAK BROTHER  
(Romans 14:1–3)**

In Romans 14:1–3, the question was raised about the eating of meats that might have been sacrificed (offered) to idols. The Jerusalem council (Acts 15) ruled that Gentile (non-Jewish) believers should avoid eating such foods. But there was always one question: “Do meats sold in public markets come from animals sacrificed to idols?” (Read 1 Corinthians 10:25.) Some Christians did not care about that at all. But others chose to eat vegetables instead. The issue had nothing to do with vegetarianism<sup>4</sup> and healthful living. Paul is not suggesting that the difference between clean<sup>5</sup> and unclean<sup>6</sup> meats has been removed. This is not the subject he is discussing. Suppose the words “he may eat all things” (Romans 14:2) were taken to mean that now any animal, clean or otherwise, could be eaten. This is not what the verse means. It would be giving it a meaning Paul never meant for it to have. Also, comparison<sup>7</sup> with other New Testament verses would show disagreement with this way of reading this verse.

Meanwhile, to “receive” someone who was weak in the faith meant to give him or her full membership in the church and all the status (honor) that went with that. That meant a person was allowed to think freely for himself or herself.

4. vegetarianism—a diet that does not include meat.

5. clean (meats)—accepted by Jewish law as fit for eating.

6. unclean meats—forbidden (not allowed) by Jewish law to be eaten.

7. comparison—the act of showing how two or more things are the same or different.

**What principle (rule) should we take from Romans 14:1–3?**

It also is important to understand that Paul in verse 3 does not speak negatively of the person who is “weak in the faith.” He does not give this person advice about how to become strong. Paul argues that the Christian who is judged to be overly (too) careful by his or her fellow Christians still is accepted by God. “God hath [has] received him.”

**How does Romans 14:4 make what we have just studied clearer to you?**

**We need to keep (remember) the principles found in today’s study. But are there times and places where we need to step in and judge a person’s heart or 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 keep the right balance?**



**Isaiah describes watchmen as watchdogs that cannot even bark. How can we know when to speak out and when to keep silent?**

**MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 20****WITH WHAT MEASURE YOU  
METE<sup>8</sup> (Romans 14:10)**

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



**Paul said that it was not wrong to eat food offered to an idol as long as it did not offend the person who ate it.**

We judge others too roughly at times. And we often judge others for the same things that we do. But how often do we think that what we do is not as bad as when others do the same thing? We might fool ourselves by our hypocrisy.<sup>9</sup> But we cannot fool God, who warned us: “Do not judge others. Then you will not be judged. You will be judged in the same way you judge others. You will be measured in the same way you measure others. You look at the bit of sawdust in your friend’s eye. But you pay no attention to the piece of wood in your eye. How can you say to your

friend ‘Let me take the bit of sawdust out of your eye?’ How can you say this while there is a piece of wood in your own eye?” (Matthew 7:1–4, NIV).

**How important is the Old Testament statement that Paul introduces in Romans 14:11?**

The verse from Isaiah 45:23 supports the thought that all must appear for judgment. “Every knee” and “every tongue” shows that every person will face judgment. The verse also tells us that each one will have to answer for his or her own life and actions (verse 12). No one can answer for another person. In this important sense, we are not our brother’s keeper.

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

The subject here is still foods sacrificed (offered) to idols.<sup>10</sup> The issue is not the difference between the clean and unclean foods. Paul is saying that there is nothing wrong with eating foods that might have been offered to idols. After all, what is an idol anyway? It is nothing (read 1 Corinthians 8:4), so who cares if some idol-worshiper offered the food to a statue of a frog or a bull?

A person should not be made to break his or her conscience,<sup>11</sup> even if the conscience seems to be too

8. mete—give or assign to others.

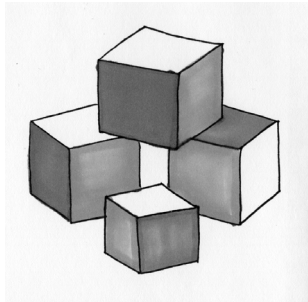
9. hypocrisy—saying one thing but doing another; two-facedness.

10. idols—statues, pictures, or other objects that are worshiped as gods.

11. conscience—sense of right and wrong.

sensitive (easily hurt). The “strong” church members clearly did not understand this fact. They hated the carefulness of the “weak” brethren and put stumbling blocks in their way.

**Might you, in your great desire to please the Lord, be in danger of what Paul is warning about? Why must we be careful to avoid being the conscience of others?**



Paul warned the stronger believers not to put stumbling blocks in front of their weak brethren.

## TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 21

### GIVING NO OFFENSE<sup>12</sup> (Romans 14:15–23)

**Read Romans 14:15–23 (read also 1 Corinthians 8:12, 13). Write a summary of what Paul is saying in Romans 14:15–23. What principle can we learn from these verses that can be used in all areas of our lives?**

In verses 17–20 Paul puts different parts of Christian teachings in the proper order. Diet is important. But

Christians should not argue over the choice of others to eat vegetables instead of flesh meats that might have been sacrificed to idols. Instead, Christians should focus on righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. How might we make use of this idea about diet today in our church? The health message and the teachings on diet can be of much blessing to us. But not everyone understands this subject the same way. We need to respect those differences.

**Verse 22 discusses leaving people to their own conscience. But Paul adds a very interesting warning: “Blessed are those who do not have to feel guilty for what they allow” (NirV). What warning is Paul giving? How does this balance many of the other ideas he has been teaching?**

Have you heard someone say, “It is my business and only my business what I eat or what I wear or what I do to enjoy myself”? Is it really? “No man is an island,” as the poet John Donne wrote. Our actions, words, and even our diet can influence<sup>13</sup> others, either for good or for bad. It is not hard to understand how. If someone who thinks highly of you catches you doing something “wrong,” that person could be influenced by<sup>14</sup> your example to do that same thing. We fool ourselves if we do not think that way. It does not matter if you say that you did not force the person. As

12. offense—something that causes a person to be hurt, angry, or upset.

13. influence—to have power, or an effect, over persons or things.

14. influenced by—to be affected or changed by the power of another person or thing.

Christians, we have a responsibility (duty) to one another. If our example can lead someone astray, we are responsible.

**What kind of example do you present? Would you feel comfortable with having others follow your example in all areas? What does your answer say about you?**

### WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 22

#### HONORING SPECIAL DAYS (Romans 14:4–10)

Paul continues the discussion about not judging others who might think differently than we do. He brings up the issue of special days that some people want to keep and others do not.

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

What are the days Paul is writing about? Was there a serious disagreement in the early church about the keeping of certain days? Yes. We read about some of this disagreement in Galatians 4:9, 10. This is where Paul scolds the Galatian Christians for honoring “days, and months, and times, and years.” In lesson 2, we learned that some people in the church encouraged the Galatian

Christians to be circumcised<sup>15</sup> and to keep other laws of Moses. Paul feared that these ideas might harm the Roman church too. In Rome it was the Jewish Christians who had a hard time accepting that they did not need to honor the Jewish festivals<sup>16</sup> anymore. Paul is saying to them, “Do as you please in this matter. The important point is not to judge those who think differently from you.” Some Christians who wanted to be on the safe side honored one or more of the Jewish festivals. To this, Paul gave the advice, “Let them do it, if they feel they should.”

To bring the weekly Sabbath into Romans 14:5 does not make much sense. We cannot imagine Paul taking such an uncaring attitude (feeling) about the fourth commandment. As we have noted from this quarter’s study, Paul felt obedience to the law was very important. Paul was not going to place the Sabbath commandment in the same class as people who did not want to eat foods that might have been offered to idols. Sadly, many Christians still use these verses as an example to show that the seventh-day Sabbath no longer needs to be kept holy. These verses say no such thing. Their wrongful use is a good example of what Peter warned that people were doing with Paul’s writings: “He [Paul] writes the same way in all his letters. He speaks about what I have just told you. His letters include some things that are hard to understand. People who don’t [do not] know better and aren’t [are

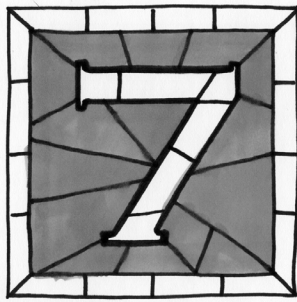
15. circumcised—the cutting away of the foreskin of the penis, a man’s sexual organ.

16. festivals—special times or events when people gather to celebrate something; doing something special or enjoyable for an important event.



not] firm [strong] in the faith twist [turn] what he says. They twist the other Scriptures [verses] too. So they will be destroyed [destroy themselves]" (2 Pet. 3:16, NIV).

**What has been your experience with the Sabbath? Has it been a blessing to you? What changes make the Sabbath more meaningful?**



How has the seventh-day Sabbath been a blessing to you?

### THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 23

#### FITTING<sup>17</sup> BENEDICTION (BLESSING) (Romans 15:1–3)

**What important Christian truth is found in Romans 15:1–3? In what way do these verses capture many ideas of what it means to be a follower of Jesus? What other verses teach the same ideas? Most important, how can you be a good example of this principle? As Paul brought his letter to a close, what different blessings did he give in Romans 15:5, 6, 13, 33?**

17. fitting—the right thing.

18. fortitude—the courage (strength) to endure (last).

19. endurance—power to keep on.

20. translated—when words have been changed from one language into another.

21. righteousness by faith—God saves us when we have faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

22. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins.

The God of patience means the God who helps His children continue faithfully. The word for “patience,” *hupomone*, means “fortitude,”<sup>18</sup> or “steadfast endurance.”<sup>19</sup> The word for “consolation” (comfort) may be translated<sup>20</sup> “encouragement” (giving hope). The God of encouragement is the God who encourages. The God of hope is the God who has given hope to people. Likewise, the God of peace is the God who gives peace, and people may have peace in Him.

What a perfect blessing in a letter whose most important theme (topic; subject) is righteousness by faith.<sup>21</sup> Encouragement, hope, and peace! How badly our present world needs these blessings.

**After many personal greetings, how did Paul bring his letter to a close in Romans 16:25–27?**

Paul ends his letter in a glorious (wonderful) praise to God. The Roman Christians, and all Christians, can safely put their trust in God. By doing so, they show support of their place as saved sons and daughters of God, justified (made pure and holy) by faith and now led by the Spirit of God.

Paul is thrilled to be the messenger of such wonderful news. He calls this news “my gospel.”<sup>22</sup> What he means is the gospel he preaches. But what he preaches has been supported by

the preaching of Jesus and by the messages of the prophets.<sup>23</sup> It was kept secret. This is not because God did not want men and women to know but because they refused to accept light from heaven. This prevented (stopped) God from giving them additional light. Also, there were some parts of the plan that men and women would not be able to understand until the Messiah (chosen One) came in human form.<sup>24</sup> He gave an example of what God is like and of what we may become by holding on to God's power. The new kind of life would be one of "obedience of faith." That is the kind of obedience that comes from faith in the Lord. In turn, the Lord justifies (makes pure and holy) sinners by grace through His perfect character,<sup>25</sup> which is given to all who accept it for themselves.

#### FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 24

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Read Ellen G. White, "Unity [Oneness] and Love in the Church," pages 477, 478; "Love for the Erring [Wrong]," pages 604–606, in *Testimonies*<sup>26</sup> for the Church, volume 5; "Helping the Tempted,"<sup>27</sup> page 166, in *The Ministry [Work] of Healing*; page 719, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 6.

"I [Ellen G. White] was shown the danger of the people of God in turning to Brother and Sister White for

help. They think that they must come to them with their burdens and get advice from them. This should not be so. They are invited by their kind and loving Saviour to come to Him when tired and heavily burdened. And Jesus will relieve them. . . . Many come to us asking questions: Shall I do this? Shall I be involved in that business? Or, about dress, Shall I wear this or that article of clothing? I answer them: You claim to be disciples [followers] of Christ. Study your Bibles. Read carefully and prayerfully the life of our dear Saviour when He lived among men upon the earth. Copy [live] His life, and you will not wander from the narrow path. We refuse to be conscience for you. If we tell you just what to do, you will turn to us to guide you, instead of going directly to Jesus for yourselves."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 2, pages 118, 119.

"We are not to put the responsibility [duty] of our work upon others. We also are not to wait for them to tell us what to do. We cannot depend on people for advice. The Lord will teach us our duty just as willingly as He will teach somebody else. . . . Those who decide to do nothing will not please God. They will know, after presenting [bringing] their case before God, just what to do."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 668.

"There have ever been in the church people who feel very independent.

23. prophets—men or women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

24. human form—having the body of a human being (person).

25. character—who God is; having and understanding the character of God is the same as being kind, loving, honest, and so on. God's law (Ten Commandments) shows us His character.

26. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

27. tempted—those who are presented with the opportunity (chance) to do wrong.

They do not seem to understand that independence of spirit may lead them to have too much confidence in themselves or to trust too much in their own judgment. They do so rather than respect the advice and judgment of more experienced church members.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*,<sup>28</sup> pages 163, 164.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

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

a. being faithful to what we believe and not judging others who think differently than we do?

b. being true to our own conscience and not trying to be the conscience for others, while at the same time trying to help those who are not following God’s will? When do we speak, and when do we keep silent? When are we responsible if we do keep silent?

c. being free in the Lord but at the same time owning our responsibility to be a good example for those who might think highly of us?

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18. apostles—the disciples, followers of Jesus, who preached and taught the gospel (the good news about Jesus) after Jesus rose from the dead and returned to heaven.