



## Growth Group Summer 2020

### *Freedom*

July 5, 2020 - Romans 14:7-8, 14:13-15:3 (NRSV)

**Growth groups are one of the best and easiest ways to find community at a church. In this time of Corona19 and “social distancing” please don’t meet in person, but do continue to check in with each other. If your growth group would like to meet online or if you are aware of needs that the church can help fill, please let us know at [connect@ljpres.org](mailto:connect@ljpres.org). Thank you for loving and caring for each other.**

### Setting the Context

At points, in the letter of Romans, the apostle Paul dives deeply into ethical and theological issues. However, Paul also took on real life situations that the early church in Rome was facing. He would do that in theological and ethical terms, but his goal was to help followers of Jesus sort through what it looked like to live out their faith. In Rome there were Jewish Christians who were reticent to give up certain ceremonial aspects of their religious heritage. However, other followers of Jesus loved the freedom that had been offered to them in Jesus. In our section today, one of the issues that Paul takes up is freedom.

Verse 7 says that none of us lives for himself/herself alone and no one dies alone. This is not the idea that each of us is an island. Rather, it is pointing out that all of us live under the watchful eye of God. All believers are ultimately responsible to God. We don’t make decisions about certain days or certain foods in isolation, but rather in accordance with God’s will.

We probably find it strange that people were debating the issue of “clean and unclean” foods. After all, Christ had set people free from those things and the Jerusalem Council had also addressed that issue. However, certain customs can linger a long time. Paul argues that there are some things that are essential and other things that are secondary and there should be some freedom around secondary issues, where believers might have differing opinions.

Around 1627, a German Lutheran theologian (Rupertus Meldenius) was writing about Christian unity, during the Thirty Years War when religious tensions were running high. He wrote, “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.”

Believers are to work hard at living in ways that brings righteousness, peace and joy. Freedom may be a right, but it is not the ultimate guide for conduct. Love is the ultimate guide for conduct. Jesus Christ modeled that rights are to be laid aside in the interest of love. We are not to act in a way that would cause others to stumble (1 Corinthians 8:13).

Paul closes this section by talking about the importance of living for one another. Our calling is not about pleasing ourselves, but about caring for others. Those who are “stronger” (this should be understood descriptively, and not a word spoken in judgment) in the faith are to work on self-denial. The stronger believers are to look to Jesus and note the way in which he lived. Mark 10:45 reminds us that the son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Thus, believers are to live in the same way.



# Exploring the Text

## Read Romans 14:7-8, 14:13-15:3 (NRSV)

*<sup>7</sup> We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. <sup>8</sup> If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.*

*<sup>13</sup> Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another. <sup>14</sup> I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. <sup>15</sup> If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died. <sup>16</sup> So do not let your good be spoken of as evil. <sup>17</sup> For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup> The one who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and has human approval. <sup>19</sup> Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. <sup>20</sup> Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat; <sup>21</sup> it is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble. <sup>22</sup> The faith that you have, have as your own conviction before God. Blessed are those who have no reason to condemn themselves because of what they approve. <sup>23</sup> But those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because they do not act from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*

*<sup>1</sup> We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. <sup>2</sup> Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor. <sup>3</sup> For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."*

## Questions

*If you are answering these questions alone, we would urge you to try journaling. Rather than just pondering the answers, try writing them out along with a prayer to the Lord.*

- 1) What is your favorite memory related to July 4th? A trip, a party, a family gathering?
- 2) In this letter Paul warns about Christians judging other Christians. What are some ways that we continue to do this? When have you seen this happen? What were the issues?
- 3) Can you think of a time in your faith when you either caused someone to stumble, or someone else caused you to stumble?
- 4) In Romans 14:23, Paul says that whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. What does he mean?
- 5) In the context we read the following quote. "*In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.*" What are the "essential" things in our faith? On what issues does there need to be unity? How about non-essentials?
- 6) How do you talk about faith and freedom? In Galatians 5:1, the apostle Paul writes, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." What does freedom in Christ mean to you?
- 7) In Romans 15:2 the apostle Paul talks about building others up. What is something you could do this week to build up your neighbor or someone you know?