

## In step with Jesus 186

14/2/26

**Key Text: “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; 38 give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure, you use it will be measured back to you.” (Luke 6: 37-38)**

### Introduction

The crust of our reflections last week was that love is the principle that must guide our relationships with leaders and those in authority. This is based on the understanding that the apparently powerful and influential people of this world are also God’s children in need of His love and mercy. They have their silent struggles, which only God understands. Therefore, we ought to be loving and compassionate towards them as children of God.

Today we will start reading Romans chapter 14, one of the most controversial chapters of Paul’s writings. It is a continuation of Paul’s instructions about the horizontal relationships we have with fellow human beings. In Romans chapter 12, Paul introduced us to the broader concept of Christian conduct in human relationships but emphasized on how we relate to those who hate us. In Romans chapter 13 he focused on our relationships with people in authority. But in Romans chapter 14, Paul turns his discussion to our relationship with members of the household of faith, some of whom may be weak in faith. Let us read Romans 14: 1-12 and see what we can learn for ourselves.

### Romans 14: 1-12

14 As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. 2 One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. 3 Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. 4 Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master[a] that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

5 One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. 7 For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. 8 For 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. 9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

10 Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; 11 for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess[b] to God." 12 So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

## **Reflections**

Romans chapter 14 can be unsettling for some of us who are sabbath-keeping and vegetarian Seventh-day Adventists. As I read this chapter, I wondered if maintaining a plant-based diet and observing the seventh-day sabbath are indicators that we are weak in faith. But that is not what Paul is talking about here. The real issue that Paul was addressing is the ongoing tension among believers with regards to salvation by faith and salvation by the works of the law.

Recall that Paul's burden in the entire book of Romans had been to convince his audience that salvation is by grace through faith and not by the works of the law. In Romans chapter 9:31 -32, Paul says that "Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone". In Romans chapter 14, Paul continued to address the Jewish problem of righteousness by works but no longer among those who did not believe, but among those who believed but were weak in faith. Some of them ate only vegetables, less they eat foods sacrificed to idols and some of them exalted certain days of the week above others. Paul was not arguing for or against any of such practices, but he discourages believers from Judging one another based on those issues. His emphasis was the need for mutual love and respect for one another's journeys of faith and acknowledgment that God is the only righteous judge.

Paul knew that one of the greatest challenges among God's people would be how to tolerate one another without judging and condemning those who are not of the same level of faith as we are. Because he knows that anything done without faith cannot please God, he discourages us from pressuring people to conform to our ideas of what a Christian life should be. Ultimately, Jesus is the saviour and judge, and he is taking each one of us on a journey. We will do well to allow Jesus to convict people on what they eat and days they observe to the glory of God. That way, we reflect the love of our heavenly Father, who loves everyone, regardless of where they are in their journey.