

Application in indifferent things

Romans 14:1-15:13

Today we will look at some very specific issues that can occur within the communities of disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as we will see, the very basis to deal with those issues is true love for one another.

Just to clarify the title of the sermon: indifferent things are things that in itself are neutral, not being good or bad by itself. Whether they are good or bad for you depends on how you look at them. We'll see that in the verses we are dealing with today. However, different opinions about these things can have a very strong impact on the unity within the church and therefore Paul speaks about them. Let's go to the first verses of Romans 14.

Romans 14:1-2

- Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.
- For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.
- Aanvaard dan wie zwak is in het geloof, maar niet om over meningsverschillen te strijden.
- De een gelooft wel dat hij alles eten mag, maar wie zwak is, eet plantaardig voedsel.

The first thing to notice is that the things that will be discussed in the verses to come should not cause division in the Body of Christ. Both aspects that are mentioned in the first verse are related to that.

In verse 2 we see one item that could cause indeed division if not dealt with in a proper way.

Before going further I have just a simple question: who of you believes that this verse talks about the Jewish dietary laws, the Jewish laws regarding food? And why can that not be correct? (Talks about a strictly vegetarian diet and later on about not drinking wine. Both are not commanded as such in those laws.)

Both a vegetarian diet as well as abstaining from wine were related to an ascetic life style as propagated by certain groups as means to control desires and resist temptations.

Romans 14:3-4

- Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.
- Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.
- Wie wel alles eet, moet hem niet minachten die niet alles eet. En wie niet alles eet, moet hem niet veroordelen die alles eet. God immers heeft hem aanvaard.
- Wie bent u, dat u de huisslaaf van een ander oordeelt? Of hij staat of valt, gaat alleen zijn eigen heer aan. Hij zal echter staande gehouden worden, want God is bij machte hem staande te houden.

In this case, despising somebody who has a different opinion in these matters may be an expression of pride, thinking that with our opinion we're on the truly right track.

But as we will see later on, these things are not doctrinal issues. Therefore we are to be careful not to try to impose our opinion upon people that belong to the group maintaining the opposite opinion.

As Paul points out in the next verses, this did not only happen with regards to food and drinks, but also with regards to specific days.

Romans 14:5-6

- One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.
- He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

The Dutch verses are on the next sheet.

Romans 14:5-6

- De een acht de ene dag boven de andere dag, maar de ander acht al de dagen gelijk. Laat ieder in zijn eigen geest ten volle overtuigd zijn.
- Wie de dag in ere houdt, houdt hem in ere voor de Heere, en wie de dag niet in ere houdt, houdt hem niet in ere voor de Heere. Wie eet, eet voor de Heere, want hij dankt God. En wie niet eet, eet niet voor de Heere, en ook hij dankt God.

Again we need to realize that this does not explicitly relate to keeping the laws regarding the Jewish feasts.

Within the Roman culture several special days were observed based on superstition. You can compare this to the awkward feelings some people have towards Friday the 13th etc.

In addition to that, citizens of Rome were supposed to participate in official celebrations related to specific days in relation to the present and previous emperors and other official days.

Just remember that this church was mainly composed of disciples from a gentile background. Jews were, up to a certain time, exempted from participating in these celebrations.

In verse 6 we see that their motive for following their opinion should be to honor God through it.

Romans 14:7-8

- For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.
- For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.
- Niemand van ons leeft immers voor zichzelf, en niemand sterft voor zichzelf.
- Want als wij leven, leven wij voor de Heere en als wij sterven, sterven wij voor de Heere. Of wij dan leven of sterven, wij zijn van de Heere.

As I already mentioned in my comments on the previous sheet, all we do we should honestly and sincerely do to bring glory to God.

That's what we need to keep in mind.

We see that also reflected in the next verses.

Romans 14:9-11

- For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.
- But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.
- For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God."

Again the Dutch verses are on the next sheet.

Romans 14:9-11

- Want met dit doel is Christus ook gestorven en opgestaan en weer levend geworden, dat Hij zowel over doden als levenden zou heersen.
- U echter, wat oordeelt u uw broeder? Of ook u, wat minacht u uw broeder? Wij zullen toch allen voor de rechterstoel van Christus gesteld worden.
- Want er staat geschreven: Zo waar als Ik leef, zegt de Heere: Voor Mij zal elke knie zich buigen, en elke tong zal God belijden.

We all have to keep in mind that all of us belong to the Lord Jesus Christ and that all of us will have to give an account for our actions to Him. He is the one to judge us in these things!

We need to keep in mind that these opinions regarding food and keeping specific days are not a matter of doctrine.

When false doctrine is taught it indeed has to be rejected and it should be exposed so people will not be misled by it.

But that is not the case in these matters.

We see that also in the next verses.

Romans 14:12-13

- So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.
- Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.
- Zo zal dan nu ieder van ons voor zichzelf rekenschap geven aan God.
- Laten wij dan niet langer elkaar oordelen, maar oordeel liever dit: de broeder geen aanstoot of oorzaak tot struikelen te geven.

So, Paul makes it clear that in these matters that are not based on anything doctrinal we have to be careful both not to judge one another nor putting up a stumbling block to one another, especially with regards to the weaker brother or sister.

Paul makes that also clear in the next verses.

Romans 14:14-15

- I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.
- Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.

Again, let's go to the next sheet for the Dutch verses.

Romans 14:14-15

- Ik weet en ben ervan overtuigd in de Heere Jezus dat niets in zichzelf onrein is. Alleen voor hem die van mening is dat iets onrein is, voor die is het onrein.
- Maar als uw broeder om wat u eet bedroefd wordt, dan wandelt u niet meer naar de liefde. Richt door uw eten niet hem te gronde voor wie Christus gestorven is.

Here Paul makes a very important point:

We are not to use our freedom in such a way that we would cause a weaker brother or sister to stumble in his/her faith.

He expresses that also in the next verses.

Romans 14:16-17

- Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
- Laat dan het goede dat u bezit niet gelasterd worden.
- Want het Koninkrijk van God bestaat niet uit eten en drinken, maar uit gerechtigheid en vrede en blijdschap in de Heilige Geest.

We need to keep in mind what is really important.

In Colossians 3:1-3 Paul says it in the following way:

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

So, Paul is reminding the recipients of his letter that in Christ they died already to sin and to the law and that they are indeed to focus on the things that really matter.

And as such, to maintain righteousness, peace and joy among themselves as disciples of Christ is far more important than any discussion on food or drinks.

Romans 14:18-19

- For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.
- Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.
- Want wie Christus in deze dingen dient, is welbehaaglijk voor God en in achting bij de mensen.
- Laten wij dus najagen wat de vrede en de onderlinge opbouw bevordert.

Here we see that Paul encourages them to truly pursue the things that really matter in order to maintain peace within the Body of Christ and to build up one another.

And, as we will see in the next verses, those that are stronger in the faith have a special responsibility in these matters.

Romans 14:20-21

- Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.
- It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.
- Breek niet om wat u eet het werk van God af. Alle dingen zijn wel rein, maar het is zondig voor hem die door wat hij eet aanstoot geeft.
- Het is goed geen vlees te eten, geen wijn te drinken en niets te doen waaraan uw broeder aanstoot neemt, waarover hij struikelt of waarin hij zwak is.

This is indeed part of loving one another: not putting up a stumbling block for a weaker brother or sister in Christ.

While you are by yourself or with a group of people who have the same opinion in these matters it is okay to eat meat or to drink wine, but in a mixed group the stronger brothers and sisters have a special responsibility towards the weaker brothers and sisters in these matters.

In the next verses Paul explains also why that is important.

Romans 14:22-23

- Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.
- But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.
- Hebt u geloof? Heb dat bij uzelf voor God. Zalig die zichzelf niet oordeelt in wat hem goeiddunkt.
- Wie echter twijfelt als hij eet, is veroordeeld, omdat hij het niet uit geloof doet. En alles wat niet uit geloof is, is zonde.

Look at verse 23!

By forcing a weaker brother or sister to do in these indifferent things what they consider to be wrong we actually would make them sin and thus even increase their problem.

That's why Paul gives the stronger brother and sister an additional instruction in the first verses of chapter 15.

Romans 15:1-2

- We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.
- Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.
- Maar wij die sterk zijn, zijn verplicht de zwakheden van hen die niet sterk zijn te dragen, en niet onszelf te behagen.
- Laat daarom ieder van ons zijn naaste behagen ten goede, tot opbouw.

Whether we like it or not, when you are a stronger and more mature disciple you have a special responsibility towards your weaker brothers and sisters.

We are not to misuse our freedom in such a way that the weaker person will stumble or fall, but we have to behave in such a way that the weaker brothers and sisters will be build up.

All of us have that responsibility. Also in this matter we have to follow the example of Christ, as we see in the next verse.

Romans 15:3-4

- For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me."
- For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

Let's go to the next sheet for the Dutch verses.

Romans 15:3-4

- Want ook Christus heeft niet Zichzelf behaagd, maar zoals geschreven staat: Al de smaad van hen die U smaden, is op Mij gevallen.
- Want alles wat eertijds geschreven is, is tot onze onderwijzing eerder geschreven, opdat wij in de weg van volharding en vertroosting door de Schriften de hoop zouden behouden.

Our Lord Jesus Christ did not sin in any way and still He had to undergo that awful suffering and death for the sake of those who would believe in Him.

And Paul reminds his readers about all the things that were written in the Scriptures, with which he means the Old Testament. From what is written in these Scriptures we should learn how to maintain our hope through both perseverance and the comfort we receive from these Scriptures.

And in the next verses he reminds them of the fact that they do not have to face these things in their own strength.

Romans 15:5-7

- Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

Let's look also at the Dutch verses on the next sheet.

Romans 15:5-7

- En de God van de volharding en van de vertroosting moge u geven onderling eensgezind te zijn in overeenstemming met Christus Jezus, opdat u eensgezind, met één mond, de God en Vader van onze Heere Jezus Christus verheerlijkt.
- Daarom, aanvaard elkaar zoals ook Christus ons aanvaard heeft, tot heerlijkheid van God.

We can trust that God will help us indeed in these matters if we truly seek to maintain the unity in the Spirit unto the glory of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And through that strength that God will supply, we should also be able to accept one another, just as Christ has accepted us.
And all this should be done unto the glory of God!

Let's continue!

Romans 15:8-9

- Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: "For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name."
- En ik zeg dat Jezus Christus een Dienaar van de besnijdenis is geworden ter wille van de waarheid van God om de beloften aan de vaders te bevestigen, en opdat de heidenen God zouden verheerlijken vanwege de barmhartigheid, zoals geschreven staat: Daarom zal ik U belijden onder de heidenen, en Uw Naam lofzingen.

Here we see that in these things God had both the wellbeing of the elected from among His chosen people and from among the gentiles in mind.

And Paul reminds his readers of the fact that all these things indeed were prophesied in the Scriptures as we see from the following verses he is quoting from Isaiah.

Romans 13:10-12

- And again he says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!"
- And again: "Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!"
- And again, Isaiah says: "There shall be a root of Jesse; And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, In Him the Gentiles shall hope."

Let's also look at the Dutch version of these verses.

Romans 13:10-12

- En verder zegt Hij: Wees vrolijk, heidenen, met Zijn volk!
- En verder: Loof de Heere, alle heidenvolken, en prijs Hem, alle volken!
- En verder zegt Jesaja: De wortel van Isai zal er zijn en Hij Die opstaat om heerschappij te voeren over de heidenen, op Hem zullen de heidenen hopen.

The Good News, the message of salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is to be proclaimed throughout the whole world as it is indeed Good News for all people!

Again, this is in line with the great commission we received from our Lord Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

Let's go to the last verse of today.

Romans 15:13

- Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- De God nu van de hoop moge u vervullen met alle blijdschap en vrede in het geloven, opdat u overvloedig bent in de hoop, door de kracht van de Heilige Geest.

Realizing that his readers will not be able to do all these things in their own strength Paul prays for them that God may supply them all with what they need in order to do all what he has taught them throughout these verses.

He knows very well that in their own strength they will not be able to do that.

But he also realizes that these things are necessary to maintain the unity in the Spirit among the members of the Body of Christ. Therefore he prays for them that through the power of the Holy Spirit they will be able to do these things.

And we too should realize that also we can only do what is needed through the power of the Holy Spirit!

Let's pray.