

AN EXPOSITION OF ROMANS CHAPTER FOURTEEN



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Romans chapter fourteen is unique, because the party of vegetarians spoken of who regarded special days to the Lord is not known by us today out of the obscurity of the past, but at least through the records left to us by Paul who wrote the book of Romans, we have a good idea of a new problem that was beginning to arise in the Roman church which was promptly put to death by Paul through the letter and special admonition which he wrote.

However, it is this same chapter that is misinterpreted and misused by anti-nomian Evangelicals in their hate of Adventist traditions, in an effort to destroy Adventist vegetarianism (which nevertheless rests on different grounds to that of Romans chapter fourteen), and Sabbatarianism.

In their misinformed and misguided zeal to brand Adventism as a “cult”, Evangelicals misuse Romans chapter fourteen as if it is against vegetarianism and the keeping of the Seventh-day Sabbath which is regarded by the Law of God (Exodus 20:8-11). Nothing could be further from the truth as what is proffered as light by these religions of lawlessness. Thus it is the intention of the author to exposit Romans chapter fourteen and so show what it really means contrary to the hollow sounds of Evangelicals.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF WHAT ROMANS CHAPTER FOURTEEN IS ALL ABOUT

The weakness in Faith of the vegetarian party of verse one (Vs. 1) was constituted of a regard of all flesh foods as common or not consecrated to God- verse fourteen (Vs. 14). so the persons subsisted on a vegetarian diet-verse two (Vs. 2). They also in their own minds regarded certain days they deemed to be special unto the Lord- verse five (Vs. 5). However, the problem came when the vegetarian party propagated those views or personal positions as necessary to salvation- verse seventeen to verse nineteen (Vs. 17-19). The opposing meat-eating side viewed and defied the vegetarian party as probably not true Christians and brothers, and thus not subject to receive acceptance and careful regard in their state, and thus Paul counseled them otherwise- verses one, three, four, ten, thirteen, fifteen and sixteen etc., (Vs. 1,3,4,10,13,15,16 etc.). The chapter therefore is an admonition of Paul to the meat-eating side especially that they must, "Owe no man anything, but to love one another..." Romans 13:8, and "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. Romans 13:10.

PROBLEMS WITH SOME WORDS

In their uninformed zeal Evangelicals usually seize upon certain words in the chapter (Romans chapter fourteen) to use as a sharp sword to refute Adventist claims about vegetarianism and Sabbath keeping, which if carefully and dispassionately studied, would lend no such aid to their excesses against God's holy Law and sacred history. A number of words are not properly translated in their best way to lend an adequate understanding of the chapter, but they are in such a form that the unthinking man not led by the Spirit of Truth (Jn. 14:16-18,26), could easily think that his anti-nomian and even anti-vegetarian ideas are represented. Words like

“unclean”, “meat” and even “herbs” must be better translated helping the chapter to reveal more light.

SABBATH KEEPING IS NOT IN ROMANS CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Sabbath keeping is not even referred to or at least hinted in the whole chapter. The verse that says, “One man esteemeth one day besides (para, Greek) another day; another esteemeth every day. Let each be fully assured in his own mind.” Vs. 5, is not speaking about the seventh-day solar Sabbath, or even the other ceremonial lunar Sabbaths which Paul expressly stated was abolished (Ephesians 2:14,15; Colossians 2:14,16, 17). Paul himself in the book of Hebrews which he also wrote tells us that when we believe in Jesus we must certainly keep the Sabbath, (Hebrews 4:1-11). He said under the inspiration of the divine Spirit: “There remaineth therefore a rest (Greek: Sabbatismos-Sabbath-keeping) to the people of God.” Hebrews 4:9. Jesus Himself presented Himself as the Lord (Adonay) also of the Sabbath day, telling us that it was made for man (Mark 2:27, 28). This day is exalted in the Bible as the sign of YHWH and His sanctifying ability (Exodus 31:13), as proof of God’s creatorship (Exodus 20:8-11), it is labeled as YHWH’S special holy day (Isaiah 58:13) and gentiles are urged to keep it (Isaiah 56:4,6,7), how can this day which God gave not even the slightest evidence of being changed or abolished be spoken of so lightly in Romans 14:5 “... Let each be fully assured in his own mind.”? It is highly ridiculous and insincere to even think so. God has already persuaded us all over the Bible about the Seventh-day Sabbath, it is not a common or cheap working day over which we must debate as to whether we regard it to YHWH. We cannot even think of God speaking about the Sabbath in the way Romans 14:6 speaks, except our minds are not worked upon sensitively by the Spirit of Truth, and we have hate and blind prejudice for God’s Law. But we can surely understand His speech about any common working day that a man puts

some special value to in such a way when He says through Paul: “He that mindeth the day mindeth it unto the Lord; and he that mindeth not the day to the Lord, he mindeth it not...” Romans 14:6. This common advice is certainly not about the Sabbath, it is about an ordinary working day that some regarded to the Lord and members were not bound to keep it.

THE ISSUE ABOUT VEGETARIANISM

The basis of vegetarianism in Seventh-day Adventism is not like that expressed in Romans chapter fourteen. In the chapter the persons were “... weak in the faith...” (Vs. 1), thus they regarded all flesh foods as “common” (not “unclean” as in the K. J. V.) (Vs. 14); that is, they regarded flesh foods as not having any special divine consecration to the cause of God so that in fear, they chose vegetarianism, because they did not want to find themselves in sin by meat-eating.

This was an un-informed position, one based upon mere speculation that arises in people not mature in the Faith of Jesus Christ. It must be clearly stated that the issue in Romans chapter fourteen was not about clean and unclean meats. The very Greek word translated “unclean” in verse fourteen is “Koinos” and it means simply “common” as seen in Titus 1:4 or as in Jude. 3. Therefore the idea of common was merely in the minds or imaginations of the vegetarian party.

The brethren of the meat-eating party were more informed from the Bible; they understood that some meats of themselves were scientifically unfit for food, as seen in the fact that seven of the clean animals went into the ark of Noah, while just two of the unclean entered therein (Genesis 7:2,3). This distinction was further reinforced by the distinctions catalogued by God in Leviticus 11:1-47. Not even the apostle Peter ate anything common and unclean (that is, not consecrated to God, and unhealthy for food (Acts 10:14). The meat-eaters understood that some flesh foods could be “received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth...” because they were “good” and were “...sanctified

by the word of God and prayer.” (1 Timothy 4:3-5). Thus they ate flesh foods without any fear, but did it in such vehemence that they were putting a stumbling block before the vegetarians and were warned by Paul about it (Romans 14:15,16,20,21). Nevertheless the foundations of the vegetarians almost bordered upon righteousness by works for salvation, thus Paul also warned them of what the kingdom of God is not, what it is and as to what is pleasing to God (Romans 14:17-19).

WHY DOES ADVENTISM HAVE VEGETARIANISM TODAY?

As Seventh-day Adventists we recognize that a person can eat flesh foods and be saved in Christ. Even Jesus, no doubt, ate flesh from the sea (John 21:1-14); but in our peculiar position as God’s remnant Church that becomes the special object of the wrath of the dragon (Revelation 12:17), we need to have a unique experience more than ever in the history of Christianity. We are to have the spirit of prophecy (Revelation 12:17; Revelation 19:10), that we can run to and fro in the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation that our knowledge would be greatly increased (Daniel 12:4). This way we shall be able to turn many to righteousness (Daniel 12:3). Where does our vegetarianism fit?

Daniel who refused the king’s food (Daniel 1), and ate a vegetarian diet (Daniel 1:12-16), was not weaker in health as the vegetarian party was weak in Faith (Romans 14:1). Rather he and his vegetarian friends were much healthier than those that ate meat (Daniel 1:15), and as a result, their mental powers in spiritual and scientific things were more alert and better functioning that God could use them greatly (Daniel 1:17-20).

This is why Adventism professes vegetarianism; that Adventists may be more mentally, physically and spiritually fit and alert to face the final events as people of prophecy (Revelation 12:17; Revelation 19:10; Daniel 12:4,9,10), and people who are to face the greatest test and persecution of the

Church in history (Revelation 14:12), and finally producing the 144,000 (Revelation 14:1-5).

Our purpose in vegetarianism is in the spirit of Daniel, standing in Daniel's lot since we are a people of prophecy like Daniel was. We do not have just health reasons like some people have, but we have health as a means to an end, a spiritual functional end just like Daniel, and not uninformed fear and precaution like the vegetarian party of Romans chapter fourteen. Our position therefore is the Will of God for the last Church which must profess the highest standards in history.

A BRIEF COMMENTARY ON ROMANS CHAPTER FOURTEEN

We shall now give a brief commentary on each verse of Romans fourteen with special emphasis on the controversial verses, that uninformed or deceived individuals may understand what it is all about, and may be edified and be blessed in the way of God.

Verse one tells the church to receive the weak in Faith— that is, they of little Faith- without doubtful reasoning or skepticism as to the genuineness of their Christianity and conversion.

Verse two tells us what behavior that revealed the weakness in Faith. While the meat-eating party believed that they may eat all things, this “all things” was in context to the clean meats of Leviticus chapter eleven and First Timothy chapter four, verse three to verse five (Leviticus 11; 1 Timothy 4:3-5); not like frogs, worms, snakes and carrion crows which gets one sick and sometimes result in death. They ate clean meats while the weak in the Faith ate a vegetarian diet. The weakness in the Faith was a fear of sinning against God since they thought that all meats were common (Greek: Koinos, not unclean as akatharton, Acts 10:14), which means none of them were consecrated to God.

Verse three has Paul counseling the meat-eating group not to belittle or denigrate or condemn the vegetarian group since God had taken them unto Himself as His children although they were

weak in the Faith.

Verse four rebukes the meat-eating party by telling them (**even though**) they were out of place to judge another man's slave (the vegetarians), to the slave master was the onus to judge whether his slave was standing in the Faith or was falling.

Verse five further informs us that the vegetarian party was esteeming or judging a specific day besides other days while the meat-eaters esteemed every day. This had nothing to do with the Sabbath which John the apostle called the "Lord's day"

(Revelation 1:10). It was merely a common working day which the vegetarians placed some spiritual significance to, that Paul had to instruct each to be persuaded in their own minds. This is not so with the Sabbath, because God persuaded our minds with the scriptures of the special importance of the Sabbath above all other days. (Exodus 20:8-11; Hebrews 4:1-11; Exodus 31:13).

Verse six tells us that he that thinketh in his mind that the day should be reserved or consecrated to God, that was his decision or choice. Likewise the same applied to those who did not regard it to God. He that eats to the Lord— (the meat-eaters) did it before God, giving thanks first.

Verse seven tells us that no man lives or dies to himself, he does all unto God.

Verse eight tells us Christians that whether we live or die we belong unto the Lord— this meant both the vegetarians and meat-eaters.

Verse nine tells us that Christ died and rose that He might be Lord of the dead and living Christians.

Verse ten asks why was each judging each other? We are told that we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.

Verses eleven and twelve are a quotation of Isaiah 45:23 to

substantiate that all are to stand before God, and we are informed that each will have to give an account concerning himself to God.

Verse thirteen tells us to no longer judge one another, that is, no longer condemn each other, but to consider not to put a stumbling block in our brother's way. This was primarily to the meat-eaters who were eating their meat in a ridiculing way as to cause their vegetarian brethren to stumble (since they were weak in the Faith).

Verse fourteen tells the vegetarian party that there were no meat or flesh foods, (the context is clean meats: 1 Timothy 4:3-5) to be considered common (Greek: Koinos, not unclean, Greek: akatharton). That means, none was to be considered unconsecrated of itself. This was simply a matter of how the vegetarians esteemed it in their minds. They esteemed meats unconsecrated or not consecrated to God, thus it was so to their own minds.

Verse fifteen then tells the meat-eating party that if they saw their vegetarian brethren grieved with their meat-eating, they were to walk in love to these brethren who were weak in the Faith. They should not destroy the Christianity of the vegetarian party with their food, since Christ died for them. Rejecting them could turn the weak in the Faith away from Christ. See verse one.

Verse sixteen admonishes that the good of both parties were not to be allowed to be evil spoken of.

Verse seventeen tells us that the kingdom of God was not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (The word "meat" in this verse is wrongly translated it is the Greek word "brosis" which means "eat").

Verse eighteen tells us that if in the points of verse seventeen we serve God, this is acceptable to Him and approvable to men. Both parties should have the righteousness, peace and joy of the Spirit in them, in service to God which He approves of, and men also approve, not silly points about food.

Verse nineteen tells the brethren that they should follow after the things that make for peace and edify each other.

Verse twenty should be translated in its first part as: “For the sake of food destroy not the work of God...” This was a statement to the meat-eating party. They were not to destroy the work of God upon the hearts of the vegetarian brethren who were weak in the Faith. A smoking flax they were not to quench, a bruised reed they were not to break. The meat eating party were as assured by Paul that “All things are indeed clean (Greek: Kathara). That is, all the meats or flesh foods (you were eating) were indeed clean meats, (according to Leviticus 11.). However it is evil for them who were eating with offense (or the vegetarian party). Why? It was a stumbling-block for them.

Verse twenty-one then admonishes the flesh eaters that it was not good to eat flesh or to drink wine or anything that caused their brethren (the vegetarians) to be offended, stumble and be made weaker in the Faith: This verse shows that the vegetarian party also had a problem with drinking wine. Truly they were weak in the Faith because this wine was just the juice of the grapes and not fermented. But Paul asked the meat-eaters who were stronger in Faith to deny themselves for the sake of the salvation of vegetarians.

Verse twenty-two says that since the meat eaters had Faith to deal wisely with the matter they should deal with it by keeping their ideas to themselves before God instead of sinning in their dealing with the vegetarians. It was blessed if they condemned not themselves in the things (meat eating) that their Faith approved, by causing their vegetarian brethren to stumble.

Verse twenty-three finally rebuked both parties saying that if they ate without Faith as the motivating factor, through doubting, they were damning themselves, because whatsoever was not out of Faith was sin.

CONCLUSION

The issue about Sabbath keeping and about clean and unclean meats were not the issues at all in this chapter. Whatever the beliefs of the vegetarian party were, they were weird or strange. Apparently they got it from the world from some type of religious influence that they were previously associated with that did not teach Christ and Him crucified.

They had accepted Jesus as their Savior from sin and for Righteousness through Faith, but they were weak in the Faith and became members of the church with their uninformed practices of vegetarianism, not drinking wine (grape juice) and esteeming certain days.

We know nothing of the name of the group or from the parent body where they took their beliefs but Paul admonished the stronger flesh-eating brethren to deny themselves for the sake of the salvation of their weaker vegetarian brethren.

They were not to eat meat before them defiantly because they knew that they were right from Leviticus 11. Rather they were to be very careful to nurture the Faith of the weak party by denying their appetite and walking in love with their brethren. One could imagine that the vegetarian party would have eventually come to see things the way of their stronger brethren after the stronger brethren labored in love for them, taught them and used wisdom in the use of that which they knew were all right to use. Paul told the vegetarian party that everything was merely according to their own estimation, but the kingdom of God which was righteousness etc. was what God values more. This whole chapter is a good lesson for the delicate growth and love sharing of a church as a way out of a difficult problem. Amen.



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