**Romans 14 and Fellowship**

**Introduction**

1. While the doctrine revealed by the inspired Apostle Paul in **Romans 14** is clear, and can be understood by the honest heart, it has been abused by many to advocate the doctrine of “unity in diversity.”
   1. The text is used by some to advocate the erroneous concept **which allows those who differ on matters of doctrinal and moral import to maintain fellowship with each other.**
   2. This is not what **Romans 14** teaches. **This is an abuse of the text.**
2. Using the passage in this way ***opens up a path to denominationalism***. In fact, those in the denominations view **Romans 14** through this lens.
   1. **How denominationalists look at the passage: Earl F. Palmer, a Presbyterian says that all differences "other than the central question of the Lordship of Christ" are governed by this passage (Salvation By Surprise, Waco: Word Books, 1975, p. 168).**
   2. It is sad that even brethren have espoused a similar view of **Romans 14**.
3. This sermon is a consideration of some error taught by brethren on the topic of fellowship and **Romans 14**. ***Does the Bible allow for the continuation of fellowship in spite of differences concerning matters of doctrinal and moral import?***
4. Lingering Error from the Past
5. Homer Hailey teaches false doctrine.
   1. **Hailey’s long held view on marriage, divorce, and remarriage:** “This book sets forth my position on the subject of the divorced and remarried who would come to God, and my reasons for holding it…The question is: Does God require those who were married, divorced and remarried while in the world and who would obey the gospel to separate after they become Christians; or does He accept their marriage as lawful? I believe that He accepts them without requiring their separation and I shall show the reasons why." (Homer Hailey, *The Divorced and Remarried Who Would Come To God*, Las Vegas, Nevada, Nevada Publications, © 1991, revised edition, © 1998. pp 5, 8)
   2. **Hailey believed that alien sinners were not amenable to the Law of Christ in the gospel, and therefore were not amenable to the marriage law taught by Christ in Matthew 19, etc. until they were baptized.** (*This is false doctrine. However, not our purpose in this sermon to examine this particular error.*)
   3. **1987 Belen, New Mexico:** Hailey met privately with a couple who were in an unscriptural marriage (married before baptized). Hailey told them, according to what he believed on the subject, that their marriage was legitimate before God.
   4. **1988 Belen, New Mexico:** Hailey’s private discussion with the couple became known to the church. Hailey was asked to come discuss his position on the subject with the congregation more thoroughly. **Hailey affirmed and taught his erroneous position.**
   5. **Following:** Many efforts were made by various brethren to sit with Hailey and study the subject further, but none were ever successful as he refused to do so.
   6. **November 1988:** After the several efforts to study with Hailey, men involved in the conflict went public with the issue in an article published in the *Guardian of Truth* magazine.
6. Ed Harrell defends Homer Hailey in articles about fellowship.
   1. **November 1988:** Ed Harrell published an article in *Christianity Magazine* defending Homer Hailey in light of the publication of the article concerning the issue in Belen, New Mexico.
      1. “This, then, is my personal defense of Homer Hailey as a man who has earned the respect and esteem of the Christians of our time. Or, more accurately, it is my explanation of why Hailey has won wide esteem among Christians **in spite of his views on the subject of divorce and remarriage.** (emphasis mine, JC)” (Ed Harrell, *“Homer Hailey: False Teacher?”*, Christianity Magazine, Vol 5, No 11, November 1988, p 6)
      2. “Homer Hailey believes that those who are baptized into Christ may remain in their present marital state…I have discussed the matter with brother Hailey on more than one occasion, and, although I am impressed by the erudition and sincerity of his arguments, **I do not believe that he is correct.** (emphasis mine, JC)**”** (Ibid.)
      3. **In this article, Harrell alluded to the teaching of Romans 14, applying it to the situation with Homer Hailey, and Harrell’s reasoning for not severing fellowship with him in spite of his teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage.**
   2. **February 1989 – June 1990:** Ed Harrell published 16 articles on **“The Bounds of Christian Unity”** in *Christianity Magazine*.
      1. These articles are Harrell’s explanation of his position regarding maintaining fellowship with those who believe and teach false doctrine (specifically Homer Hailey).
      2. **He discussed his views on fellowship and Romans 14.**
7. Lingering Effects
   1. Why discuss things which happened so long ago?
   2. The articles written by Ed Harrell concerning his erroneous views of fellowship and Romans 14 **have been printed, reprinted, and circulated for many to read.**
   3. **These views have been adapted and espoused by many Christians, and fellowship has been maintained with false teachers, and those who are involved in various sinful practices. (Many as a direct result from these events.)**
   4. Example:
      1. **Shane Scott, a professor at Florida College, advocated non-literal interpretations of the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2.**
      2. In fact, in *Sentry Magazine* (Vol. 21, No. 1), Shane stated, “I believe…that the days of Genesis 1 should not be interpreted literally.” (*Creation of the inanimate present order of the physical universe was not instantaneous, but slowly developed over a vast amount of time.*)
      3. **In spite of the obvious contradiction to the scriptural account that Scott advocates, many have continued fellowship with him.**
      4. **Recently, a congregation in the Ft. Worth area where I grew up had Shane Scott for a gospel meeting.**
   5. These are results of continued misapplication of Romans 14 (among other more fundamental misunderstandings and adapted error concerning fellowship). We should take heed, and revisit the topic so as to discern the truth, and follow the truth.
8. Romans 14 and Fellowship
9. Who should we receive, or not receive?
   1. **Receive** – **Romans 14:1**; **15:7** – obvious obligation to receive one within the context considered in this passage.
   2. **Do not receive** – **2 John 9-11** – obvious obligation NOT to receive one within the context considered in this passage.
   3. **We are charged with the task of distinguishing between who we should receive and not receive.**
      1. To receive one we are not authorized to receive is sin.
      2. To not receive one we are commanded to receive is sin.
10. Romans 14 – Receive
    1. **V. 1-4** – This requires reception of one *who God has received*.
       1. ***“weak in the faith”*** 🡪 **(v. 2)** – concerning eating 🡪
       2. **(v. 5** – Observance of days) – each be FULLY CONVINCED in OWN mind.
       3. **(v. 23)** – **doubt = not fully convinced = not from faith = weak in faith** (If eat while doubting you sin.)
       4. **(v. 3a)** – do not judge or despise in this matter:
          1. **Eating of meat** – **v. 2**
          2. **Observance of days** – **v. 5**
          3. BOTH:
             1. **(v. 3b-4)** – Received by God; made to stand by God.
             2. **(v. 6)** – Eats/does not eat, observes/does not observe – **TO THE LORD**.
          4. HOW/WHY:
             1. **(v. 14)** – nothing unclean (in this context)
             2. ***“But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse” (1 Corinthians 8:8)***.
       5. **The topic of difference in Romans 14 concerns MATTERS OF INDIFERENCE TO GOD (Meats and days).**
    2. **Ed Harrell on Romans 14:** “Specifically, Paul teaches that those who retained conscientious scruples about various rituals of the law should understand that **those issues were not matters bound by God** (emphasis mine, JC). But the intent of the passage **clearly encompasses more than that clarification** (?, emphasis mine, JC). The subject of Romans 14 is the question of brotherly disagreements.” (Ed Harrell – *“The Bounds of Christian Unity 3”*. *Christianity Magazine* / April 1989 p.6)
       1. Harrell admits that the things mentioned by Paul (eating meats/observing days) were matters **NOT BOUND BY GOD – MATTERS OF INDIFERENCE.**
       2. However, Harrell has the audacity to suggest **Paul’s INTENT** of the passage “clearly encompasses more than that clarification.”
       3. **If what Paul discussed was MATTERS OF INDIFFERENCE we CANNOT include more than that principle.**
       4. ***“The subject of Romans 14 is the question of brotherly disagreements.”*** – Correct.
          1. **What disagreements?**
          2. **(v. 1)** – doubtful things – concerning the individual conscience **(v. 5** – *be fully convinced*).
          3. **(v. 2, 6)** – eating meats/observing days – **MATTERS OF INDIFFERNECE.**
          4. **The DIVINE HERMENEUTIC** *(methodological approach to interpreting scripture)* **requires us to go no further than that which the passage includes!**
    3. **Ed Harrell fails to respect the context of Romans 14, and stretches it beyond its proper context. 🡪**
11. Romans 14 – In Context
    1. **Ed Harrell on Romans 14:** “It is obvious that Christians sometimes disagree about scriptural instruction, **even in matters of considerable moral and doctrinal import** (emphasis mine, JC). **In spite of these disagreements, we work and worship together** (emphasis mine, JC), leaving many **matters of individual judgment** (emphasis mine, JC) in the hands of God. That behavior, uniformly practiced throughout the history of Christianity is, I believe, the issue addressed in Romans 14 (see article number 3).” (Ed Harrell – *“The Bounds of Christian Unity 4”*. *Christianity Magazine* / May 1989 p.6)
       1. “matters of considerable moral and doctrinal import”? – **(v. 14** – Considers matters which are inherently clean)
       2. ***“But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse” (1 Corinthians 8:8)***.
       3. **Are “matters of considerable moral and doctrinal import…matters of individual judgment?”**
          1. **Has God left the principles of marriage, divorce, and remarriage up to our judgment?**
          2. **No!** Jesus said, ***“And I say to you” (Matthew 19:9*** – This was Jesus’ DIVINE LAW).
       4. **Ed Harrell’s interpretation of Romans 14, and his application to “matters of considerable moral and doctrinal import” contradict the context! 🡪**
    2. **Immediate Context:**
       1. **Preceding passage** – **Romans 13:11-14**
          1. “cast off the works of darkness”
          2. “walk properly”
          3. “not in revelry…drunkenness…lewdness…lust…strife…envy”
          4. “make no provision for the flesh”
          5. **In MATTERS OF MORAL IMPORT there is no LENIENCY – NO INDIVIDUAL JUDGMENT.**
       2. **Succeeding passage** – **Romans 16:17-19**
          1. “note those who cause divisions and offenses”
          2. “contrary to the doctrine…learned”
          3. “avoid them”
          4. “For those…do not serve the Lord Jesus Christ”
          5. “deceive the hearts of the simple”
          6. **In MATTERS OF DOCTRINAL IMPORT there is no LENIECNY – NO INDIVIDUAL JUDGMENT.**
    3. **Remote Context (Biblical harmony, no contradiction):**
       1. **Moral Sin** (has God received him?):
          1. **Galatians 5:19-21** – Works of the flesh – practice, not inherit kingdom of God.
          2. **Colossians 3:5-11** – Members which are on the earth – put to death.
          3. **Ephesians 5:11** – No fellowship with works of darkness – expose them.
       2. **Doctrinal Sin** (has God received him?):
          1. **2 John 9-11** – Do not go beyond doctrine of Christ.
          2. **1 Timothy 1:3** – Teach no other doctrine.
          3. **Galatians 1:6-9** – Preach no other gospel (accursed if you do).
       3. **Fellowship with sin is not allowed**:
          1. **2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1** – No fellowship, come out from among them, cleanse ourselves, perfect holiness.
          2. **Christians are not to have anything to do with ANY KIND of sin, regardless of the PERSON INVOLVED.**
    4. **It is inappropriate to use the text of Romans 14 to advocate continued fellowship with those teaching error, and/or living in sin. THE CONTEXT DOES NOT ALLOW IT!**
12. Another Consideration – Strong and Weak
    1. **Strong** – the knowledgeable – strength of conscience in eating/observing.
    2. **Weak** – lacking knowledge – weakness of conscience in eating/observing.
    3. Homer Hailey and Ed Harrell:
       1. **Who is strong and who is weak?**
       2. **Romans 14:2** – The strong believes he can, the weak does not.
          1. **Homer Hailey – would be the strong** – “believes that those who are baptized into Christ may remain in their present marital state” (Ed Harrell, *“Homer Hailey: False Teacher?”*, Christianity Magazine, Vol 5, No 11, November 1988, p 6).
          2. **Ed Harrell – would be the weak** – “I have discussed the matter with brother Hailey on more than one occasion, and, although I am impressed by the erudition and sincerity of his arguments, **I do not believe that he is correct.** (emphasis mine, JC)” (Ibid.)
    4. ***Are we willing to say the strong brother is the one who believes that which is contrary to the teaching of Christ?***

**Conclusion**

1. **Romans 14 considers MATTERS OF INDIFFERENCE. That is all the context allows. Men like Ed Harrell have falsely included “matters of moral and doctrinal import” so as to maintain fellowship with false teachers, and those practicing sin.**
2. **We must be aware of this issue, and of the error brought forth and propagated during it. We must continue to follow the truth, and *“contend earnestly for the faith” (Jude 3).***
3. ***“For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you” (1 Corinthians 11:19)***.
   1. The teaching of this error on Romans 14 and fellowship by Ed Harrell and others has exposed them as being unapproved to God.
   2. Those who teach, advocate, believe, and practice the same are unapproved.
   3. **Let us make sure we are approved before God, following His inspired word.**