

Chapter 63

Christ the Lord

(Romans 14:6–13a)

In verse 6 Paul comes to his second main point in this section: Christ is the only Lord over every kind of Christian, weak and strong.

1. **There may be sincerity where there is weakness of faith.** ⁶*For the person who respects one day as special does so for the Lord. The person who eats meat does so in relationship to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God. Equally the person who abstains from eating meat does so out of regard for the Lord. He too gives thanks to God.* Imagine the situation. Here are two Christians eating a meal. One of them feels he has to be a vegetarian. He is quite mistaken but that is what he believes. As he eats he gives thanks to God for the vegetarian meal he is eating. Another Christian eats meat. He too thanks God for the meal. Both of them have a happy relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to learn that a Christian may be in a good relationship with the Lord even though he is in serious error with regard to some small matters of conscience. ⁷*For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.* The Christian gives thanks to God because he or she is living for the glory of God. ⁸*For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die we are the Lord's,* ⁹*because it was for this very purpose that Christ died and returned to life, that he might reign as lord over both the dead and the living.* The point

is that both kinds of Christian, the strong and the weak, accept this lordship of Christ over their lives. One of them has a deficiency in his understanding of his faith. He or she is needlessly scrupulous. The other Christian has a clearer understanding, yet he can be needlessly scornful at times in his attitude towards the Christian who is weaker at this point. Yet both of them are submitting to Jesus. They are relating to the living Lord Jesus Christ, accepting Christ's right to give directions to his people each day. The minor matter of disagreement between them cannot be so great.

2. **So Paul rebukes two types of mistake.** ¹⁰*You then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister . . . ?* The disagreeing Christians can have respect for each other, not because they agree with each other's opinions in these minor matters, but because they can both see that the other is in submission to the Lordship of Christ. Notice that Paul is only dealing with a temporary weakness in the life of the church. It is not that the weak Christian should remain a weak, unteachable Christian for the rest of his life! Nor will Paul allow a 'weakness' in faith to become central in the life of the church.

3. **Whatever kind of Christians we might be, there is a judgement of the way we have lived.** The answer to all of these disputes is soon to be given to each one of us, in the light of the coming judgement of God. Why do you despise your brother or sister, *for we shall all be brought to appear before the judgement seat of God.* God's judgement is a matter of oath. Paul confirms what he has said by referring to Isaiah 45:23:

¹¹*For it is written,*

*'As I live,' says the Lord,
'every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall
confess to God.'*

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The words 'As I live' do not occur in Isaiah 45:23, which has instead 'By myself I have sworn'. Paul is referring to the gist of what the Old Testament says, rather than trying to quote exactly. 'As I live' are the kind of words God uses when he takes an oath. Isaiah says, 'By myself I have sworn' but Paul uses the oath-language which is known from other passages (such as Isaiah 49:18 and about twenty others). The point is: judgement is a matter of God's oath. An 'oath' is a statement that is **not** open-ended and cannot be changed. It is one hundred per cent certain that God will call the entire human race to give an account of itself. 'Strong' and 'weak' Christians in Rome should cease their criticisms of others; all of them will have to submit to a judgement that is far more searching than the judgement they are giving towards each other. ¹²*So then each of us shall give an account concerning himself to God.*

Verse 13a brings to a temporary conclusion everything that has been said in verses 10–12. If the strong must receive the weak (14:1), if the weak must not judge the strong (14:3), if God receives all of his people no matter what their opinions are in these matters (14:3), if each Christian stands to his own master (14:4), if each has to be persuaded by his own thinking on these matters (14:5), if both the weak and the strong are acting out of regard for the Lord (14:6), if we live or die to the Lord alone (14:8, 9), if the Christian church is a community of brothers and sisters (14:10a), and if there is a one-by-one judgement of all Christians which is the prerogative of God alone (14:10b–12) – then it all leads to one great conclusion: ¹³*Therefore, let us no longer be judging one another.* Everything Paul has said so far should make them resolve never again to allow a spirit of mutual criticism and denunciation in the congregation at Rome.