

## Romans 14:1-23

### *The Lord is Able*

**Main idea:** Eternal life depends on Jesus, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

One of the most basic things we believe about God is that He is omnipotent, which just means that He's all-powerful.<sup>1</sup> God is Almighty.<sup>2</sup> He's able to do anything and everything that He desires to do.

People sometimes debate about whether we have freewill, and certainly there's a degree about our will that's free,<sup>3</sup> but I think we ultimately have to acknowledge that our will is also limited.<sup>4</sup> We're not free to do anything that we desire. We can't fly, breathe underwater, or snap our fingers and create a billion dollars. Our freewill is limited.

And our will is especially limited by our sin.<sup>5</sup> And we've all felt this. We've let down our families. We've failed to perfectly love the people that we love most in this world. And even sometimes when we do good things, like serving people, we've sometimes done it with wrong motives, like out of greed, or for man's praise.

In short, we've all broken God's commands, and we're unable to obey God perfectly.<sup>6</sup> As a result, we're unable to save ourselves from death and hell.<sup>7</sup> Even if we really really want to, we cannot, through sheer stubborn determination, earn our way to heaven. Our freewill is limited.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 147:5

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 1:8

<sup>3</sup> Joshua 24:15

<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 16:9

<sup>5</sup> Even from birth, our sin has limited our free will. Psalm 51:5

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 64:6

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 7:13

But God's will is not limited.<sup>8</sup> God truly has freewill. He can do anything He wants.

What this practically means is that God is able to do what we could not do. We could not save ourselves, but God is able to save us. We're not able to seek and save other sinners, other lost people, but God is able to. And when we say that God is able to, we don't just mean that He's capable of it, but that He does it.<sup>9</sup> Because if God is able to do something, and wants to do something, then nothing stands in the way of God accomplishing all of His will.

So when we say that God is omnipotent, we're not just saying that God is able to do all that He wills, but that He will do all that He wants and desires. So the only question is, what does God desire?<sup>10</sup>

Romans 14. We're going to read the whole chapter.

Welcome anyone who is weak in faith, but don't argue about disputed matters. One person believes he may eat anything, while one who is weak eats only vegetables. One who eats must not look down on one who does not eat, and one who does not eat must not judge one who does, because God has accepted him. Who are you to judge another's household servant? Before his own Lord he stands or falls. And he will stand, because the Lord is able to make him stand.

One person judges one day to be more important than another day. Someone else judges every day to be the same. Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind. Whoever observes the day,

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<sup>8</sup> Luke 1:37

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 7:25

<sup>10</sup> 1 Timothy 2:4

observes it for the honor of the Lord. Whoever eats, eats for the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; and whoever does not eat, it is for the Lord that he does not eat it, and he gives thanks to God. For none of us lives for himself, and no one dies for himself. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. Christ died and returned to life for this: that he might be Lord over both the dead and the living. But you, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written,

As I live, says the Lord,  
every knee will bow to me,  
and every tongue will give praise to God.

So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Therefore, let us no longer judge one another. Instead decide never to put a stumbling block or pitfall in the way of your brother or sister. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself. Still, to someone who considers a thing to be unclean, to that one it is unclean. For if your brother or sister is hurt by what you eat, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy, by what you eat, someone for whom Christ died. Therefore, do not let your good be slandered, for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever serves Christ in this way is acceptable to God and receives human approval.

So then, let us pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another. Do not tear down God's work because of food.

Everything is clean, but it is wrong to make someone fall by what he eats. It is a good thing not to eat meat, or drink wine, or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble. Whatever you believe about these things, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But whoever doubts stands condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith, and everything that is not from faith is sin. (Romans 14:1-23)

*Father, help us to live by faith, knowing that You are able to keep us from falling. Help us to walk according to Your will. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

We've been talking these last few weeks about how to live in light of the gospel. The first eleven chapters of Romans explained the gospel in detail, and then the rest of the book of Romans explains what that means for our lives: how we should live our lives as people who trust in Jesus.<sup>11</sup>

So we saw last week that as Christ-followers, we ought to wake up from sleep.<sup>12</sup> We ought to rise up to live a new life in Christ, not living just like we did before we came to know Jesus, but leaving sin behind in order to embrace a new life.<sup>13</sup> And we don't do that primarily by setting up safeguards and schedules to keep us from sinning, although that can certainly be wise at times. Primarily, however, we live a new life in Christ by putting on the Lord Jesus.<sup>14</sup> Jesus Himself is our Life.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Romans 12:1-2

<sup>12</sup> Romans 13:11

<sup>13</sup> Romans 13:12-13

<sup>14</sup> Romans 13:14

<sup>15</sup> John 14:6

When I began preparing this message a few weeks back, I really struggled as to how I should break up chapter 14 and preach it. Because there are several topics addressed in this chapter, but they all weave together in such a way that it would be difficult to preach on just a few verses at a time. For example, the chapter addresses the topic of Christian conscience in verse 2, which then hops back and forth between that and topic of judging others in verses 2 through 13, which transitions to the topic of what sin even is at all in verses 14 through 21, which circles back to the topic of Christian conscience in verses 22 and 23.

And that's mapping just one thought process in chapter 14. There are also topics such as weak versus strong faith, and how we're to obey the Old Covenant in light of the New Covenant, which includes clean versus unclean food, and celebrating the Old Covenant festivals, and not causing other believers to stumble. So when I sat down to consider all these things, I just didn't know where to start.

But throughout all of this, there's one subtle theme that runs throughout chapter 14 that I think is often overlooked while discussing all these other things. It's not the main point of the chapter, but it is an important point, and Paul begins to talk about it in verse 4. Paul writes:

Who are you to judge another's household servant? (Romans 14:4a)

Now, to be clear, Paul isn't saying that we should never judge regarding sin, because he says in verse 1 that he's talking about not arguing about disputed matters with those who are weak in the faith. So when the Bible is clear about sin, we should be clear about it as well.<sup>16</sup> With

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<sup>16</sup> John 7:24

humility, of course, and out of love rather than judgmentalism, but still not calling evil good and good evil.<sup>17</sup>

But that's not even what I want to focus on this morning. It's the next part of the verse that often gets overlooked. End of verse 4.

Before his own Lord he stands or falls. And he will stand, because the Lord is able to make him stand. (Romans 14:4b)

When a person is weak in faith, and even when you disagree with him about what you think the Bible says, the Lord is able to make him stand. It's not up to you to correct every error you perceive in others. In other words, the spiritual growth and sanctification of others doesn't depend on us, but on God Himself.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, you've probably heard the expression, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink." As a pastor, I often feel like it's my responsibility not only to lead the sheep to water, but to make them drink. I've felt the weight of so many sheep seemingly leaving the water in favor of wandering in the wilderness. And I've often taken that upon myself. I know I shouldn't, but I have.

But Paul is saying that while we, not just the pastor, but all of us, while we certainly have the responsibility of teaching truth, we can't make people grow. We're not able to sanctify others. But the Lord is able. The Lord is able.

If you're a parent, I'm sure you've felt the weight of whether your children would grow up to make right choices, and whether they would

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<sup>17</sup> Isaiah 5:20

<sup>18</sup> Jude 1:24-25

believe the right things, or even follow Jesus at all. And maybe at times you've felt like you've failed your kids or even failed God to train them up the way that they should go.<sup>19</sup>

But you know, we can't cause our kids to believe.<sup>20</sup> We certainly ought to do our best to teach them truth, but we can't cause them to believe. And we certainly can't cause our kids to live a certain way.<sup>21</sup> They're going to make their own choices, their own mistakes, because we're not able to live their lives for them, which is probably a good thing because we'd fail to do that very well. Our kids have to live their own lives. And sometimes that means we feel helpless, but it's also an opportunity to show them true love when they stumble.

And we're going to fail at that, too!

But did you know that God actually loves you and your kids more than you do?<sup>22</sup> God is love,<sup>23</sup> and God loves every person with a perfect love,<sup>24</sup> so God longs for you and your kids to believe and make good choices and follow Jesus even more than you do.<sup>25</sup>

And here's the thing: while we aren't able to cause our kids to believe and follow Jesus, God is able. God is all-powerful, omnipotent, Almighty God.<sup>26</sup> So while we should certainly continue to train up our children in

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<sup>19</sup> Proverbs 22:6

<sup>20</sup> Romans 10:8. Sometimes Acts 16:31 is used to say that your kids may be baptized and saved because of your faith, but a more biblically consistent interpretation of this verse is to say that you yourself must believe and be baptized, as do each of the members of your family.

<sup>21</sup> Jeremiah 31:29-30

<sup>22</sup> John 3:16, Romans 5:8

<sup>23</sup> 1 John 4:8

<sup>24</sup> John 15:13

<sup>25</sup> 2 Timothy 2:4

<sup>26</sup> Psalm 147:5, Revelation 1:8

the way that they should go,<sup>27</sup> don't take the results of their journey upon yourself. Trust in God, who brings the growth.<sup>28</sup>

And God is patient toward you and your kids, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.<sup>29</sup>

Did you know that the Lord is able to accomplish all of His will? The Bible repeatedly states that God can do whatever He wants! Psalm 115:3.

Our God is in heaven and does whatever he pleases. (Psalm 115:3)

Isaiah 46:10.

declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose." (Isaiah 46:10)

Ephesians 1:11.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will. (Ephesians 1:11)

You see, God's not limited by external forces, and He certainly isn't limited by what we often call our free will, because God's will is truly free, and if God wills something, it will happen.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Proverbs 22:6

<sup>28</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:6

<sup>29</sup> 2 Peter 3:9

<sup>30</sup> Ephesians 3:20



The Lord is able. He's able to strengthen the weak.<sup>31</sup> He's able to save the lost.<sup>32</sup> He's even able to give life to the dead, which is what He did with each one of us who have trusted in Jesus.<sup>33</sup> He's able.

And check out what He promises in verse 11 of Romans 14.

For it is written,  
As I live, says the Lord,  
every knee will bow to me,  
and every tongue will give praise to God. (Romans 14:11)

This is a quotation from Isaiah 45:23, in which God says:

By myself I have sworn;  
truth has gone from my mouth,  
a word that will not be revoked:  
Every knee will bow to me,  
every tongue will swear allegiance. (Isaiah 45:23)

And, of course, Paul quotes this same text in Philippians 2.

For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11)

And God is able to make it happen.

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<sup>31</sup> Isaiah 41:10

<sup>32</sup> Luke 19:10

<sup>33</sup> Ephesians 2:1-5

We often live as if life and the church depends on us. But Jesus said that it depends on Himself, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.<sup>34</sup>

God is able.

And yet, we're still accountable. Verse 10 says:

we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. (Romans 14:10)

And verse 12 says:

each of us will give an account of himself to God. (Romans 14:12)

Now, remember, Paul has stressed over and over again that we've all sinned,<sup>35</sup> and the wages of sin is death.<sup>36</sup> So when we stand before the judgment seat of God, and give an account to God, it's not an account of our righteousness. None is righteous.<sup>37</sup> No, we stand before God not based on our good works, but based on the work of Jesus for us on the cross.<sup>38</sup>

Eternal life depends on Jesus, and we each must receive Him.<sup>39</sup>

And then, we allow Jesus to live in us, through us, and we begin to be transformed by the Holy Spirit.<sup>40</sup> We begin to love people as God loves

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<sup>34</sup> Matthew 16:18

<sup>35</sup> Romans 3:23

<sup>36</sup> Romans 6:23

<sup>37</sup> Romans 3:10-12

<sup>38</sup> 1 Peter 3:18

<sup>39</sup> Romans 4:5

<sup>40</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Galatians 5:22-23

us: unconditionally, with sacrificial love.<sup>41</sup> We serve people, not to get anything from them, but just because we see them as God sees them: as people with the image of God in them, worthy of living and dying for.<sup>42</sup> And even when we feel incapable of doing any of this perfectly, that's ok, because we trust in God, and God is able.

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<sup>41</sup> John 13:34, 1 John 4:19

<sup>42</sup> Genesis 1:26-27