

# The Heart of Christianity



Collegiate Quarterly

## Teacher's Guide

### Surveying the Source

Romans 14, 15, 16.

### Plotting the Course

**The students will:**

- ▶ Appreciate the difference between judgment and discernment.
- ▶ Consider how rules can be important in our lives, faith, and church.
- ▶ Explore how to stand for right and make the best choices in kinder ways and how we influence and encourage others by the choices we make.

### Preparing to Lead

One of the curious aspects of our celebrity culture is that whenever someone becomes famous, people begin to ask questions about their status as a role model. In a sense, they are looked up to, but whether they represent sufficient achievement or values to be truly consid-

ered a role model is often questionable. Yet in Romans 14 and 15, Paul urges that as Christians we are all role models to someone. We represent God by our actions and choices, and so we need to be mindful of how we influence others.

### Getting Started

**A.** Collect food ingredients that are not pleasant on their own (flour, corn meal, salt, cocoa powder, sugar, jelly crystals, et cetera). Blindfold two volunteers and ask them to taste a small amount of each ingredient. Have water available for them to rinse out their mouths. Can they tell the difference between the different substances? Are there some they would like more of? Say that this is a kind of judging known as discernment. Ask how this is different from the judgment Paul talks about in Romans 14. State that we need to be able to distinguish between what is right and wrong, good and evil.

**B.** Ask students to think about what life

might be like if there were no rules. At first, they might think this would be a relief from the restrictions that rules place on them. But how would it work in practice? This is similar to the situation in which some of the early Christians found themselves. They had been in different religions that had many rules. But when they chose to follow Jesus, they realized that some of these rules were not so important. This was what Paul was talking about in Romans 14 and 15. Read 1 Corinthians 10:23, 24. So might some rules be good for us? Is doing what we want always best?

### Delving Into the Word

**A.** Distribute copies of the reproducible activity to class members (p. 43). Work-

ing individually or in pairs, ask class members to rewrite the texts in their own

### Materials

pens or pencils, writing paper, Bibles, food ingredients, teaspoons, blindfolds, a selection of plain greeting cards

words, not just updating the language but also applying the verses specifically to their lives today. Have Bibles available for class members to use in completing this activity. Some different translations will be helpful for them to get a better grasp of the meaning of the texts; and reading through Romans 14 will give a broader context for these three verses.

When completed, ask class members to read their version of the texts to the class. Compare and discuss any differences that arise between the various “translations.”

Emphasize Paul’s focus on living in such a way as to encourage one another. If your class has a permanent meeting space, these versions of the texts could be placed on a notice board or wall as reminders of this activity in coming weeks.

**B.** In a 2008 report in *Adventist World*, General Conference president Jan Paulsen made the following statement: “It is more important to be kind than it is to be right.” Divide the class into two groups. Assign one group the task of arguing for this statement, while the other group argues against it.

Tell each group to base their arguments primarily on Romans 14–16; but they can draw on any biblical references that support their case. Direct class members to engage thoughtfully with what Paul is saying in these chapters. Provide pens and paper for taking notes.

After preparation and discussion time, allow each side to present their arguments, whether using formal debating procedure or simply allowing representatives from each group to explain how and why they agree or disagree with the statement.

When both sides have presented their arguments, lead a discussion in which each side can reflect on these questions from both perspectives: ●“Why is it important to be right?” ●“Why is it important to be kind?” ●“Is one more important than the other?” ●“Do you think Paul would agree with Jan Paulsen?”

●“Reflect on whether the ‘debate’ was conducted in a kind or unkind manner.”

●“How was that helpful or unhelpful to making sense of the question being explored?”

## Discussing the Ideas

1. How would you explain the difference between judgment as a bad thing and discernment as a good thing?

2. How do rules help make life better?

3. The Bible urges us to “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8, NLT). Do we also need to “taste and see” to know that things are wrong? Explain.

4. Think of someone you admire. How do they influence your life?

5. How concerned should we be about how our choices or actions influence or affect others?

6. Do you consider yourself to be a role model? Why or why not? If yes, for whom?

7. What is one thing you could do this week to encourage someone in their faith or to making a positive life choice?

## Closing the Activity

*Say:* “At the end of his letter to the Romans, Paul lists many friends and colleagues with whom he had worked. It is significant that such an important church leader, missionary, and evangelist gave such space to supposedly ‘little people.’ Paul recognized the importance of thanking those who had supported him.” Next,

invite students to consider how they can thank those who support and encourage them. Provide a card for each student to write a message on and to present to a significant supporter in their lives. Ask them also to consider how they can give that same kind of encouragement to someone in their lives.

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“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 14:17).

“For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men” (Rom. 14:18).

“Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Rom. 14:19).