

**HELPING A WEAKER BROTHER**

A. Don't judge each other in doubtful things.

1. (Rom 14:1-2) Receiving the weaker brother.

Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.

a. **Receive one who is weak in the faith:** We accept those weak in the faith, but not for the sake of carrying on a debate with them regarding **doubtful things**.

i. **Receive the one who is weak in the faith:** These are words to take seriously. Paul warns us to not make spiritual maturity a requirement for fellowship. We should distinguish between someone who is **weak** and someone who is *rebellious*.

ii. There are many reasons why a Christian might be weak.

- They may be a babe in Christ (babies are weak)
- They may be sick or diseased (by legalism)
- They may be malnourished (by lack of good teaching)
- They may lack exercise (needing exhortation)

b. **Eats only vegetables:** As an example of a *doubtful thing*, Paul looks at those who refuse to eat meat for a spiritual reason. Perhaps they refused it because they feared it was meat sacrificed to a pagan god (as in 1 Corinthians 8). Perhaps they refused the meat because it wasn't kosher, and they stuck to Jewish dietary regulations and traditions.

i. Because some Christian saw nothing wrong in this meat and others saw much wrong in it, this was a burning issue among believers in Paul's day. While the issue of not eating meat for spiritual reasons is no longer directly relevant to most Christians today, there are plenty of issues where some believers believe one way and others believe differently.

c. **He who is weak eats only vegetables:** In Paul's mind, the **weak** brother is the stricter one. It wasn't that they were weaker in their Christian life because of what they ate or didn't eat, but they were weaker because of their legalistic attitudes and lack of love towards others.

i. Undoubtedly these **weak** ones did not see themselves as weaker. It's likely they thought they were the strong ones, and the meat-eaters were the weak ones. Legalism has a way of making us think that we are strong and those who don't keep the rules the way we do are weak.

2. (Rom 14:3-4) Judging our brother is inappropriate because we are not their masters.

Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

a. **Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat:** It would be easy for a Christian who felt free to eat meat to **despise** others as hopeless legalists. It would also be easy for those who did not eat meat to **judge** those who did. But **God has received** those Christians who eat meat.

b. **Who are you to judge another's servant?** Paul reminds us that it isn't our place to pass judgment on any fellow Christian. They stand or fall before their own Master, God – and God is able to make those “meat eaters” stand.

i. There is a lot of useless, harmful division among Christians over silly, bigoted things. Paul isn't telling these Christians to *erase* their differences; he tells them to rise *above* them as Christian brothers and sisters.

3. (Rom 14:5-6) Judging our brother is inappropriate because these are matters of conscience.

One person esteems *one day above another*; another esteems *every day alike*. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes *it* to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe *it*. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

a. **One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike:** By bringing in the aspect of observing certain days, Paul lets us know that he is talking more about *principles* than *specific issues*. What he says has application to more than just eating meat.

b. **Let each be fully convinced in his own mind:** In such issues, Paul is willing to leave it up to the conscience of the individual. But whatever we do, we must be able to do it **to the Lord**, not using “conscience” as an excuse for obviously sinful behavior.

4. (Rom 14:7-9) We live and die to the Lord.

For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

a. **For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself:** We must understand that from beginning to end our life is connected to other lives. Paul reminds the Roman Christians that “No man is an island.”

b. **Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's:** From beginning to end, our lives are to be dedicated to God. Therefore, whatever we do, we do it **to the Lord** – because Jesus *is* our Lord (**that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living**).

5. (Rom 14:10-12) Judging our brother is inappropriate because we will all face judgment before Jesus.

But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

a. **But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother?** Probably, the use of both **judge** and **show contempt** is meant to have application to both the “strict” and the “free” individuals. In either case, the attitude is wrong because **we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ**.

i. The *strict* Christian found it easy to **judge** his brother, writing him off as an unspiritual meat-eater-compromiser. The *free* Christian found it easy to **show contempt** against his brother, regarding him as a uptight-legalistic-goody-good. Essentially, Paul's answer is “Stop worrying about your brother. You have enough to answer for before Jesus.”

ii. **The judgment seat of Christ:** “This is the *bema* seat, equivalent to the judge's seat in the Olympic Games. After each game, the winners came before the judge's seat to receive crowns for first, second, and third places. Likewise, the Christian's works will be tested by fire, and he'll be rewarded for those which remain... The judgment seat of Christ is only concerned with a Christian's rewards and position in the kingdom, not with his salvation.” (Smith)

b. **Every knee shall bow:** The quotation from [Isaiah 45:23](#) emphasizes the fact that all will have to appear before God in humility, and **give account of himself before God**. If this is the case, we should let God deal with our brother.

6. (Rom 14:13) Summary: don't make it an issue of judging, but don't use your liberty to stumble another brother.

Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

a. **Let us not judge one another:** In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus helped us to understand what this means – it means judging others according to a standard that we would not want to have applied to ourself.

i. This does not take away the need and the responsibility for admonishment ([Romans 15:14](#)) or rebuke ([2 Timothy 4:2](#)). When we admonish or rebuke, we do it over *clear Scriptural principles*, not over *doubtful things*. We may offer *advice* to others about doubtful things, but should never judge them.

b. **Not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way:** We might stumble or cause our brother to fall in two ways. We can discourage or beat them down through our legalism against them, or we can do it by enticing them to sin through an unwise use of our liberty.

B. Don't stumble each other over doubtful things.

1. (Rom 14:14-15) Destroying a brother makes a privilege wrong.

I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that *there is nothing unclean of itself*; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him *it is unclean*. Yet if your brother is grieved because of *your food*, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.

a. **I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself:** Paul knew that there was nothing intrinsically unclean about meat that was not kosher or sacrificed to an idol. Yet there was *nothing* that could justify the destruction of a Christian brother over food.

i. Trapp on **I know and am convinced:** “Many, on the contrary, are persuaded before they know; and such will not be persuaded to know.”

b. **You are no longer walking in love:** The issue now is not my personal liberty; it is **walking in love** towards one whom Jesus loves and died for.

c. **Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died:** If Jesus was willing to give up His life for the sake of that brother, I can certainly give up my steak dinner.

2. (Rom 14:16-18) Pursuing the higher call of the Kingdom of God.

Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things *is acceptable to God and approved by men*.

a. **Do not let your good be spoken of as evil:** Our liberty in Jesus and freedom from the law is **good**, but not if we use it to destroy another brother in Christ. If we do that, then it could rightly be **spoken of as evil**.

b. **The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking:** If we place **food and drink** before **righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit**, then we are hopelessly out of touch with God's priorities and His heart.

c. **Acceptable to God and approved by men:** Serving God with a heart for His **righteousness and peace and joy** is the kind of service that is **acceptable** in His sight, and will be **approved by men**.

3. (Rom 14:19-21) Use your liberty to build each other up, not to tear each other down.

Therefore let us pursue the things *which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another*. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed *are pure*, but *it is evil for the man who eats with offense*. *It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak*.

a. **Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food:** If eating or drinking something will stumble another brother, then we are not free to eat or drink in that circumstance. Even if we have the personal liberty, we do not have the liberty to stumble, offend, or weaken a brother.

b. **All things indeed are pure:** Paul will concede the point that there is nothing impure in the food itself; but he likewise insists that there is nothing pure in causing a brother to stumble.

c. **Nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak:** However, we shouldn't think that Paul would permit this kind of heart to cater to someone's legalism. Paul speaks about the stumbling of a sincere heart, not catering to the whims of someone's legalism.

i. For example, when some Christians from a Jewish background were offended that Gentile believers were not circumcised, Paul didn't cater to their legalistic demands.

4. (Rom 14:22-23) The concluding principle of faith.

Do you have faith? Have *it to yourself before God*. Happy *is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves*. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin*.

a. **Do you have faith?** If you **have** [strong] **faith**, and feel liberty to partake of certain things, praise God! But have your strong faith **before God**, not before a brother who will stumble.

b. **Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves:** Not every Christian knows this happiness. There are things God may challenge us to give up, but we go on approving them in our life – thus we **condemn ourselves**. It may not be that the thing

itself is clearly good or bad, but it is enough that God speaks to us about the matter.

i. Each of us must ask: "God what is there in my life hindering a closer walk with You? I want to know the happiness that comes from not condemning myself by what I approve in my life." This takes faith, because we often cling to hindering things because we *think* they make us happy. Real happiness is found being closer and closer to Jesus, and by not being condemned by what we approve.

c. **Whatever is not from faith is sin:** Paul concludes with another principle by which we can judge "gray areas" – if we can't do it in faith, then it is sin.

i. This is a wonderful check on our tendency to justify ourselves in the things we permit. If we are troubled by something, it likely isn't **of faith** and likely **is sin** for us.

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