

WHEN CHRISTIANS DISAGREE, PART 2

Romans 14:13–23

Dr. George O. Wood

Romans 14:13–23 (NIV)

“Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.”

This is the second now in a three-part series from Romans 14:1 through the middle of chapter 15, which deals with the question of, “How do Christians disagree with one another?” We have already noted that there are some matters over which Christians are not at liberty to disagree. And especially in the first eight chapters of Romans, Paul has dealt with what unites us doctrinally in the faith. Our deep conviction that we are lost without Jesus Christ. Our deep conviction that Jesus came to save us. No Christian can be a Christian and disagree with that.

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Jesus is Lord. He lived a sinless life. He died a sacrificial death. He physically rose again from the grave. He ascended to heaven. He is returning again to gather us to himself and to judge the world. In those areas, no disagreement is permitted. For to deny any one of those is to deny the faith.

But there are some areas, and these are what Paul is speaking of in Romans 14 and 15, where Christians may, and indeed do, disagree. Areas, for example, that relate to diet—as is here in Romans 14, matters of eat and drink. Matters of ceremony. Even matters in which we worship in different ways. In Romans 14, the issue is worshipping on certain days or not other days. It may be a style of worship.

I'll never forget the experience of coming to Springfield, Missouri, as a teenager, as a junior in high school coming to Central Assembly. I had always, up to that time, been in very small churches where maybe there were about two teenagers to the church—me and somebody else, who usually wasn't anywhere near my age. And to come into Central Assembly, a large church of 2,300 people, a youth group in high school of over a hundred. It was kind of a great experience. But there was a characteristic of worship at Central Assembly in those days. I don't know what it's like now because I haven't been back recently. But the reputation of Central in various parts of the Pentecostal movement was that they are going to be the first to go up in the Rapture because the Scripture says the dead in Christ will rise first. It was sort of a judgment that was made. I don't really believe the Lord cares all that much if we worship Him quietly or worship Him very audibly. What He cares about is, are we worshipping Him from our hearts? We may even disagree in ways we worship, but disagree with freedom and love.

We may disagree in matters of dress, as Christians. There are some areas of the country where it is impermissible for a woman to wear pantsuits to church, or wear them anytime at all, yet here we don't seem to have a problem with that. But there are Christians who disagree on that issue.

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There are Christians who disagree in matters of amusement. Where you can go and where you cannot go.

Paul has been saying in Romans 14 there are some caution words for both the strong and the weak. The temptation of the strong is to despise the weak, to ridicule them for their tight convictions. And the temptation of the weak is to look at the “liberated” Christian and say, “You’re not spiritual,” or maybe even say, “You’re not a Christian.” Paul has said in the first part of Romans 14 that God has welcomed each of us into His Body. Each of us is the servant of the Lord. Both of us can be right if we’re worshiping God from our heart, and both of us must come before the Lord’s judgment and, therefore, we’re not at liberty to judge one another in these areas.

Beginning with verse 13 through the end of chapter 14, Paul is especially giving counsel to the strong that are in the congregation. His first counsel in verses 13–18 to the strong is that their conduct not trip, or trap, the weaker believer. The word “trip” I would associate with the word “stumbling block.” That is a stone that you leave unthinkingly in the path of someone else and they, coming along, perhaps even in the dark hours, do not see the stone there, and trip on it and fall down so that injury occurs to them. That’s the follow up in verse 15. “If your brother is injured by what you eat.” If he’s pained or grieved or troubled, that’s a tripping stone.

There’s a stronger word, even, used for the things which are not permitted to the strong. That is, that they not be a hindrance in the way of a brother. And the hindrance here really is the Greek word “scandal,” which is also an English word. In its original usage, the word “scandal” in the Greek language came to mean a stick that was in a trap, and the stick had bait on the end of it. When an animal came along and took the bait, the stick reached up and tripped the trap, and the animal was caught in the trap.

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So Paul is saying there are some things regarding the lifestyle of the strong believer that, as the weaker believer watches, the strong believer may not at all trouble the strong. But it may be a matter of undoing for the weak believer. So not only does he trip, which is the idea of stumbling block. But worse than that, he is trapped. And if he's trapped, then the later part of verse 15 says, "Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died." First result is injury, but there can be something even deeper than injury—and that's ruin or destruction. A strong word which can also be translated as the word "destroy," a word the Lord said himself—that we are to fear Him who can destroy body and soul in hell.

Paul indicates that there can be behavior which theologically is appropriate, but which in terms of impacting or affecting someone else, can be so injurious, that can result in their destruction. I could probably use a lot of controversial illustrations, but then I'd have to spend the rest of the sermon trying to justify the illustration and get caught in a side trap. So I decided, at this point, to select an illustration and let you all draw your own conclusion.

Suppose that someone was tremendously overweight, and the doctor had put him on a very restrictive diet, liquid diet, which essentially put him off all sugars. He'd been on this about six months and managed to lose one hundred to a hundred and fifty pounds. But suppose now that he finally got acclimated to his body being off sugars and the doctor said to him, "If you eat anything real sweet in the midst of this diet, what it's going to do is trigger the metabolism in your system and you're going to have a rough time saying no to anything else. Once you break it, it's going to lose a number of other things, and you'll go right back to where you were." Suppose you know that about this person, and then you invite that person over to your home or your apartment for a dinner. And you really put on a feed. To top it all off, you cook this triple layer banana cake with the most gorgeous half-inch-thick icing all around it, just loaded with sugar. And you put some heavyweight vanilla ice cream on top of the piece you cut. You set it down

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before them and say, “I know you may not be able to eat this, but I thought, in case you would, here it is. I’m going to eat my piece, if you don’t mind.”

Such behavior can be, at its best, a stumbling block, but at its worst, can be a real trap. A person may take that and eat it, and all of a sudden all that they tried for six months to do becomes totally undone. Once tasting the sugar again, they’re off into other kinds of behavior. This is Paul’s concern related to the weak in certain areas. It’s not just what imbibing in that particular thing will do. It’s that because the weak offends his or her conscience by partaking, it may lead to some deeper areas of offending the conscience. So that the weak brother not only falls in respect to things which are matters of conscience, but falls in respect to things of morality. It can be something like undoing a zipper in a person’s moral and spiritual life. It triggers a whole host of other things. So Paul is saying, very strongly, to the strong, “Do not trip or trap the believer.”

In this section, we need to look, first of all, at what Paul is saying about the theology of the strong (verse 14). The theology of the strong is very simple. “I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean of itself.” The source of the strong theology or belief is the Lord Jesus. It’s not simply opinion. And Paul says, “In the Lord Jesus I’m persuaded that nothing is unclean.” What does he mean by this? He is referring to the fact that the Lord himself had put His approval upon eating all foods. In Mark 7 Jesus declared all foods clean. In Acts 10, Peter sees a sheet coming down from heaven loaded with all kinds of animals, clean and unclean, and the Lord says, “Take and eat.” So Paul knows the pattern of the Lord, both from His own physical appearance on earth in Mark 7, and from the experience of Peter in Acts 10. He knows that the Lord had declared that all foods are clean.

There may be some food you don’t like. And there may be some food, which you take, a poison mushroom or something, that will kill you. But basically, from a standpoint, there is no food

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that's off limits by virtue of its identity—a pig, or fowl, or fish, or whatever. This, that the Lord taught, was revolutionary. Paul was convinced all things are clean.

But there are some things which are not wise for us to partake of. And there are some things which, if we partake of in regard to food, will be harmful to us in overdoing it. It's important to be persuaded in the Lord that something is clean. There are people who misuse this text and say, "Paul here is saying that everything's clean. That means everything in the world is ok. You can do what you want. It doesn't matter. All things are clean." They expand this verse to include morality—everything is all right as long as you do it with sincerity and don't hurt anybody.

But there are some things which the Lord has said are obviously not clean at all. But in respect to food, the Lord declares it clean. Food was very important in the Early Church because the Early Church was a combination of Jews and Gentiles. The Jews had food laws, and it was one of the principle features which distinguished them from Gentiles. For example, certain flesh of animals was prohibited to the Jews. Not only that, but the blood of every animal was off limits to the Jew. And even clean animals were to be killed in such a way that the blood was drained off. Since no one could ever be sure that meat that was killed by a Gentile was free from suspicion of illegality, the good Jew never sat down to share a meal with a Gentile. He couldn't. In fact, the good Jew was even suspicious of eating meat with a fellow Jew who was suspected of looseness in these matters. So when the Early Church began to meet and some believers started eating pork chops—and not only that but eating meat that hadn't gone through the meticulous kosher laws—it was a matter of stumbling and offense.

Paul says, "Theologically, I'm convinced that all these rules and regulations are nonsense because, in Christ, nothing is unclean." But for the sake of the weak, he is giving counsel: "If it's going to cause the weak pattern of a brother to emerge, leave off that food."

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The reason for the importance of the source of theology is the strong brother says Jesus is his authority, whereas the weak brother, for all of his not wanting to eat, does not take the Lord as his authority. But he's taking tradition as his authority, or the example of other people. "It's what I grew up with that counts." The weak has not yet been able to come to a position of strength in his Christian experience, where he lives totally by the authority of the Lord rather than what his conscience has programmed from his background, or from other people, or tradition.

To give an example of this, up until the age of sixteen years of age, I honestly believed that a gal that wore lipstick or earrings could not be a Christian. It was programmed into me. Where did I get that? Did I get it from the Scripture? Not really. Maybe, if I allegorized the case of Jezebel, I might get it, and many did that. If I didn't get it from the Scripture, where did I get it? I got it from tradition. I'm debating the legitimacy of the tradition, but the fact is, when a person relies on something that cannot be substantiated from the Scripture and says, "My conscience is programmed by that," they, by virtue of that fact, are constituted as the weaker person. The theology of the strong is from the Scripture. The theology of the weak adds to the Scripture, tradition.

The theology of the strong is also such that Paul does not prohibit the strong from declaring their theology. In other words, he doesn't head into this potential problem of the Roman church by saying, "There are some things I am free on, but I don't want to tell you because I don't want anybody to be offended by my views." No, he's very careful to set forth his views, even if his views might be offensive. He flat out declares, "I'm convinced that all foods are clean." You see, the Lord does not intend that the strong brother simply agree with the weak brother. To do so, to agree with the weak brother in this instance, was to take the Church back to what it was before Peter had the vision in Acts 10. It would be to take the Church back to Jewish Christianity. No, Paul, as a strong brother, is free to say, "I am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean

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in itself.” And if the strong brother isn’t free to declare what is his belief, then some other things are going to happen which are bad.

For example, there are going to be others in the body of Christ who get hung up in the weak person’s scruples. Also, there is going to be the tendency of the weak to be further confirmed in their narrowness, and never have that belief challenged in any way. The third thing that’s going to happen is, if the strong Christian doesn’t state his view and his source of authority, then the world which is looking on from the outside looks at the Christians and says, “All they’re hung up on are a bunch of dos and don’ts.”

The strong Christian is in this unique area of, on the one hand, not wanting to offend his Christian brother who may be weak, but on the other hand, also he doesn’t want to so compromise the truth that he makes the gospel a laughingstock to the world. So he’s concerned not to make the non-Christian be offended at Christianity because it comes across as a bunch of do’s and do nots—mostly do nots—and yet is concerned for his weaker Christian brother.

So Paul is simply saying in verse 14, “I’m free to state where I am. I’m free to state that nothing is unclean of itself.”

But there is a second thing that comes into the fore, and that is the conduct of the strong. Because while he may be free to state where he’s at, he is not free to act where his belief is at. In other words, he doesn’t limit his belief, but he does limit his conduct. There are these limitations of conduct that are then placed upon the strong. Some principles given to us in Romans 14.

The first limitation placed upon the strong is this:

I. Is the conduct coming from love?

“If your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died.” Literally, the text says, “Do not let your meat destroy him for whom Christ died” (Romans 14:15). Underline the word “your meat.”

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Because that shows the pettiness of it. It's yours—in contrast to the example of Christ, who held nothing back. How selfish not to yield up so small a thing as meat when the Lord went to the cross and yielded up His life. That's the principle. So Paul is saying to the strong brother, "Do you operate out of love towards your weaker brother?"

Sometimes the weaker brother may not be the person who withholds eating meat. It may be the person who is eating meat. This varies from time to time, but we need to be very careful with terms because it's easy to say that a legalistic Christian is a weak Christian. That's not always the case. Look at Galatians 2 for a moment, and see Paul's advice differs considerably from Romans 14. In Galatians 2 there is a new church which has arisen, composed of Gentiles and Jews.

Barnabas and Peter, Jews, have gone up to Antioch and are eating with the Gentile Christians. Bologna sandwiches, pork chops, and eggs and bacon for breakfast. They're having a great time. Then some Jewish brothers come up from Jerusalem, and they see them eating the pork chops, and they're very offended. They're not weak brothers; they're just offended brothers. They say to Barnabas and Peter, "Withdraw from eating with these Gentiles." Paul, at that point, does not come along and say to the Gentiles, "You, brother, yield to these Jews." Instead, he insists that the Jews yield to the Gentiles on that point. He tells Barnabas and Peter they need to get back to the table, eating with the Gentiles, because they've acted insincerely. So from time to time, who's weak may differ.

I have found in my growing up years, in which there was a great deal of legalism, that, surprisingly, the things that were always warned about, that were going to cause somebody to stumble, never caused me to stumble. Someone wearing cosmetics or something related to a gal's dress, or something related to what amusement you could do or what you couldn't do, seeing a Christian do these never caused me to stumble. What, interestingly enough, caused me to stumble was often the inconsistent behavior that was in the life of the person who was warning

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me about all these externals. “Don’t do this because you’re going to cause somebody to stumble.” And I’d look at their life and see, sometimes, the contrast between what was being said and the way they were living, and that would cause me to stumble. I would think that that kind of behavior would be embraced here in this passage where Paul is saying, “Look at all you’re doing.” Is it proceeding out of love toward the weaker person? At the end today, we’ll really try to tie down the definition of the weaker Christian.

Another question that Paul asked toward the strong is, not only do you act in love toward the weaker brother, but...

II. What does your action produce?

Verses 16–18. Does it produce a discredit to the faith? “So do not let your good be spoken of as evil.” What’s that mean? The right that you’re referring to: “Christians have a right to do this.” If you emphasize that long enough and there are other people in the Body that disagree with you, it will create a big controversy so that local church becomes known as a place where Christians are divided up over that issue. And the good the thing you thought was right becomes evil spoken against.

To use an illustration from 1917, the Russian Orthodox church was meeting at a convention in Moscow. The revolution was going on in the streets, but for two or three whole days the leaders of the church were debating the question whether or not red or yellow robes should be worn in certain church ceremonies. A person who was convinced that red should be worn, maybe that was, to him, good. But it later becomes spoken against because of their being so unaware of what the real issues really were. And the church was totally misrepresented in the eyes of the world as dividing up over some issue like that. I think they should have compromised and gone with orange.

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But to confuse the Church on these minor issues is to drive down the doctrine of the Resurrection, which is the real problem the legalist always has. Every doctrine has the same weight, so the doctrine of the Resurrection becomes dragged down to the level of whether or not you completely are still on the Sabbath day. If you break one, you've violated the other. Paul is saying here, "If you're strong on an issue, don't push it to the point that it becomes a discredit to the faith."

Another thing he says in that regard is...

III. Does your course of action and your belief produce the kingdom of God?

He says the kingdom of God is not meat and drink at all. But it's righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. In other words, the kingdom of God isn't something external. It's the inward rule of God. And when God's inward rule is taking place, things have a way of working out. Maybe we could ask some questions in regard to this verse. Do you feel that on the Day of Judgment, when we stand before the Lord, he's going to ask you the question, "Did you eat meat, or did you eat vegetables?" Is the kingdom of God meat and drink? Is He going to say to you, "Did you keep holy days, or not?" Is He going to say to the gals, "Did you wear pantsuits, or dresses?" Is He going to ask, "Did you see a Walt Disney movie, or not?" Is He going to ask, "Did you read out of the King James Bible, or out of the RSV? Or the Living Bible?" "Were you a dispensationalist, or not a dispensationalist?" "Were you Assemblies of God, or Baptist?" "Did you go to Mariner's Church, or Calvary Chapel, or Newport Mesa Christian Center? Where did you go?"

Since I believe the Lord loves every one of His own in any church, I don't think it really matters to the Lord at all what tag we wear. The only reason why we wear a tag is that all of us can't fit under one tag. And, also, some tags have a sharper perception of how to get the Great Commission done than others. But be that as it may, I think the Lord loves all His children. I

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think He could care less whether we're Baptist, Presbyterian, Assemblies of God, or whatever.

What He's concerned about is the condition of our heart.

So the things that we get all caught up with aren't really important. I doubt if, on that day, the Lord is ever going to ask us questions in respect to these matters. He may probe some of our motives as to why we ate or drank, or why we did this, or why we did that. But the issue is not the thing itself, but it will be the spiritual motivation.

If the Lord isn't concerned about some things in the future, why do we think He's concerned about them now? So live in light of the future and say, "If the Lord isn't concerned about it then, maybe He's not concerned about it now." Let's get on to the things He is concerned about. He is concerned with righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Being in His Kingdom is to embrace righteousness. It's to say at the Cross, "I'm unrighteous, but You are righteous, and I receive Your righteousness as a gift." It's to walk in righteousness after Him. To have peace is to, at the deep center of your being, recognize there is wholeness that is come in your relationship to God. And that wholeness is entering into your relationship to other persons. That's what the kingdom of God is—a deep, fixed meaning of peace. And the kingdom of God is joy in the Holy Spirit.

How sad it is if we confess Jesus Christ as Lord and don't have joy. For joy should be the very essence of the Christian's emotional life. Not a joy that is rooted in the well-being of circumstances, but joy in the Holy Spirit rooted in the nature, character, and being of God.

Unchanging, timeless Presence, no matter what the adversity. Joy in the Holy Spirit.

In preparation for this week, I really began to focus in on this theme: joy in the Holy Spirit. I recognize that, even as Christians, we go through moments in our life that the joy of the Holy Spirit is not there in proportion that the New Testament teaches it should be. I got to thinking, how would I get up and tell people to have the joy of the Holy Spirit if they don't? This Scripture

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really struck me from John, where the Lord says, “Out of your innermost being will flow rivers of living water.” It’s just like a well springing up within you. I got to thinking about a well. A well is sunk in the ground, and because there’s a water table underneath the ground, the water goes right through the ground and into the hole that is dug. The well is put into a water table. I got to thinking about our lives. See yourself as a well that is sunk down into Christ. The life and the joy that is in Him just permeates right into you. How can you stop that joy from coming through if you want to stop the joy? It’s going to be natural. When a person first gives their life to Christ, what’s the first thing we inevitably see? Almost inevitably, it’s joy. It fills up immediately. The water table is there, and in it rushes.

What begins to happen that sometimes stops the flow of joy? I think we’re on the inside of the well, and maybe unconsciously we begin putting things in the well that block the flow of the joy of the Spirit. I would compare this to doing concrete work or concrete blocks. We, in the bottom of the well, pour the concrete of sin—unconfessed sin—and there’s nothing that can stop more the joy of the Holy Spirit than living with known sin in our life, which we’re not giving up or yielding or confessing. And we lay that on the ground floor. Then we begin to put some other things on the inside of the well, as we build the walls up, which stop the flow of joy. Not forgiving other people. Holding a grudge or bitterness in our heart towards someone. Having no song in our life. Letting no song emerge. We’re songless, praiseless. Festering with some hurt that has happened in the past, some way that someone has disappointed us, or maybe God has disappointed us. Perhaps prayerlessness. Or not really taking in the Scripture. Or being self-centered in life. Or not having the attitude of gratitude or no confession to another person that we’re wrong. You put on the top of the well hypocrisy to mask the whole thing of what’s going on beneath. And the top of the well says, “Because I wear the name Christian, there’s water underneath.” But you lift off the lid, and there’s no water. The top of hypocrisy is there.

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So how do you get water in the well again? Just take the sledgehammer, which the Spirit provides in His Word, and begin chopping up that concrete that's there—that unconfessed sin, and that prayerlessness, and that hurt. And begin taking down blocks that never should be there anyway so that the life of the Holy Spirit floods in and rushes in again.

This is what Paul says is involved in being in the kingdom of God: joy. This kind of conduct—righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, is the conduct which is approved by God and is acceptable with others. Arguing and entering into hassles really isn't approved by God and acceptable to others.

Paul tells us not only not to trip or trap one another, but he tells us also in verses 19 through 23 to promote the welfare of Christ's Body. Our goal is the common good. Let us then pursue—really seek hard after—what makes for peace, for mutual upbuilding. To the strong, Paul says in this passage, “If you're going to mutually upbuild the Church, then you have a function. That is to yield to your weak brother.” That's the theme of verse 20: “Do not, for the sake of food or meat, destroy the work of God.” It's so easy to destroy something. But it takes so much longer to build something. It takes a long time to build a building, but you can take a crane and a steel ball and slam it against the wall of the building and destroy in a few moments what has taken months to conceive and execute in building. So don't destroy another brother.

Instead Paul says, “Everything indeed is clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make others fall by what he eats” (verse 20). That's the universal, to make somebody else fall. In verse 23, he says to the weak, that they're to yield to their conscience. “It is right to not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother stumble, but the faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. But he who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not act from faith” (see verses 21-23).

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Who condemns the weak? Is it God? Does God think it's wrong to eat meat? No, God doesn't condemn. Who is it that condemns him, then? It's himself. He condemns himself for eating. And because he doesn't act from faith, because it perhaps gives him encouragement to begin to act irresponsibly in other areas of his life in conflict with this conscience, Paul says it's sin to do that.

It's obviously Paul's goal to help the weak come out of their wrong perceptions. But the way to help the weak is not to wrest them into new patterns of conduct. It's, first of all, lay the groundwork of where the theology comes from. To be persuaded in their own mind of what's right or wrong. Then proceed from that to act. This is kind of a good rule of thumb. If doing something as a Christian causes a conflict in your conscience, do not do it as long as the conflict is there. If you come to the point where you are thoroughly persuaded in the Lord Jesus that it is not wrong, then you have no conflict in conscience because you're persuaded in the Lord Jesus. Then if you have no conflict in conscience, you should have no guilt or condemnation.

I want to tie this whole thing together by asking a question—make a perception of the definition of the weak and strong that maybe you haven't looked at before. How do you know, as a believer, whether you're a strong or weak believer? We've looked at ways of saying a weak believer may be a legalist. That's almost the direction of the last two weeks. That almost seems to be the overriding direction of Paul. But that is not all that's involved in being a weak Christian. In fact, that is not the fundamental thing.

A weak Christian is a person who will fall on the basis of someone else's behavior. That's a weak Christian. A strong Christian is a Christian who is persuaded in the Lord Jesus and is not going to be unwholesomely or wrongly affected by someone else's example or behavior.

You and I have, perhaps, known circumstances where there have been people who have said, "I was a Christian until so and so did that. That person was really respected in the church, and you

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know what happened to him/her. I gave up after that.” That’s an example of a weak Christian.

Someone who is looking at someone else and saying, “As long as that person serves the Lord, I’ll keep serving the Lord. But if anything ever happens to him, my faith is not that rooted that I can keep on going.”

I think we all come to Christ that way. I was a weak believer when I came to Christ. I watched other people’s examples. I think of the time when I really came to the Lord as a junior in college and heard a series of messages on the resurrection of Jesus Christ which absolutely, irrevocably altered my life. The person who gave that series of messages today is not where I would personally want to be spiritually. It’s kind of been a subtle perversity entering into this person’s ministry and life. Now my faith is sufficient in Christ that I can say, “I’m very sorry what has happened to that brother whose ministry has really caused me to come face-to-face with the Lord. But my faith now is rooted enough in the Lord that I’m not deterred by this person’s example.” I have to say that there was a time when I would have been deterred. There was a moment in time in my early Christian experience where if that person had done the kinds of things they’re doing now, I would have been very disillusioned because this person had come along as such a shining, glistening example of the clarity and the Person of Jesus Christ. I was a weak Christian.

That’s why, as believers, we need to ask ourselves fundamentally after we’ve said, “Am I weak, or am I strong?” We need to ask ourselves these questions. Is my faith becoming strong enough that, no matter what anybody else did, I’d still serve Christ? If, all of a sudden, one of my parents absolutely flipped out, would I still serve the Lord? If the preacher turned out to be a wolf in sheep’s clothing, which I hope I’m not, but if I were, would you still follow the Lord? If my example, or the example of a parent, or the example of a Sunday School teacher, or someone else, in falling away from the Lord, would cause you to trip or to be trapped and cause your faith

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to be ruined or affected in such a way that you would be bitter from this point forward, this is a real searching word to you to say, “Get a faith that is deeper and stronger than that. Come all the way into Christ and be fully persuaded in Jesus, not in someone else.”

But then to the strong. There are people that do watch our example who are new in the faith or who are children. They’re saying of us, “We expect something from you.” We want to encourage them to stand on their own, be strong, independent of our example. But we’re conscious of Paul’s words, “Follow me as I follow Christ.” So knowing that we can help or hinder others who are not yet completely strong in the faith, we want to live in such a way that God will be pleased. And new persons will be built up so that as they follow Christ, their faith will be increasingly transferred to that of Jesus and Jesus alone. For it is on Christ the Solid Rock we stand.

I think that pretty well sums up what Paul says in Romans 14. Next week, we’ll look at the third phase of when Christians disagree.

Closing Prayer

Our gracious heavenly Father, we thank You today for the reality of Your life in us. We thank You for this weekly time of gathering we have to share together, to have our hearts kindled once more around Your Word. We think of the impact of the Scripture upon our lives as we hear it, together, opened. In praying today, Father, I, first of all, think of that person with sin in our midst, for whom the kingdom of God has not yet come. Who is not, at this point, wrestling with the kingdom of God being fruit or drink, or righteousness, or peace, or joy in the Holy Spirit, but just really hasn’t come into the Kingdom; the Kingdom hasn’t come into them. Lord, maybe this day they have seen something of Your character and life flowing through the Scripture, and following You is not some set of dos and don’ts. It’s a relationship. May they also see, Lord Jesus, that when believers gather together, they’re so in love with one another that when one or more in the Body is hung up on dos and don’ts, instead of a condemnation towards that person,

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and ridicule and contempt, there is an embracing kind of love which welcomes and says, “I’m not like you, but praise the Lord, together we can be like Jesus Christ. Together we can accept one another.” Lord, may that attitude be reflective of our own hearts, as believers, together in this Body. I would, Lord, that men and women here today would come to Your Kingdom this very hour.

I would, Lord Jesus, as well, for those among us who have staunch wells in our lives, who through the process of days and weeks, have allowed concrete blocks to be built into the well of living water so that the joy of the Holy Spirit is not permitted to seep through because we have put too much there to stop the flow. May this be an arresting day, an important day, in which we look face-to-face into those matters which obscure us from Your presence and the flow of Your reality. Lord, just give us the strength right now in prayer to take our hands and grab hold of that block and rip it out.

For the one who’s going through hurt and hasn’t forgiven someone else, hasn’t forgiven You, let them put their hands right now on that block and know forgiveness. May Your power now surge through their arms and just give their hands strength to grab it and absolutely tear it down. Let them see the water that begins to flow right into their life in that place where, just a moment before, had been a concrete block. Lord, let’s take a jackhammer and tear up the bottom floor of sin—sin that we’re living with that’s unconfessed, undealt with, and stops the joy from flowing out from underneath us, up through our being. Lord, we just take Your Word now as we stand upon it, which says to us as believers, “If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us.” We yield that to You, Lord. We see all the structures going down so that we might be filled with joy, which is the kingdom of God. Then, Lord, as we look face-to-face at who we are—whether weak or strong, whether our faith is built upon someone else’s example in life or built upon You, help us to see that clearly. As our faith is built upon You, that doesn’t

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mean that we quit being an example or want examples, because we still do and will. But Lord, it means we should say to each other, “Follow me as I follow Christ.” But there’s a subtle, deep-rooted change which realizes that our faith is not in someone else. Our faith is really in You, on Christ the Solid Rock we stand. Lord, we just ask this in Your Name. Amen.