

14:1-2: *But him that is weak in faith receive ye, (yet) not for decision of scruples. 2 One man hath faith to eat all things: but he that is weak eateth herbs.*

There were and still are brethren who are “*weak in faith.*” The *weak (astheneo)* members of the congregation about whom Paul wrote are identified in verse two—Christians who would *only eat herbs*. The “strong Christians” ate everything without concern; the *weak brethren* were Christians who could not conscientiously eat certain foods. Brown (3:995) suggests the terms *weak and strong* were “catchwords or familiar slogans” and “used by the various groups within the churches of Corinth and Rome.” A *weak person* was a Christian who had an uneasy conscience about a matter of judgment. Such a person had “not yet reached a full knowledge of the faith” (Brown, 3:995). Compare 1 Cor. 8:11. In this first verse *weak* is a present tense verb. It is also found in verses 2 and 21 of this chapter. We can better appreciate the word if we think of first century life. For those living in the midst of Roman culture, much of the meat sold in local stores was associated with idolatry (see 1 Cor. 8:7). Christians who were *weak* could not eat this meat and maintain a clear conscience because they believed that eating the meat caused them to be involved with idolatry. If meat could not be eaten in good conscience, these Christians needed to be vegetarians.

On the other hand, there were Christians who were *strong* in the faith (this description is implied in verse 2). *Strong* Christians could eat all meats, even if the food had been used in idol worship. The strong Christians saw the meat as food and nothing but food. The weak Christians believed this food was to be avoided. Since these two groups had very different opinions, Paul needed to explain how the church could stay unified even though there was a disagreement about food. If the Greek text is examined, *faith* is literally “*the faith*” (the system of faith or “the gospel”). See the commentary on Jude 3 for more information on this point.

The opening verses of this chapter contain some valuable lessons, the first of which is related to agreement. No matter where we worship we are not going to fully agree with fellow Christians on matters of opinion. Even in a Christian marriage, a husband and wife will not always agree on matters of opinion. This chapter teaches that this is to be expected and that disagreeing over matters of judgment is okay.

Today, if we would call a Christian *weak* we would probably injure the person’s feelings. No one wants to be thought of as a *weak* Christian. Although many would reject this description, the Bible uses this terminology to describe some church members. This description is not degrading. Neither is it mean. *Weak*, as noted above, does not mean that a Christian is somehow inferior to another member of the church. It does mean a Christian’s conscience will not allow him or her to do what others do. If there is an instance where we are *weak*, we should be willing to acknowledge that. Refusing to acknowledge we are *weak* in some area indicates stubbornness and pride.

There must be agreement in the church concerning the “pattern of sound words” (2 Tim. 1:13). We must agree that worship is to be in spirit and truth (Jn. 4:24). We must agree on the terms for obeying the gospel (2 Thess. 1:7-8). Unity must exist in many areas, but there are some other matters wherein we can disagree. Some subjects that are a matter of opinion are these.

- How long should our worship service last?
- How long should a preacher stay with (at) a congregation?
- How many songs should be sung when we worship?
- What kind of church building should we have?
- Should we have more than one service on Sunday?
- Should we have Bible classes and Vacation Bible School?
- How should we celebrate holidays like Easter and Christmas?
- Should we eat in a restaurant that serves alcoholic beverages?

- Is it right to attend movies produced by the entertainment industry?
- Should we have and watch television?
- Should a Christian be involved in politics?

There are many matters of opinion wherein Christians may make up their own minds about things. In cases where Christians are *weak* (they are not comfortable doing what a *strong* Christian would do), the stronger is to *receive the weaker, yet not for decision of scruples* (verse 1). God insists stronger brethren *receive* (take in, do not shun or avoid) the weaker brother. The weaker Christian must be fellowshipped and included in the group.

In addition to fellowshipping each other, God’s people must obey a second command: *Do not fellowship him for the decision of scruples* (i.e. try to change his mind). A paraphrase (the New Living Translation) brings out the thought quite nicely: “Accept Christians who are weak in faith, and don’t argue with them about what they think is right or wrong.” If this rendering is used, however, it must be remembered the *right and wrong* are matters related to something as innocent as “*meat*” (food, verses 2 and 15). Also helpful is the NKJV: “Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.” “Herbs” (*lachanon*) is found only a few times in the New Testament (Mt. 13:32; Mk. 4:32; Lk. 11:42). Before the New Testament was written, this term described “herbs and vegetables cultivated in a field or garden, sold in the market, and prepared in the kitchen” (CBL, GED, 4:38). Many first century groups (academic, philosophical and religious) were composed of vegetarians. Since this is a matter of judgment, it must be treated as a matter of judgment. People may have differing opinions about it but still be faithful children of God. Trying to force a vegetarian to eat meat, or trying to beat him or her into submission through quarrelling, is forbidden. Even though we may be tempted to get a weaker brother to “believe just like us,” trying to change someone’s opinion on a matter that bothers his conscience is wrong. Making such an attempt is a sin.

What Paul wrote does not prohibit us from discussing a matter with someone or even engaging in some teaching. Weak brethren are not helped if we leave them in a state of ignorance. There is a difference between “trying to straighten someone out so he shares our opinion” and teaching a person with love. The former is forbidden; the latter is permitted. If a person believes something is wrong when it really isn’t, this chapter affirms the person may retain their faulty opinion. God does not require every Christian to share the same judgment about matters of opinion, though some seem to think so.

14:3-4: *Let not him that eateth set at nought him that eateth not; and let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. 4 Who art thou that judgest the servant of another? to his own lord he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be made to stand; for the Lord hath power to make him stand.*

The third verse repeats and expands Paul’s thought. Not only is the *strong brother* to welcome the *weak brother*, the *weak brother* is to *welcome the strong brother*. When Christians differ on matters of opinion, God accepts (has “*received*”) both Christians. This term (*proslambano*) has the sense of “receive hospitably” (CBL, GED, 5:343). It is also found in the Philemon letter (Phile. 12). When Philemon received his slave Onesimus back, Onesimus was to receive a *hospitable* welcome to his master’s home. Because God warmly, eagerly and fully accepts both the weak and the strong, there is to be no barrier between the weak and strong (this describes differences concerning matters of judgment—not matters of doctrine). Furthermore, there should be no bad (ill) feelings between the strong and the weak. There should never be a case where someone is disfellowshipped over a matter of personal judgment or a matter where God’s will is not clear.

There must have been a problem with matters of judgment among the Roman Christians. This is indicated by the word “*judging*” in verse 4 (the word is in the present tense). This tense indicates judgments were being made. The strong were judging the weak and the weak were judging the strong. When this judging is referred to in verse 3, two different words are used. *Strong* Christians “*set at*

nought” or “despised” (KJV) the vegetarians. This term (*exoutheneo*) has the sense of contempt, disdain, rejection. The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (2:9) defines it as, “have a low opinion of, scorn, reject contemptuously.” It is not hard to imagine how the strong accused the weak of being unspiritual or spiritually immature. Accusations were not limited to strong Christians (people who were not vegetarians). From the weak were people who “judged” (*krino*) the strong. Robertson (4:412) noted the difference in words and said, “One side (the meat-eaters) despises the vegetarians, while the vegetarians criticize the meat-eaters.” The weak may have accused the strong of being ungodly bullies who lacked spiritual sensitivity and discernment. The tension between the two groups could have resulted in a church split.

To stop the judging (verse 4), Paul asked this question: *Who are you that judges another?* Since the present tense is used, there must have been a steady flow of accusations within this congregation. Knowing this can comfort God’s people today in that congregations in the past have sometimes had periods of intense discussions and heated debates. As Christians the words from the Hebrew letter (13:1) always need to be remembered: “*Let brotherly love continue.*”

The Romans needed to realize they were judging the “servants” of God. Also, the matters troubling these people were opinions and not doctrine. Because of these two facts, Paul asked how a servant could judge a fellow servant on matters of opinion. Surely they understood this was wrong. Only God (Jas. 4:12) has the right to justify or condemn people in matters of judgment. However, God does not use this right. Heaven allows the weak brother to “stand” (be justified) with his opinion just as the strong brother stands (is also justified). *Stand* (*steko*) is a present tense verb that occurs at both the beginning and end of this verse. It means “to stand erect” and “not to sin” (Thayer, p. 588). Since God does not judge His people in matters of opinion, how can another human being do this?

Many times in the New Testament *servant* is the word *doulos* (a bond servant). This common term is found earlier in this letter (Rom. 1:1; 6:16, 17, 20). New Testament writers also had at their disposal another word for servants (*oiketes*), and this second term described “closer relations with the family.” Here this second more personal term is used. God’s servants are not mere slaves; they are chosen and favored people. Because Christians have a God who cares deeply about them, we must treat our brethren very, very well, especially when we disagree about a matter of opinion. Lenski (Romans, p. 818) noted how this kind of servant would be “in personal contact with his master. Whose business is it to pass any kind of judgment, either favorable or unfavorable upon such a servant? Certainly the master’s alone.” In the middle of verse 4 is another key word which completes the thought (in the ASV, this is also translated *stand*). God helps *hold up* His people whether they are weak or strong. The strong may not believe they need God’s aid, but they do. Such is also true for the weak. Compare Rom 16:25; Heb. 7:25; 1 Pet. 1:5; Jude 24.

What Paul said is easy to understand but many fail to apply it. There have been cases where Christians have said: “Agree with us if you want to be part of this group. Change your viewpoint or we will separate ourselves from you.” Paul understood that this was wrong. He refused to coerce or pressure weak Christians to believe something that offended their conscience. We must follow Paul’s example. Weak brethren have liberty just as the strong do, and all must be allowed to enjoy their freedom. Neither the weak nor the strong are to bind or attempt to bind their opinions on each other.

14:5-8: *One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day (alike). Let each man be fully assured in his own mind. 6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord: and he that eateth, eateth unto the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, unto the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks. 7 For none of us liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself. 8 For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.*

Paul will return to the subject of eating meats, but in this section of the chapter he turned to a different subject—*special days*. In the first century, certain days had a lot of religious significance. This was especially true for the Jewish people. The Jews believed certain days should be recognized as special or holy days because of their background. The Gentiles did not share this belief, so this

difference was another source of friction and contention. “Esteemeth” (*krino*) is used twice in this verse. At the start of the verse it means “to esteem one day as better than another,” and the second time it means “to approve each day, i.e. esteem all days alike” (Brown, 2:364).

A specific example of the “day problem” may have been the Sabbath. On the seventh day (Saturday) those from a Jewish background may have wanted to rest, but Gentiles wanted to work. A similar problem could have resulted from the Jewish feasts such as the Passover. Those from a Jewish background may have wanted to observe this day; those from a Gentile background may have wanted to treat the day as any other.

Paul’s solution to these problems is stated in the 5th verse. He said, “*Let each man be fully assured in his own mind.*” People needed to make their own decisions about special days. Some might choose to celebrate a certain day and others could choose to not celebrate that day. Each Christian had the right to make up his or her own mind about special days and celebrations. The word translated *fully assured* (*epicheireo*) means Christians are to act “with a conviction that is thought out, mature, justified in their conscience” (Spicq, 3:121).

This instruction may be applied to the present time. Some Christians like to expend a great deal of time and energy on Christmas. Those who wish to celebrate this holiday have divine permission for their celebration. Those who wish to view Christmas as an ordinary day or season are entitled to their viewpoint. The same is true of Halloween. Some view this day as a time dedicated to the devil and they want nothing to do with it. Others see Halloween as a time of joy and they do not associate it with evil or Satan. God allows Christians to differ about national holidays. The end of this verse says we are to make decisions we are comfortable with when dealing with matters of opinion.

The points made by Paul are further developed in the 6th verse. Here we are told that if someone believes a day is special, or he eats a certain food in good conscience, these actions are done “*unto God*” and “*thanksgiving*” is offered. This means both the weak and the strong are sincere in their activities. What is being done is done with a good conscience and no one is guilty of sin. “*Regardeth*” (*phroneo*) is defined by Thayer (p. 658) as “to regard a day, observe it as sacred.” The man who *eats* (the strong brother) is thankful to God for his food. The person who observes a *special day* (the weak brother) is grateful for his holiday. The verse ends by saying the one who does *not* eat meat is also thankful. Such a person would have been appreciative for the alternative food (in this case the food was probably vegetables).

Many verses in the New Testament teach the point found in verse 7. Christians belong to someone else—Jesus Christ. We belong to the Lord because He has bought us. Because Christ has purchased His people, “*none of us liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself.*” This means there is more to our life than our day-to-day existence. God holds the deed to our soul. If we are alive or dead (verse 8), we belong to the Lord. Paul used this fact to show that both strong and weak Christians are bound together by a common owner. Only our owner (the Lord) can make rules regarding matters of opinion. God has ruled that in matters of opinion we get to decide what is right for us.

14:9-12: *For to this end Christ died and lived (again), that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. 10 But thou, why dost thou judge thy brother? or thou again, why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of God. 11 For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, to me every knee shall bow, And every tongue shall confess to God. 12 So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God.*

Jesus has experienced both life and death. If we live for Him as a Christian, He is our Lord. If we die in His service, He is still our Lord. Paul meant a Christian always has Jesus as Lord and judge (notice how this is stressed in verse 8; Paul used the word “*Lord*” three times). Paul wanted his readers to know beyond any doubt that Christ, and not a fellow human being, is our judge. A further emphasis of this point is found in verse 9. Three words “*might be Lord*” come from a single term (*kurieuo*), a verb, meaning *to be Lord over, rule over, have dominion over, or control*. Earlier in this book (6:9), Paul used this term to say death has no more *dominion* over Jesus. Here Spicq (2:352) says it means Jesus “has conquered every sovereignty, and the legitimacy of his dominion can never

be contested.”

Because Jesus is the judge, making judgments against each other in matters of opinion is wrong and forbidden (10a). Another forbidden act is *setting at nought* a fellow Christian. The word “*naught*” (*exoutheneo*) meant to *despise* or *treat with contempt*. We might think of it as looking down on someone (Earle, p. 208). Other definitions are “have a low opinion of, scorn, reject contemptuously” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:9). This is the same word used in verse 3 as well as 1 Cor. 16:11 (there was a chance Timothy could be *despised*). *Judge* and *despise* are both present tense verbs. Christians are slaves to Christ and we must remember our position (we are servants). This lowly position does not give us the authority to judge others. Neither does it allow us to insist that others accept our opinions on matters of judgment. Others have a right to their opinions on things that are not doctrinal. These differing opinions must be accepted and respected.

The statement “*Lord of both the dead and the living*” provides us with information about death. Since the dead can only be “ruled over” if they are conscious, this verse teaches that people are conscious after death. *Death* is the separation of the body and soul; it is not the cessation of the eternal spirit (Jas. 2:26). The Lord continues to rule over man’s eternal spirit after people die. Jesus affirmed this same truth when answering the Sadducees (Mt. 22:23-32). He spoke of men such as Abraham, men who had been dead a long time, but claimed God still ruled over them (notice the present tense in Mt. 22:32—I **am** the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). If death is all there is and an end to our existence, Jesus would have said, “God *was*.” (For a special study on Hades, the holding place for both the righteous and unrighteous dead, see the commentary on Acts 2:27).

The two questions in the 10th verse were directed to both the strong and the weak. The strong were inclined to *set at nought* the weak. That is, they looked down upon and rejected the weak. The strong even expressed feelings of contempt toward their weaker brethren. The weak brethren responded with *judgment*. We can compare this *judgment* to the charge of liberalism. The weak charged the strong with doctrinal error and apostasy. While these charges are appropriate for doctrinal error, they are not suitable for differences in opinion. For ways to distinguish between doctrine and matters of opinion, see the introductory comments for this chapter.

In verses 11 and 12 Paul provided information about the final judgment. Some believe his quotations from Isaiah 49:18 and 45:23 show that the final judgment was predicted in the Old Testament. This may be correct. Others like McGuiggan reject this interpretation. If the final judgment is not in view, it is difficult to explain when we will “*give an account*” for our lives (verse 12).

There is an interesting contrast between Rom. 14:11-12 and Phil. 2:11. While men are upon the earth, they “*should*” confess Christ as Lord and become a child of God (Phil. 2:11). If this is not done, all “*will*” eventually submit to God’s power and acknowledge Jesus as King of Kings and master of all (Rom. 14:11-12). This forced submission will not offer any benefit to the unsaved, but it will cause all to ultimately acknowledge that Jesus is supreme and the one true Lord. “*Bow*” (*kampto*) is found only four times in the New Testament. In addition to here, it occurs in Rom. 11:4; Eph. 3:14; Phil. 2:10. It is defined as “a sign of reverence or submission” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:248). Each time *bow* occurs, it is joined with the word “*knee*” (*gonu*). In almost every passage that uses *knee*, the thought is associated with prayer or worship. For the culture in which this was first written, “bowing one’s knee was a respectful acknowledgement of another’s superiority (as in the case of Mark 15:19)” (CBL, GED, 1:641).

If *bowing the knee* (and this may not be a literal expression) is not enough, “*every tongue shall confess to God*.” *Tongue* (*glossa*) is found about fifty times in the New Testament, and it is the word associated with *tongue speaking*. Here, however, it is a quote from Isaiah (45:23b): “for the person who must stand before God’s judgment. The same citation is used in the hymn in Phil. 2:10f. for the recognition of the lordship of Jesus Christ by the cosmic powers” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:252). It is difficult to know what the *confession* (*exomologeō*) will be. Two distinct possibilities are “confession of sin to God or acknowledgement to God of who Jesus is” (CBL, GED, 2:479). This same term occurs about twelve other times in the New Testament, and one of these other places is Phil. 2:11. Whatever the confession is, it will be “*to God*” (i.e. the Father).

14:13-14: *Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge ye this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock in his brother's way, or an occasion of falling. 14 I know, and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean of itself: save that to him who accounteth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.*

Paul has shown that judging each other in matters of opinion is wrong. In the first part of verse 13, this point is stressed even more. The first part of this verse says, “*Let us not therefore judge one another any more.*” These Christians were in the habit of judging one another in matters of opinion. This had to stop. Robertson (4:414) expresses the idea as, “Let us no longer have the habit of criticizing one another.” This message still needs to be proclaimed in classrooms and pulpits throughout the world.

If these Christians wanted to *judge* something, they needed to turn their attention to *stumbling blocks* and *an occasion of falling* (13b). A “*stumbling block*” (*proskomma*) was an impediment or an obstruction. It is putting a “hindrance in the way of a brother” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:173). Gingrich and Danker (p. 716) define it as putting “*an obstacle in the brother’s way.*” An “*occasion of falling*” (*skandalon*) was a “means of falling” (an offense). It can be likened to a snare that “would entice one from the Faith” (CBL, GED, 6:60). Here the *snare* was based upon “eating habits” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:249); i.e. the eating of foods which made some uncomfortable. The end of verse 13 means that instead of judging the opinions of others we must judge ourselves. We must ensure we are not doing things that would lead others into sin, cause a fellow Christian to stumble, or engage in actions that somehow damage another Christian. Our energy for judgment must be focused on ourselves. This thought is developed more fully in the following verses. Paul used food to illustrate his point.

The New Testament writers had more than one word for *food*. One term (*kreas*), found only in Rom. 14:21 and 1 Cor. 8:13, described flesh (meat). Among the Gentiles, pork was especially popular. Christians from a Jewish background would not have been accustomed to this type of meat (Lev. 11:7-8; Isa. 65:4; Acts 10:14), and this created problems. Another word for food (*broma*, the term used in verse 13) was a general word for food. It included animal flesh, fruit, vegetables, bread, etc. A good definition for *broma* is “*food, nourishment, or nutrients*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:228).

When Paul penned this letter, he affirmed his right to eat any type of food (14a). He both “*knew*” and was “*persuaded*” (*peitho*, a verb that has the sense of *being convinced*) that all foods had divine approval. Because both verbs are in the perfect tense, Paul had come to this conclusion in the past and he was still persuaded it was true. He knew any kind of food is acceptable because the Old Testament law has been removed (Rom. 7:1-4). The Law of Moses has been abolished and Christians are now under a New Testament. This new law says all foods are acceptable (Mk. 7:19). While Paul realized all food may be eaten with God’s approval, he also understood that not every Christian was comfortable with doing this. There was even a time when Peter did not understand or make use of this truth (Acts 10:13-15). A Christian from a Jewish background may have had lingering questions about eating food that had been forbidden since childhood. This conviction would have made some Christians from a Jewish background *weak* in the sense that they could not eat certain foods and have a clean conscience. Paul said if people thought it was wrong to eat certain foods, it was wrong (wrong for them, not everyone else). People were to live in such a way that they could have a clean conscience. If a *strong* Christian insisted a *weak* Christian eat certain food(s), a *stumbling block* would be put before the weak brother. This was also wrong.

These Christians had no right to impose their personal ideas or beliefs on other members of the congregation. If a man wanted to avoid doing some things (and one of these things was not eating meat—“*to him it is unclean,*” 14b), this was acceptable. If a person wanted to teach his opinion as the only right way to do things, this was wrong. Anyone who taught that some forms of food had to be avoided taught a demonic doctrine (1 Tim. 4:1-4). This belief could be a personal conviction, but it could not be a law that was bound upon other members of the church. *Unclean (koinos)* can be

defined as “profane” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 438). Kittle’s comment (abridged edition, p. 448) gets to the heart of the matter: “Weaker brethren may still think in these terms, and allowance must be made for them, but they are objectively mistaken (Rom. 14:14).”

14:15-16: *For if because of meat thy brother is grieved, thou walkest no longer in love. Destroy not with thy meat him for whom Christ died. 16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of:*

The *weak* were warned about trying to impose their convictions about food on others. Similar instructions were given to the *strong*. Those who believed that all food is suitable for eating were to avoid *grieving* (a present tense verb) a fellow church member. *Grieving* (*lupeo*) has varying shades of meaning in the New Testament. In its most intense sense it is applied to Jesus and His time in the Garden (Mt. 26:37). Here the sense is something like “hurt feelings.” Other definitions would be “*injured/deeply troubled*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:363). We may illustrate the thought with an example. Suppose a church member is opposed to roast beef (he thinks eating this type of meat is wrong). He would be *weak* with respect to roast beef. What if a *strong* Christian invited this *weak* brother to have lunch at Arby’s and have a giant roast beef sandwich? This invitation would *grieve* the weak Christian. Failing to take the weak Christian’s convictions into account or flaunting the fact that others eat roast beef at Arby’s would create a *stumbling block* for the weak Christian. The lack of love and consideration for a fellow Christian’s opinions is deplorable (15a). This must not be found in the church.

Christians are to show “*love*” (*agape*) towards all people (13:8). Christian love prevents Christians from hurting those who have a tender conscience. The end of verse 15 accentuates the point even more by saying, “*Destroy not with thy meat him for whom Christ died.*” Strong Christians may know that certain actions are acceptable to God and they can conscientiously engage in these practices. However, those who do so must be mindful of those who do not share their confidence and convictions. It is better to forego some of our liberties if engaging in something means we will hurt or destroy a fellow Christian. *Love* also means the strong will not boast about how they can do things that bother other Christians. Christian love even prohibits strong Christians from having a condescending attitude towards those who do not share their convictions. McGuiggan (p. 395) asked an excellent question: “What will we take in exchange for a brother’s soul? Would it be food? Drink? Money? Being right? What is so valuable that it destroys the soul of another Christian? We cannot run roughshod over fellow brethren and please God.”

The word translated “*destroy*” (*apollumi*) “literally means to ‘destroy utterly.’ It is used frequently in the New Testament of sinners perishing without salvation. This makes it clear that it is not a matter of a weak brother having his life wasted or his reputation ruined. Our selfish liberties may cause his soul to perish” (CBL, Romans, p. 219). If we injure or ruin another Christian, we can expect to face God’s judgment. Christ died “*for*” (on behalf of) a weak Christian. If we negatively impact a weak Christian, we essentially interfere with the Lord’s saving work and He will surely not be pleased with our negative interference.

The information in verse 16 is easily related to the previous verses. Christians must not let their “*good*” (this word may describe our salvation, Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:6) be “*evil spoken of*” (*blasphemeo*). This term was used by Jesus when He spoke of *blaspheming* the Holy Spirit (Lk. 12:10). *Blasphemo* “occurs more often than one might suspect—35 times—in the New Testament, being found in 14 books by 8 writers” (CBL, GED, 1:563). Here it warns Christians “against any behavior that gives occasion for their salvation. . .to be *slandered* or *brought into ill repute* among non-Christians and thus to become a subject for scorn and ridicule” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:220). Even though some Christians may do or believe things a *weak Christian* would not do or believe, these beliefs or actions should never bring injury to another believer. No one should ever be able to point to a strong Christian and say, “You are damaging a fellow Christian with your opinions and actions.” Too, our actions should never leave us open to charges from non-Christians (compare 1 Tim. 3:7, 9-10). Any Christian who is truly strong will defend, protect, and compassionately love those who are *weak*. The strong have liberties, but if these

rights crush and hurt a son or daughter of God, or would subject our life to ridicule and slander from the unsaved, it is better to abandon the freedom (compare verse 21).

14:17-18: *for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 For he that herein serveth Christ is well-pleasing to God, and approved of men.*

The kingdom of God is not “*eating and drinking*.” That is, there is more to Christianity than food and beverages. Thus, if eating certain foods would destroy a Christian, or engaging in other activities would bring about a similar consequence, the food or activity should be abandoned. The kingdom is far greater than any freedom or opinion we possess.

Paul understood that God’s kingdom is about “*righteousness*” (right conduct by its citizens), “*peace*,” and “*joy*.” When Christians insist that others agree with their opinions (this insistence is often made by the *weak*), or trample others with their confidence about things (this is usually done by the *strong*), there is little *righteousness*, *peace*, and *joy* in the kingdom (church). Insisting on our rights or opinions causes us to lose sight of what the kingdom is. In this passage (as well as some other places), the *kingdom* refers to the *church*.

The phrase “*in the Holy Spirit*” describes living as a Christian. This is clear from Paul’s use of the same phrase in the book of Ephesians. According to Eph. 6:18 members of the church are to both “*watch*” and be “*praying at all seasons in the Spirit*.” Since *in the spirit* is joined with “*all seasons*” in Eph. 6:18, this is not mystical, supernatural, or unexplainable. Also, since the word *watch* is used in conjunction with this phrase, being *in the Spirit* cannot describe a loss of control—a claim made by some members of the Pentecostal movement. The command to *watch* in Eph. 6:18 further implies we are in control of ourselves when we are *in the Spirit*.

In Eph. 5:18 this phrase is used to present a contrast. Instead of *living in trespasses and sins* (Eph. 2:1-2), Christians have been *made alive to live with Christ* (Eph. 2:5). Because we have left the old life, we refuse to follow the ways of the world. This includes avoidance of things associated with “*riot*” (see Eph. 5:18). Instead of living a life of sin and following the ways of Satan, Christians are to be *filled with the Spirit* (the ways of God). Living in the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit are different ways to express living the Christian life. This was what the Romans needed to do so there would be no problems between the weak and the strong. For more information about this subject, see the commentary on Jude 20.

There are members of the church who do not walk (live) *in the Spirit* (17b). Many want their own way and insist that fellow church members accept their opinions on matters of judgment. Some get their way by claiming to be *weak*. Some affirm they will be offended if certain things are not done as they want or deem best. If the truth were told, many who claim to be *weak* are not weak. These people are stubborn, self-centered, and full of pride. When these individuals disguise their intentions by pretending to be *weak*, we have no obligation to accommodate them. Neither does this chapter require us to go along with every crank that has a half-baked idea or opinion. We must carefully distinguish between those who are *weak* and those who are obstinate, selfish, and opinionated, and the Scriptures will help us do this. According to Phil. 3:15, God can be involved in helping people determine what is and what is not critical regarding our beliefs and practices. Through God’s providence we can come to a deeper and fuller understanding of the Scriptures. As questions arise and are considered, we must always remember the difference between renouncing liberties for those who are weak and giving in to people who do not like a decision. Too many congregations have been guided or overtaken by people who condemn every idea and opinion but theirs. When Christians have differing views about various matters, sometimes both sides can be accommodated. A Catholic lady once refused to visit a certain religious group because it did not have “*kneelers*.” She believed it was disrespectful to pray in a posture other than on the knees. Should the congregation that did not have kneelers have rebuffed her belief or tried to accommodate her? It would have been wrong to insist that all worshippers use kneelers, but one could have been made available to her and any one else who wanted one. When we find Christians who are *weaker* brethren, there must be a spirit of “*us*” and a desire for truth and unity, not an “*us versus you*” mentality. Agape love solves a lot of problems. For additional suggestions on

how to work through differences, see the introductory comments on this chapter.

Verse 18 refers to Christians “*serv*ing” (*doouleuo*, a present tense verb) “*Christ*.” Matthew is the first New Testament book to use this term (Mt. 6:24). He recorded the Lord saying we cannot *serve* two masters. Neither can we *serve* (same word and same verse) money. When meeting with the Ephesian elders Paul applied this term to his Christian life (Acts 20:19). Prior to this place in the book of Romans this term occurs in Rom. 6:6; 7:6, 25; 9:12; 12:11. After this verse it is found in Rom. 16:18. See too how it is used in 1 Thess. 1:9. Brown (3:596) offers this comment on *serv*ing in the present text: “Christ’s redemption frees one for obedient service under the command of the *Kyrios*” (Lord, BP).

Christians who *serve* are “*well-pleasing*” (*euarestos*) to God. In the KJV this term is rendered “*acceptable*.” Other places which use this word reveal other aspects of the Christian life which are also *well-pleasing* to God. In Rom. 12:1 *well-pleasing* is applied to our bodies. When writing to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 5:9), Paul associated this word with a Christian’s *labor*. In the Philippians letter it is associated with *sacrifice* (Phil. 4:18). *Well-pleasing* is joined with *obedience* in Col. 3:20 and *good works done through Christ* (Heb. 13:21). Living as verse 18 describes will leave us “*approved of men*.” Who are these *men*? Lard (p 426) rightly said, “it is not necessary to restrict the word ‘men’ to christians (sic). The meaning appears to be this: It is the general sentiment of mankind that he is worthy of approval who is righteous in conduct, and who at the same time so acts as to occasion others peace and joy, and not grief. Such a man is approved by the world.” Compare this to a qualification for elders (1 Tim. 3:7).

14:19-21: *So then let us follow after things which make for peace, and things whereby we may edify one another. 20 Overthrow not for meat's sake the work of God. All things indeed are clean; howbeit it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. 21 It is good not to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor (to do anything) whereby thy brother stumbleth.*

One of the things that must concern every Christian is “*peace*” in the church. Strife and contention are out of place in the Lord’s body. Instead of attacking and injuring each other (as people in the world often do), Christians are to “*edify*” (*oikodome*) one another. We cannot have a good relationship with God if we have a sour relationship with our brethren. Perhaps to convey the intensity of the thought, Paul used a special word (*dioko*) which is translated “*follow*.” Most of the places where this term occurs use this word to describe *persecution* (see how this word is used in Mt. 5:10, 11, 12, 44). There are some instances of the word having a different but still intense meaning (i.e. the quest for Christian values). For this passage it can be understood as “*strive for something*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:338). It is a present tense verb, and it tells us to always strive for peace and edification within the church. Compare this to what is said in Rom. 12:18.

In light of the preceding material it is clear that we must promote peace and harmony by letting fellow Christians maintain their individual convictions on matters of opinion. The weak can bear with the strong and the strong can bear with the weak in matters of judgment. We should do everything we can to encourage and not discourage fellow Christians.

The material in verses 20 and 21 expands this thought even more, and the wording from Today’s Living Bible simplifies the point quite well: “*Don’t undo the work of God for a chunk of meat*” (or any other food, BP). Christians are forbidden from using food or anything else to “*overthrow*” the “*work of God*.” The *work of God* is a metonymy for Christians. If any of our opinions would damage the body of Christ, or cause a single Christian to stumble, our opinion must be sacrificed. We either keep some opinions to ourselves, do not engage in things that bother weak brethren, or avoid discussing matters that would cause a fellow Christian to stumble.

The reason for our care and caution is found at the end of verse 20. If a weak brother believes something is wrong (let’s use apple cider as an example), and we cause him to drink some, he has committed an “*offence*” (*proskomma*, the same term used in verse 13). Leading another brother to do what his conscience condemns is “*evil*.” The weak brother (in the illustration given) sins because he is conscientiously opposed to drinking apple cider.

The strong Christian also sins because he forced the weak brother to violate his conscience. By itself, apple cider is not sinful (20a, “*all things indeed are clean*”). It can become wrong if someone has a personal conviction against it. If stronger brethren would be aware of this conviction, they would not serve, offer, buy, or even drink this beverage in the presence of a *weak* brother. Bringing apple cider to a fellowship meal at the church building would be unthinkable. This is the entire point made in verse 21. All Christians are to treat each other with consideration and love.

Although this is how Christians are supposed to behave, we live in a time when many insist on having and using all their “rights.” Americans are taught to exercise their rights. We are repeatedly told that if we do not use all of our rights, we are being cheated. Giving up any right is bad. Giving in to others is wrong. These attitudes are inconsistent with this chapter, but they have often slipped into the church. When this type of thinking is found, it needs to be condemned and eradicated. Insistence on our rights, when they injure a fellow Christian, is a violation of the golden rule. This is also an excellent way to destroy the soul of a weak brother or sister in the Lord—an act God hates (1 Cor. 3:17). We must resist the temptation to have and use our rights, if having and using liberties will injure another believer.

The information in verses 19-21 illustrates true Bible love. There were Christians who could not eat “*flesh*” (*kreas*, a word denoting animal flesh) in good conscience. Among the Gentiles, pork was a common food. After becoming Christians Gentiles would have surely expected to continue eating this type of meat, but many Jews would not have been comfortable eating or having pork at the table because they had been accustomed to treating it as forbidden (Lev. 11:7-8; Isa. 65:4; Acts 10:14). Jesus “made all meats clean” (Mk. 7:19), but some Jews still had difficulty accepting certain foods.

When we are given the choice of surrendering our rights or injuring a fellow Christian, faithful Christians will quickly and willingly give up their rights. We will go out of our way to avoid injuring a fellow Christian. Even though there is often a cost to *edifying* each other (verse 19), Christians are willing to pay this price. Jesus once said, “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*” (Jn. 15:13). If we are willing to give our life for a fellow Christian, will we not also surrender some rights if this helps another child of God? If fellow Christians did not need to be *edified*, and there were no *weak* brethren, our lives would be a lot easier. Our lives are not easy. There are members of the church who are weak and they need to be edified. These facts show why every Christian must still follow the instructions in this chapter.

Many who have studied this material have been fascinated by the reference to “*wine*” in verse 21. Some have suggested that since Paul spoke of wine this shows the first Christians drank alcohol. This has caused some to conclude that if the first Christians drank alcohol we can drink it too. Those who make this argument, if they are mindful of this chapter, must also affirm that social drinking is only permitted if there is not a *weaker brother* (someone who is conscientiously opposed to Christians drinking alcohol). An argument against drinking alcohol may be based upon the *weaker brother* principle. Many Christians view alcohol as a tool of the devil and consider it to be a sinful pleasure from the world. Those who believe Christianity and alcohol are compatible can and will injure a weaker brother.

To determine what Paul meant by the word *wine*, we must study the original term (*oinos*). This word described both “vine-juice” (grape juice) and intoxicating beverages. In Mt. 9:17 *oinos* describes a non-intoxicating drink. Jesus knew people did not put new *wine* (*oinos*) into *old containers*. Why not? The *wine* expands. Since the old containers had previously expanded and were brittle, they would break when the “new wine” expanded. What kind of *oinos* (*wine*) expands—grape juice or alcohol? The answer is grape juice. Carbon Dioxide causes grape juice to swell during the fermentation process. The reference in Matthew 9 proves that *oinos* is sometimes used to describe a non-alcoholic drink. In order to say the *wine* in Rom. 14:21 was alcoholic, there must be proof. Since there is no proof that *oinos* in Rom. 14:21 was alcoholic, affirming that these Christians drank alcohol is only an assumption.

The *wine* in this chapter may have been an illustration. Jesus once used a dishonest man for an illustration (Lk. 16:1-10). This illustration caused people to understand the point, but Jesus did not endorse the man’s deceitfulness. Paul may have used the same teaching technique. Those who believe

that they are strong and have the freedom to drink socially (casually) should consider how they would feel if they saw their preacher coming out of a liquor store with a full case of beer in his hands. Would the *strong* be bothered by such a sight? What if this imaginary preacher opened up a can of the beer and drank it on the street corner? Would the *strong* be upset? If we were to go to a preacher's house and he offered us a beer, would this seem odd? Would we be offended and shocked?

Many who view social drinking as a matter of judgment would reel with shock if they saw their minister buying or drinking alcohol. When it comes to a minister buying booze, many instantly become *weak* and would insist that such a minister be fired. Many who drink in moderation cannot stand the idea of their evangelist buying alcohol. If it is wrong for the preacher to drink in moderation, it is wrong for every other member of the church. Alcohol, in all quantities, is to be avoided by Christians. For more information on alcohol and Christians, see the commentary on 1 Tim. 3 and the special study at Tit. 2:3.

14:22-23: *The faith which thou hast, have thou to thyself before God. Happy is he that judgeth not himself in that which he approveth. 23 But he that doubteth is condemned if he eat, because (he eateth) not of faith; and whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*

There are times when Christians have different opinions on matters of judgment. Paul knew this and thus concluded, *Whatever you believe [regarding matters of judgment] is between you and God.* In matters of opinion, our conscience can be our guide (our conscience “*approves*” us). Because we have the right to individual opinions, we do not judge ourselves in these matters (i.e. matters of opinion). Because opinions are individual, Christians should make their own judgments about personal matters. They should make individual judgments that leave them with a clear conscience. If we do this, we will be “*happy*” (*makarios*, the same word translated *blessed* in the Sermon on the Mount, Mt. 5:3, 4, 5, etc.).

It should be remembered that if we are personally opposed to something (verse 23), and we engage in the activity anyway, we are “*condemned*.” We cannot violate our conscience and stay in good standing with God. God wants His people to have a clear conscience. Even the Hebrew writer (10:22) commented upon the importance of having a clean conscience. “*Doubteth*” (*diakrino*) is also used in Jas. 1:6 (God wants His people to have conviction, no doubts or wavering). Paul used this same term in Rom. 4:20 to describe Abraham's faith. Here *doubting* is a present tense verb.

The last statement in verse 23 means, “When in doubt, don't.” If we are not confident and sure about engaging in a certain act, we need to avoid it. In matters not related to church doctrine, Christian living, or salvation, our conscience must be our guide. This guide will only work if we train it; this training comes by reading and knowing God's word.

The final thought from these verses is found at the start of verse 22. Our personal convictions on matters of opinion must be between God and us. This fact is one more reminder that we have no right to bind our opinions upon others. This also suggests that if we approve of some things that are not endorsed by others (i.e. weak brethren who would be offended by certain things), either we do these things in private or we avoid them. According to Paul, even the strong Christian has the right to be “*happy...in what he approveth*” (verse 22). The KJV says “*alloweth*.”