



World Christian Fellowship

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Romans 122

Unity of Weak & Strong

Romans 14:1-12

Romans 14:1-12, *Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. ²For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. ³Let 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. ⁴Who 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. ⁵One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶He 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. ⁷For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. ⁸For 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. ⁹For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰But 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. ¹¹ For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God." ¹² So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. ¹³ 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.

The Unity of Strong and Weak Believers.

All of us who are part of the church of Christ understand the power of sin to devastate a church congregation. We know that sin in a church can cripple its function.

It can destroy its harmony.

It can sap its strength.

It can negate entirely its testimony.

Throughout the New Testament there is a call for the purity of the church.

Jesus introduced this really in **Matthew chapter 18** when He said if a brother is in a sin, you go to him. If he doesn't hear you, take witnesses. If he doesn't hear them, you tell the whole church.

To instruct us that we need to deal with sin in the church because sin has such a debilitating and crippling effect.

Apostle Paul reminds the church at Corinth.

1 Corinthians 5:6-7, *Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ⁷ Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.*

2 Corinthians 7:1, *Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

We are also instructed that if we find anyone in the church who's in sin, we are not to fellowship with him.

Paul told the **Philippians and the Thessalonians**.

We are not to have any time to eat a meal with him, to accept him and make him feel welcome in the assembly because the potential for destruction is so great.

We have encouraged to come frequently to the Lord's Table and every time we are to Examine ourselves.

Take stock of our own lives and see if there is sin. Because sin is the single great danger to the church which we are most aware of.

The Scripture is filled with injunctions and exhortations regarding that.

Romans have many injunctions for the purity of the church.

After 11 chapters of doctrine, the meaning of justification by grace through faith. After he has laid out the significance of salvation, then comes the exhortations and commands beginning in chapter 12.

Present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God which is an act of spiritual worship and not be conformed to the world.

From Romans chapter 12 to a whole series of commands and exhortations about the purity of the church.

Romans 12:1-2, relationship to God is dealt.

Romans 12:3-8, relationship to members of the body.

Romans 12:9-21, relationship to everybody.

V21, sums up as, *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

All of those are exhortations for the purity of the church as each individual believer is purified.

Romans 13:1-7, Church relationship to Government.

Romans 13:8-14, relationship to neighbours.

Paul closes out **Romans chapter 13** by telling us how urgent it is to live a pure life.

V 14, sums it up, "*But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts.*"

Paul deals with the matter of sin among believers.

The church must be pure.

- That's why we have church discipline.
- That's why we call for confession of sin.
- That's why we read the Word of God that we may be exposed.
- That's why we pray that the Spirit of God may reveal to us anything in our life that isn't right.
- That's why we go to one another to give rebuke or a reproof or instruction or guidance or wisdom, to assist in the spiritual growth and purity of the church.

Sin is not the only problem the church faces.

There is another category of problems that is not strictly speaking a sin problem with which the church must deal. Which also has potential to create a sinful situation which will cripple the life of the church.

It is the relationship between strong and weak Christians within the church.

Now in any church all of us face the inevitable potentiality of severe problems in the church because of the potential conflict between strong and weak believers.

Paul deals with that in **Romans chapters 14 and 15**.

Romans 14:1- 15:13 deal with this issue of the strong and the weak Christians.

We see a tremendous amount of diversity in our churches.

People at all different levels of life chronologically, young people all the way to old people.

People at all different chronological spiritual ages.

There are people here who have been saved 50 years.

There are people here who have come to know Christ.

There are people who come from irreligious, atheistic, humanistic backgrounds.

There are people who come from Roman Catholic backgrounds.

There are people who used to be Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses etc.

There are people who have come here from very hard-line, legalistic, super hyper, and fundamentalist churches.

There are people who come here from very loose, free-wheeling surfer churches, and every conceivable thing.

Potential of all of that is to create a lot of problems.

We have every kind of person and personality.

We have Christians at every level of maturity.

We have believers who have one thing in common.

Though we are redeemed yet remain in this unredeemed flesh.

The potential of unredeemed flesh all coming from varying backgrounds bumping into each other could create some great problems.

Why don't the ladies cover their heads?

They are very concerned about that because they came from a background where the ladies cover their heads.

Why don't you have any candles?

Because it's hard for them to worship without candles because that's just been a part of the genre of their experience.

There are people who are very offended by certain haircuts. There are churches if your hair is not an inch above your ear, you are not spiritual.

There are people who have come are offended because you have Mustache. Because they have been raised that if you have moustache then you are sinful.

Some people have a problem with drinking.
Other people come and say a vile sin.

We have a tremendous spectrum of people with all kinds of orientations that can potentiate great discord in the church.

There are new Christians still holding onto old traditions, old lifestyle patterns. Jewish Christians who still hold to the tradition.

There are people who come from the Episcopalian background or Lutheran background where they were used to people with backward collars and standing up and sitting down 20 times during a service. They don't understand why we don't have that, and they sort of struggle with the casual perspectives and freedoms of others.

There are preferences in all kinds of things, preferences in dress, in music, in diet, entertainment, programming, all kinds of things.

It was true in the early church. It is even more true now than it was then because we are such a melting pot of diversity today.

We have non-moral preferences.
It isn't necessarily a sin issue.

But it can become a very serious issue in the church, and it needs to be confronted. We must understand what the Bible teaches about it so that we can get along well with each other.

Romans 14:1 to 15:13, Paul deals with this whole matter of unity among strong and weak believers.
It is essential of maintaining unity in the church.

Ephesians 4:3, *endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Colossians 3:14, *But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.*

It is loving compatibility of very diverse people.

John 13:34-35, *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*

John 17:21, *that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.*

It comes with grave difficulty because the church is made up of such diverse elements of people.

Paul spoke the same to the elders of the Ephesians church.

Acts 20:35, *I have shown you in every way, by labouring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'* ”

If there are the weak in the church, we can conclude that there are also the strong and everything in between.

Paul says we must be very honourable about supporting those that are yet weak.

Galatians 6:1, *Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*

1 Thessalonians 5:14, *Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.*

There are the people who want to push the limits all the time. These are the people who lack caution, and they want to run their freedoms in Christ right out the end.

They tend to be unruly and undisciplined. Warn them of the danger of living on the edge of their liberty.

Encourage the faint-hearted. Those are the people huddled in the middle scared to death of their liberty. They haven't got the courage to even venture out.

Support the weak and be patient with everybody.

We are going to have the unruly in the church and going to have the faint-hearted who don't take a step in any direction, they just hold on to what they have got.

Then we have the weak, who are trying to go from being faint-hearted to being strong, in fact maybe unruly.

In the process they are so weak they have got to be helped along.

So, the church has all of that to deal with.

1 John 2 it tells us there are spiritual infants, spiritual young men, and spiritual fathers, all on a continuum of spiritual growth.

To develop a loving compatibility of all these people must understand what Paul writes to us here in this very important.

The temptation in the church is this, the liberated brothers, and sisters out here who fully understand what it is to be free in Christ. They are not hung up on old tradition, old ritual, and old forms of religion. They understand fully they are free from sin, death, hell, and Satan. They understand the freedom which they have in Christ no longer involves religious formats, rituals, holy days, ceremonies, and candles. They are very free to make choices dependent on the Spirit of God's moving in their heart. Those we will call the strong.

Strong in faith in that they understand their freedom, they understand their liberty.

On the other hand, we have the weak in faith who are still so close to the pass that they can't quite let go. They can't quite move away from what it is that holds them down. They can't believe that they have the freedoms they really have.

They really do have some freedoms, but they can't believe it. They can't accept it. They can't handle it.

Because of preferences that have been brought to bear on their life in the past. They can't enjoy that freedom. They stay huddled in the middle in a sort of faint-hearted way, maybe making some crawling efforts toward that understanding of freedom.

The temptation:

The strong will be tempted to look down on the weak as legalistic, faithless, weak, pitiful people who just get in the way of these people trying to enjoy their liberty.

Some people come in and says, "You can't do that. That offends me, that makes me stumble, that's a sin."

Your reaction to him is to despise that person or look down on that person as one who doesn't understand his freedom, there is a tendency on the strong part to look down on the weak.

Conversely, the tendency on the part of the weak is to condemn the strong for what they read as an abuse of liberty. To condemn them for freedoms which they feel they shouldn't exercise.

- The weak wanting to condemn the strong.
- The strong wanting to despise the weak.

There lies the problem.

It does happen. There are people in the church who would run their freedoms out to the edge.

There are people in the church who want to hold them in the middle, tightly clenched in their little hands because they are bound to a tradition, and they are conformed to that.

The clash of those two people comes when one despises the other and the other condemns the other.

There are in these church believers who comprehend their freedom, who enjoy their freedom.

There are believers who think they abuse their freedom.

There are believers who are very weak and who don't understand their freedoms in Christ and are still holding on to residue of the past and living under self-imposed and unnecessary rules, rituals, and routines.

They are often looked down on by the rest. But the principles that Paul gives us here will teach us how we can have unity even with the strong and the weak.

It is essential that we understand this.

At the very outset that we do have freedom in Christ.

- We are free from sin in terms of its ultimate penalty.
- We are free from death in terms of its ultimate power.

- We are free from hell in terms of its ultimate punishment.
- We are free from Satan in terms of his ultimate persuasion.
- We are free in those areas, free to worship God, free to love God, free to be forgiven, free to go to heaven.

But there is another dimension in which we enjoy freedom, too.

We are free as new covenant Christians from all the Old Testament laws that were strictly external and ceremonial.

We are not free from the Ten Commandments, and we are not free from any moral laws given in the Old Testament, because God is the same God.

But we are free from external, ceremonial rules and rituals that were attached only to a period of time and a given people, the people Israel.

We have entered a liberty that is cut off from ceremony, ritual, and routine that was part of the old economy.

Many of us enjoy that immensely. Most people in this church would be liberated.

But there are a few other people in this church who are still somewhat bound to the Old Testament tradition in which they were raised.

If that can be an existing problem here, we can only imagine what kind of a problem that was in Rome in the time of Paul. They had Jews who were being saved right out of Judaism and finding it impossible to let go of deeply ingrained tradition.

Tradition, for example, along the lines of dietary laws. Tradition along the lines of, holy days, feast days, festivals, new moons, Sabbaths which all their life they had been prescribed to maintain.

Many had come out of Judaistic legalism, and they were still bound in their conscience to life-long, ritual ceremony and tradition.

Acts 21:20, *And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law;*

Their consciences put unnecessary bondage on their liberty.

There were others out of the Roman society who were saved out of paganism, idolatry, set free in Christ, but even their background limited them.

Even their background constrained them because of past pagan religious experience so that they couldn't enjoy some things they had every right to enjoy.

There they had this Jewish-Gentile factor.

Jews wanting to hold on to what they had all their life known.

Gentiles, many of them holding on and others of them wanting to avoid things that they had known in the past.

When they saw things in the church that were similar, they wanted to avoid those, too.

Then they had the sort of natural conflict between a liberated Gentile and a legalistic Jew.

This was the conflict potential.

Jews clinging to the Old Testament.

Some Jews who were just as free as they could be, and they were very offensive to the Jews still bound.

Gentiles just delivered out of paganism, just delivered out of debauched orgies where they had eaten food offered to idols, and other Gentiles free from any concern about that in the past and free to exercise all their liberties.

But some things they did like eating food that was once offered to idols just totally offended those new Gentile converts that had come out of paganism because they couldn't believe that you could eat food offered to idols which were so much a part of their debauched past.

So, as a result there was this conflict.

The legalistic believer sees liberty as sinful.

The liberated believer sees legalism as sinful.

Paul gives some principles.

Receive one another with understanding. (Romans 14:1-12)

Build up one another without offending, Romans 14:13-23.

Please one another as Christ did, Romans 15:1-7.

Rejoice with one another in God's plan, Romans 15:8-13.

1. Receive one another with understanding.

First one directed towards strong believer.

V 1, *Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.*

Background.

The Jews had been raised to do what was **kosher**.

Kosher a Hebrew word it means "fit" or "right."

Anything that is kosher to a Jew is right, it is fit, it is proper, it is acceptable.

There were two things that were very dominant in terms of the category of what was kosher.

- One was diet and
- Other was days.
 - Special diets and
 - Special days.

In **Leviticus chapter 11**, we will see all the dietary restrictions.
Deuteronomy chapter 14.

The life story of Daniel, who when taken captivity into Babylon was told he was supposed to eat the king's meat.
Daniel said, "I will not do that."

His conscience would not allow him to do that. He had three friends, Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael, whom the Babylonians named Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Those are their pagan names, their real names I gave you first. They along with Daniel said we will not compromise our Jewish convictions.

So, they were typical of the no-compromise Jew who will keep his dietary laws no matter what the price might be.

All those dietary laws and special days were ordained originally by God and so they had a real reason for affirming their validity. On the other hand, you had the Gentiles. They were used to pagan feasts and festivals.

What we celebrate today as Christmas is more akin to the feast of Saturnalia than it is to anything to have to do with the birth of Christ. It was a pagan festival and their festivals.

Saturnalia and many others, involved drunken, gluttonous orgies which left them vaccinated very often against certain things that as Christians they would be free to do.

But because of their experience in the past identifying those things with paganism, they wanted nothing to do with them.

Now we can see this illustrated in two passages. The first one deals with the Jewish problem.

Galatians.

Peter came to Antioch and Paul confronted him to the face because he was to be blamed.

- Peter was a significant person.
- Peter was a main character.

- Peter was uniquely the apostle of Christ in a way that even Paul had not enjoyed, that is to live during the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ and walk with Him.

Yet Peter did something that caused Paul to rebuke him to the face.

What did Peter do?

Galatians 2:12-16, *for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.¹³ And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.¹⁴ But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?¹⁵ We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,¹⁶ knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.*

- Peter was afraid of the Jews.
- Peter was afraid of what the Jews would think.

- Peter overtly and openly denied the liberty that was his in Christ.

The dietary laws had been set aside.

They set aside specifically for Peter in **Acts chapter 10** when the Lord gave him a vision of a sheet coming down out of heaven and all the animals were in the sheet, clean and unclean.

The Lord said in the vision to Peter.

Acts 10:13-16, *And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." ¹⁴ But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." ¹⁵ And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." ¹⁶ This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.*

Lord was saying all that dietary stuff is wiped away.

In the life of Peter, the Lord began to remove the significance of the Sabbath.

When Jesus came, He said, "I am the Lord of the Sabbath."

Jesus, as far as the Jews were concerned, overtly violated their Sabbath, breaking their traditions. Eventually rose from the dead not on a Sabbath but on the first day of the week and

established a whole new era in which the Sabbath has no longer any necessary place.

Peter knew that, because Peter was with Christ, and saw Him after the resurrection and knew when the church met, on the first day of the week.

When the Jews come to Antioch, he reverts, and he puts himself back under Mosaic law. Paul rebukes him for such a silly retreat from liberty in Christ because all it will do is confused everyone.

All the other Jews joined with him in like manner with him. Peter was such a leader that when he did that all the other Jews backed away from the Gentiles, too.

Paul could see a fracturing of the church.

Do you know who became a victim of this?

Barnabas was also carried away with this hypocrisy.

If you don't mind coming up here and living with the Gentiles, why are you now going to back into the Jewish camp and then make those Gentiles live like Jews?

Peter, you are wrong.

Paul withstood him to the face.

The situation existed in which that tension was there because the pressure in the early church among the Jews was to hang on to Judaism.

The council in Acts 15, there were some in that council who wanted to make sure that people held on to Judaism.

There were the Judaizers who said you can't be a Christian unless you keep the Mosaic law and get physically circumcised. There were Jews living in Rome at the time of Romans who lived on fruit all the time for fear of eating something unclean according to Josephus.

This can happen even among believers in Rome because they are still stuck on laws which have long ago been abolished.

Mark 7:15-19, *There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. ¹⁶ If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!" ¹⁷ When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable. ¹⁸ So He said to them, "Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?"*

The problem the Gentiles had.

1 Corinthians 8.

Insight into some of the Gentile tension in the early church and parallels many things today.

The problem in Corinth, a typical pagan and do their worship. Here is how you do it.

They go to a temple of a pagan deity, (they had many deities), and want to worship or go to the festival of the deity that is throwing the banquet and bring in a sacrifice.

- It could be vegetables.
- It could be fruit.
- It could be meat.
- It could be even a drink of some sort.

They bring their offering and put it on the altar.

Their invite copy read like this, "Antonious invites you to dine at the table of our lord Serapis." Serapis was a pagan deity.

You got invited to the banquet of Serapis. You go and get your little piece of meat. Those banquets were sort of like potluck, everybody brought something. You put it on the altar.

Part of it might have been consumed in a ceremony.

Part of it would be eaten and whatever was not eaten in that banquet that night would be taken right out the back of the temple and sold the next day in the market so that the priests could make money off it.

When you went through the marketplace, *the agora*, and were doing your shopping, you could theoretically be purchasing food which had been the night before offered to idols.

Now if you happen to be a pagan who was all your life long trapped in idolatrous worship and what came in your life was the gospel of Jesus Christ and you were totally transformed, redeemed, and a new creation. You would have an animosity and a hatred for all that past.

The thought that you were invited over to the home of some Christian brother who was a liberated brother, and he was offering you a wonderful meal but you in your mind thought that this might have been offered to the god Serapis. That could bother you greatly.

So, you might not be able to eat that meal and therefore you would be a great offense to that host. Maybe a Jewish host who wasn't bothered by idols, just as a Gentile could greatly offend a Jewish guest by offering him some pork or other unclean animal.

The problem in the Corinthian church is the same thing. They are struggling about what do you do with meat offered to idols.

Paul says let me give you some principles that will help.

Everybody has knowledge but love must rule.

Knowledge just puffs up, but love builds up.

1 Corinthians 8:1-3, *Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. ²And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. ³But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.*

Don't force your knowledge on a person, rather force your love on him. If it's going to offend him, don't give it to him.

Be sensitive.

Knowledge is fine but love should rule.

Idols are nothing anyway.

But not everybody can handle that.

Is there such a thing as a false god?

Are there any other deities floating around?

No.

There aren't any, so whatever is offered to a false god is offered to a nothing. There aren't any.

1 Corinthians 8:4-6, *Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. ⁵ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), ⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.*

What are you worried about?

It was offered to nobody.

So, you shouldn't be hung up on that because there are not any other Gods anyway. So, it's offered to a nothing.

1 Corinthians 8:7, *However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.*

Not every man that knowledge.

Not everybody can handle that.

For some with conscience of an idol to them.

To this hour they eat it and they are eating it as a thing offered to an idol and their conscience being weak.

Because that's the definition of the weak person.

The weak person is the person who has not yet come to believe his freedoms. That's the weak person.

He does not yet understand that he is free to eat that.

If he eats it without understanding it, he will defile his own conscience. Because his conscience is screaming don't eat that, that was offered to an idol, don't eat that.

If you go in there and force him to do that against his conscience. You will defile his conscience and his conscience will accuse him. Because your conscience, you must understand this, your conscience is totally controlled by your mind.

The conscience does not act independently of what you know. The conscience is simply set in motion.

The engine is your mind.

The conscience is just a flywheel, that's all.

It's just sent spinning by your mind.

When it's engaged, it moves you, but your conscience reacts to your thinking.

If you are in your mind convinced that this is to an idol offered and you go ahead and eat it anyway. Your conscience will react negatively because your conscience can only respond to what you know.

That's why he says not everybody has that knowledge. The first three verses, you might have that knowledge, but knowledge alone does puffs you up, and you be better off to act not out of knowledge but out of love.

Love must rule.

Idols are nothing, but not everybody can handle that.

Food is no issue with God anyhow.

Food commends us not to God.

1 Corinthians 8:8, *But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.*

We should say that to people we know who Seventh Day Adventists are because they believe that God wants them to be vegetarians.

God could care less what you eat in terms of any ceremonial effect or any religious impact. You have enough sense to know God doesn't want you to stuff food in you that's going to

ultimately shorten your life or your capability to function as a human being.

But God is not concerned with whether you eat this or that in terms of food.

It doesn't matter where it came from or who it was offered to or what it was intended for. That isn't an issue with God.

There are many people who think that vegetarianism is spiritual and that meat eaters are not. That's not so.

For neither if we eat are we any better, and neither if we don't eat are we the worst. It doesn't matter.

The meat offered to idols. It doesn't matter if you eat it. It won't make you any better and it won't make you any worse.

If it offends someone, don't do it.

1 Corinthians 8:9, *But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.*

There were some in Corinth believers who had been saved some years before, they had sort of lost their connection with paganism. They were just going down the marketplace and if

the meat was cheaper at the temple butcher shop, they got it there. It didn't bother them at all.

They had invited some new converts over, and they would be saying, "Could I ask, where did you get this meat?" "Last night this was offered to Zeus." Can't handle that.

How can you eat that?

You are entering into the worship of a false god because that was given for that purpose.

The liberated guy says you are out of your mind, don't you understand your freedom, eat up. In fact, if you don't want it, I will eat it.

1 Corinthians 8:10-11, *For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? ¹¹ And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?*

Would you really want to devastate someone for whom Christ died?

No, you wouldn't.

So, don't sin against the brethren and wound their weak conscience because when you do that you sin against Christ.

1 Corinthians 8:12, *But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.*

Paul says that meat or food's going to make my brother offend. I am not going to eat any as long as the world exists because the one thing, I don't want to do is offend my brother.

From the Galatian passage that there were some Jews who were very hung up on maintaining Jewish tradition, dietary laws, and Sabbath laws.

There were some Gentiles who were very hung up on not maintaining their past tradition.

The potential in the church was for all kinds of conflict because of these particulars. These were the issues facing the early church.

They were very close to issues facing the church today as we shall see.

There was an immature, weak faith.

- The weak person is always the person who does not understand his freedom.
- He doesn't believe he is as free as he is.
- He thinks he is bound to certain preferential, external traditions when he is not.

The strong believer is the one who knows he is not bound to those things.

Please do remember that we are not talking about moral issues or sin issues.

Obviously Christian freedom is not the freedom to do wrong. It is freedom from externals, traditions, preferences, rituals, ceremonies.

This was the conflict.

V 1, *Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.*

Now we know who the weak one is!

The present participle is used here, the one who is in the present tense being weak.

Not necessarily a permanent state but this is where he is at the time.

The article "the" is present.

- He is weak in the faith.
- He is not weak in saving faith.
- He has come to saving faith.
- But he is weak in the faith that it takes to believe he is free to enjoy any kind of food.

- He is free to enjoy any kind of day.
- He is free to cut off the connection from the past, traditional Judaism.
- He is free to eat the meat that was once offered to an idol.
- He is free to enjoy all of those things, but he is too weak to believe that.

Paul says to the strong, receive him.

Literally means take to oneself with a preposition at the front, receive strongly.

It is a command.

Take him fully into your fellowship.

Take him fully into your love, fully into your companionship.

Embrace him in your arms in your love and your fellowship.

Paul is very gentle here and it is very different than the way he rebukes in Galatians and Colossians.

Galatians 1:8, *But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.*

Paul says I pronounce a curse on anybody who preaches any other gospel.

Now you have a distortion of salvation here.

You have a distortion of the message of redemption here.

Galatians 4:8-9, *But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods.⁹ But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?*

What was happening in Galatia?

Paul came preached the gospel.

Judaizers came through and said that gospel can't save you.

You can't be saved by grace.

You must be circumcised.

You must keep the Mosaic law.

Galatians 4:10-11, *You observe days and months and seasons and years.¹¹ I am afraid for you, lest I have laboured for you in vain.*

Galatians 5:1-2, *Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.² Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.*

Why Paul is so strong and so bold and so straightforward?

The difference.

In Galatia they were teaching that the law and the Mosaic ceremony with all its ceremonies and rituals was necessary for salvation.

Paul blasts that as another gospel.

In the Roman church, they weren't advocating those things as a part of salvation. They had come to believe in salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

They were just holding on to those things as signs of past tradition and habits. That was the difference.

That's why Paul could speak gently to the Roman church because they weren't affirming these things as elements of salvation, but the Galatians were.

Colossians 2:16-18, *So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, ¹⁷ which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. ¹⁸ Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,*

Don't let anybody lay that trip on you.

Why?

They are only a shadow of things to come but the body is Christ. You must avoid those things.

Why?

People were saying to be a true Christian you must have the food, the drink, the feast, the new moon, and the Sabbath all in line with the Mosaic economy.

Again, they were advocating that as an element of salvation. Paul defiantly rejects that.

Paul is dealing with Judaizers who are advocating another gospel, an intolerable legalism that was unacceptable and would damn men to hell.

But in the Roman situation, they were just signs of past religion.

- They weren't being pushed as necessary to salvation.
- They were just being held on to as necessary parts of spiritual growth.

Big difference.

Paul says to them be easy on them. Open your arms to them and bring them along.

The climate was very different in Rome from Galatia and Colossae.

- Don't do it for the purpose of passing judgment on their opinions.
- Don't do it just to get in an argument with them.

Receive them. Not to harass them, not to wrangle with them, not to argue, not to force your opinion on them, not at all, but to love them.