

THE STRONG BELIEVER AND THE WEAK BELIEVER: QUESTIONABLE FUNCTIONS AND BEHAVIOUR – CHRISTIAN LIBERTY ROMANS 14:01–23

Introduction

The issue of Christian liberty vs. license is always confronting the believer and the church who wish to please their Lord. What can a believer *do and not do* socially and personally? Can he...

- drink socially?
- attend films, and if so, are any unacceptable?
- watch television, and if so, are all programs acceptable?
- gamble, and what is considered gambling?
- dance, and is there any form of dance unacceptable?
- listen to music, and if so, what music is acceptable?
- attend or participate in athletic events on Sunday?

There are a host of social and recreational functions that are sometimes questioned by the believer who is truly seeking to please his Lord in *all that he does*. This passage deals with the principles which are to guide the believer as he faces these issues.

- I. Accept the weak brother (vv. 1-2).
 - II. Do not look down on or judge (criticize) others (vv. 3-4).
 - III. Be fully convinced of right and wrong behaviour (vv. 5-6).
 - IV. Watch out – watch what you do (vv. 7-9).
 - V. Leave the judgment up to God (vv. 10-12).
 - VI. Judge only one thing: stumbling blocks (vv. 13-15).
 - VII. Give no occasion for criticism (vv. 16-8).
 - VIII. Pursue things that bring peace and edification (v. 19).
 - IX. Do not destroy or ruin the work of God in another person's life: it is sin to do so (v. 20).
 - X. Do nothing to cause a brother to fall (v. 21).
 - XI. Watch and do not condemn yourself (vv. 22-23).
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I. *Romans 14:01–02 Accepting a Weak Brother*

Accept or receive the weak brother. The word “accept” (*proslambano*) means to welcome, to accept, to take to oneself. However, there is a significant fact about the word that must be noted. It means...

- to accept a weak person just as *God graciously receives men*
- to take a weak person to oneself just as *God graciously takes men to Himself*

The believer is to “accept” the weak brother just as God accepts him. The exhortation is both forceful and tender, demanding and hopeful. It is forceful and demanding in that it gives the believer the opportunity to act as God acts, and it gives the weak believer great hope in being cared for and looked after. Now, note two instructions about accepting the weak brother.

1. The weak brother is to be received without criticism and argument over his weaknesses. There is to be no passing judgment in accepting him. He is to be accepted with open arms just as God receives men.

Rom 15:1 *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.*

1 Cor 9:22 *To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.*

2. There are differences between Christians as to how they should live — about what is and is not allowed by God. For example, one Christian believes he can eat anything, whereas another Christian believes he must be a vegetarian. The Roman church was apparently dealing with this very problem. The Jews from their earliest history had a long list of laws governing food (see Lev. 11:1f), so there was probably some division within the church between the Jewish and Gentile converts as to just how closely these laws should be observed, if indeed at all. The point, however, is not limited to rules governing food. The Scripture is applicable to all the rules, scruples, taboos and restrictions of behaviour which some believers and churches say should regulate our lives. However, having said this, it is absolutely critical to note two facts.
 - a. This passage is *not dealing with the clear commandments of God*; it is dealing with those behaviours about which there are *clear differences of opinions* among men. *There is no dispute about the commandments of God in Scripture: they are to be obeyed.* In fact, Christian maturity is measured by our obedience to Christ (see note, Mt. 5:17-18).

John 14:21 *“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”*

John 15:10, 14 *“If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. You are my friends if you do what I command.”*

John 14:21 “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

1 Sam 15:22 But Samuel replied: “Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

- b. The person who is a vegetarian, that is, who governs his life by *strict rules*, is called the *weak* brother. Why would keeping strict rules cause a believer to be called a *weak* Christian? (see *Christian Liberty*, Rom. 14:2).

ROMANS 14: 02 CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. Romans 14: 02

Both the weak Christian believer and the strong Christian believer thought the other was weak. This is important to see, for both are subject to criticizing and condemning the other (v. 3f).

Paul faced the issue of Christian liberty often; therefore, he is an excellent example to consider in discussing this issue. Paul was willing to become all things to all men when principle was *not at stake*, but when principle *was at stake*, he would concede nothing.

For example, Paul had Timothy circumcised, conforming to the law of Moses; however, here in Romans he exhorts believers to ignore outward observances and to resist them to the utmost. In another instance, he *would not allow* Titus to be circumcised — under any circumstance (Gal. 2:3-5); and he warned the Galatians that if they were circumcised, Christ would profit them nothing. They would be renouncing their salvation. What is the difference?

When rules and observance are made the *means of salvation*, they become a fatal heresy; and in the case of Titus and the Galatians, this is what was happening. Rules and observances are contrary to God’s method of saving men. There is all the difference in the world between a man who approaches God *by means of rules* and the man who approaches God *by means of Christ*. The first man believes he is saved by his works, that is, by the morality of keeping rules; whereas the second man believes he is saved by Christ and Christ alone.

The problem of the weak brother is that he is just a little bit mixed up as to how day to day cleanliness comes. He feels a tinge of conscience to observe some rule in order to keep his life clean. He feels that he keeps the favour of God by doing *extra* works. He just has not matured to the point of understanding that even his day-to-day cleanliness comes from the *righteousness of Christ*.

There are essentially two reasons why the strict or judgmental man is weak in the faith.

1. He still believes in the necessity of works. Down deep within his heart he still believes that he can gain *some favour* from God by doing certain things and abstaining from others — things that are not taught in the Bible, that are reasoned out by himself and others as commendable and beneficial. To some degree he is still trying to gain and to maintain a right relationship with God by his own works. He has not fully accepted the way of God's grace and love. He has not yet understood that he is accepted *in* the righteousness of Christ and in His righteousness alone. He has not yet understood — not fully — that he is short, and always will be short, of God's glory, unable to do any work or act perfectly. He has not grasped that he must trust the love of God to count him righteous in Christ *every day*. He is not completely liberated from a belief in works and self-righteousness.
2. He does not know the meaning of Christian liberty. He sees Christianity as a thing of rules and regulations, and he governs his life by these rules and observances. In many cases even the thought of Christian liberty *frightens* him.

Now, having said this, it is of *utmost importance* that a believer keep in mind his duty as a Christian (see Rom. 6:1-2; 6:14-15). There are *commands and prohibitions* given in the Bible about which there are no questions. A believer must unquestionably obey them (see Rom. 14:13-15; 15:1-3; see Exo. 20:1f; Rom. 1:29f; Gal. 5:19f; Eph. 4:17f). □

II. *Romans 14:03–04 Judging or Criticizing Others*

Do not look down on or criticize or judge others. As the strong believer and the weak believer associate together, both are subject to serious sin.

=> The believer who understands his liberty in Christ is subject to *look down on* the weaker brother. The words looking down on, condemn, despise (*exoutheneito*) mean to hold in contempt, to treat as meaningless and utterly wrong.

=> The weak believer, the believer who feels he must observe *extra* rules, is subject to judging (*krineto*), criticizing or censoring others.

Three reasons are given for not looking down on, despising and judging one another, three reasons that stand as a warning to believers.

1. God Himself has accepted the strong believer. The believer who walks in the liberty of Christ and does not live a strict life has been accepted by God, no matter what the more legalistic believer may think. There may be some man-made religious rules which he does not observe, but he has trusted Christ, and he obeys the Word of God. Therefore, he is not to be criticized and judged, but he is to be accepted into the fellowship of the more legalistic believer.

2. No one has the *right* to judge the Lord's servant. Note: both believers belong to the Lord; both are the servants of the Lord. Therefore, the Lord alone has the right to judge them. Believers do not have the *right to play God* and to judge each other. They have no right to condemn and pass judgment upon each other's behaviour and works, for they do not belong to each other. They each belong to Christ; therefore, He alone determines whether or not they stand or fall and are accepted or rejected.
3. God *will hold* the believer up. There is no question about the matter: the believer will be held up, for God is able to make him stand.

Phil 1:6 Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

2 Tim 1:12 That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

2 Tim 4:18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Pet 1:5 [You] who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Gen 28:15 I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

Psa 37:28 For the LORD loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones. They will be protected forever, but the offspring of the wicked will be cut off.

Prov 2:8 For he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.

III. *Romans 14:05–06 Believer's Behaviour*

Be fully convinced of right and wrong behaviour. The Jews had made a maze of rules governing the Sabbath and special holy days.

Gal 4:9-10 But now that you know God — or rather are known by God — how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!

Col 2:16-17 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

Again, this issue was apparently a hotly debated issue between the Jewish and Gentile believers in the Roman church. But again, the issue is much broader than the mere observances of *holy days*; it involves all the man-made restrictions laid upon men

by legalistic believers and churches. In saying this, however, it bears repeating: Scripture is not talking about the commandments found throughout the Bible. The commandments and instructions of Scripture are to be kept. The present passage is dealing with the legalistic tendencies of men, the rules and regulations which some men put forth as commendable and beneficial to practice.

Another fact needs to be mentioned as well. Paul is not suggesting that the Lord's Day is not important. He is not suggesting that it is all right to ignore, neglect or abuse the Lord's Day. Far from it. What he is attacking is an attitude that substitutes a Christian day for Christianity. The Lord's Day is very important to God, for it is the day set aside for the worship of His Son and for the rest and relaxation of His followers. However, the believer is not to worship the day, but worship the Lord of all days.

The point is this. Whatever the believer does, he must be fully convinced that it is right and not wrong. Note two points.

1. The believer is to be fully convinced in his own mind when dealing with questionable matters. The believer is to make the decision for himself; no one else is to decide for him. But note:
 - => He must make sure the matter *is questionable*, that it is not covered by some command in the Scripture.
 - => He must be honest and intelligent in deciding if the behaviour is right.
 - => He must not violate his conscience *at all*, not in the least.
 - => He must be absolutely sure to do no wrong.
2. The believer is to live as he sees and understands God's will. The point is very simply stated: one man dedicates every day to the Lord and sees every day as the Lord's; the other man dedicates every day to the Lord, but he believes Sunday and holy days are more special and meaningful and should be especially set aside for God. Note that the same attitudes prevail toward food: one man *gives thanks* to God and eats everything; another man *gives thanks* and eats only vegetation. The point to note is that...
 - both men dedicate and worship the Lord every day. They differ only in that one man sets aside some days for an extended celebration to God.
 - both men thank God for their food. They differ only in what they are eating.

Now note the crucial factor: the hearts of both men are focused upon God. Both men are dedicating their lives to worship and serve God and both are thanking God for what they have. Their hearts are right with God. The differences between them are external and concern material things: days and food. Therefore, both are acceptable to God. Both are fully convinced that what they are doing is right before God.

IV. *Romans 14:07–09 Watch What You Do*

Watch out — watch what you do. There are two *supreme reasons* why the believer must watch what he does.

1. The believer belongs to Christ in both life and death.

=> He does not live to himself alone: he does not do as he wills, follow his own desires, do his own thing, give in to his urges and passions.

=> He does not die to himself alone: take his death into his own hands or expect to handle death by himself.

The believer does not live for himself; he lives for Christ. He has committed both his life and his death into the hands of Christ, surrendering all he is to Christ. While he lives he is the Lord's, and when he dies he is the Lord's. The Lord's dominion does not extend only to this life, but in the other life as well. No matter where the believer is or what he is doing, he is the Lord's. The Lord is his Lord, for the believer has placed his life and death under the care and keeping of the Lord. The Lord is the Master and God of his life; therefore, the believer watches closely what he does: he makes sure that what he does pleases his Lord, *for the welfare of his life and death is under the Lord's care.*

Luke 20:38 “*He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.*”

Rom 14:8 *If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.*

2. The believer has been purchased by the Lord's death and resurrection. Christ died, bearing the sin of the believer upon Himself, so that the believer could be freed from the coming judgment upon sin. The believer has faith in the death of Christ. He believes that...

- when Christ died, he *symbolically died* with Christ.
- when Christ hung upon the cross, he *symbolically hung* upon the cross with Christ. How? By faith. God loves man so much that when a man truly believes in the death of Christ for his sins, God will take that man's *faith* and count it as the death of Christ, as the believer having died with Christ. It is the same with the resurrection of Christ. When a man truly believes in Christ, God counts the man's belief as the resurrection of Christ. The man is identified with Christ in the resurrection of Christ, and he is given a new life that is both abundant and eternal.

The point is this: it was for this purpose that Christ died and arose — that He might be the Lord both of the living and the dead. He is the Lord of all believers whether they are living on this earth or deceased and passed on into heaven. The true believer has been purchased by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The believer does not belong to himself: he cannot act selfishly and sinfully in making decisions about behaviour. He must obey and please the Lord, for the Lord has purchased the right to the believer's life and death.

Rom 6:10-11 *The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

2 Cor 5:14-15 *For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

Gal 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

V. **Romans 14:10–12** *Leave Judgment to God*

Leave the judgment up to God.

=> Why do you judge and criticize your brother?

=> Why do you despise and look down upon your brother?

The questions are forceful and disturbing because so many believers stand guilty before God.

1. Note the word “brother.” The person being criticized and judged is a brother, and what he is doing is coming from a sincere conviction that it is either God’s will or acceptable to God (vv. 5-6). Why then do you set yourself up as God and criticize and judge him? Watch out! For “we will all stand before God’s judgment seat” (v. 10). Everyone of us will be judged *by Christ, not by each other.*
2. Every knee will bow *to Christ*, not to each other. Every tongue will confess *to God*, not to each other. None of us are God; therefore, we absolutely have no right to be judging and criticizing each other. God alone is the judge of men.

Rom 14:11 *It is written: ‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.’*

Phil 2:9-11 *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Rev 15:4 *“Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”*

Isa 45:22-23 *“Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.*

3. Everyone will give an account of himself to God. We are not going to be called to give an account of others before God. We are going to give an account of ourselves. Each one shall be held accountable *for himself only*. God is not going to be asking us what we think or know about Stephen or Ruth. Each one will stand alone before God and give an account for his own behaviour only.

Mat 25:32 *“All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”*

John 5:22 *“Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son.”*

Acts 10:42 *He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.*

Acts 17:31 *“For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”*

Rom 2:16 *This will take place on the day when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.*

Rom 14:10 *You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat.*

1 Cor 4:5 *Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.*

2 Tim 4:1 *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge:*

VI. Romans 14: 13–15 Check Being a Stumbling Block

Judge but one thing — if you are a stumbling block to a brother. The word “stumbling block” (proskamma) means an obstacle placed in the way of someone. The word “obstacle” (skandalon) means to trap, to snare, to do something that causes a person to stumble and fall. It has reference in particular to leading or causing someone to sin. The exhortation is strong: believers are not to be criticizing and judging each other: they are to be judging themselves. Every single believer is to be constantly looking at his own life making sure...

- that he is not putting a stumbling block in his brother’s path to God, not even a single obstacle or hindrance of any kind.
- that he is not doing a single thing that will cause his brother to stumble or fall into sin.

If a believer is constantly looking at his own life and guarding against becoming a stumbling block, he does not have time to judge and talk about his brother. There are

three very practical behaviours that will keep us from putting stumbling blocks in our brother's walk toward God.

1. First, we must watch for the things which our brothers think are unclean. And, very simply, if some behaviour or activity is thought to be unclean, we are not to do it. Scripture gives us a great principle in these three verses, a principle that could revolutionize the behaviour of believers and much of society if we would just do what God says.

Note the words, “no food is unclean in itself.” The immediate situation of the early church was dealing with eating certain foods and keeping special holy days. However, the fact is applicable to the questionable functions faced by every generation of believers. In its pure and natural form, all of God's creation is acceptable to God. It is what man does with things that make them impure.

- => The grape is pure, but man takes it and makes an intoxicating drink out of it that damages the human body and leads to immoral behaviour.
- => Fellowship is pure; but man takes it and turns it into a loose, partying atmosphere that leads to exposure of the human body, suggestive thoughts and conversation, and immoral behaviour.
- => Vegetation and forest plants are pure, but man takes them and makes all kinds of harmful and intoxicating drugs, drinks and foods that harm the human body and lead to immoral and unjust behaviour.

The point is this: because of what man does with the things and activities of the earth, believers must watch the things which men make unclean and the things which other believers think are unclean. We must not do anything that would cause a brother to stumble.

Rom 14:13 *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.*

Rom 14:15 *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.*

1 Cor 8:9 *Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.*

Gal 5:9 *“A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.”*

1 John 2:10 *Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble.*

2. Second, we must walk in love toward our brother. Note:

- => We are to do nothing that would distress a brother. Imagine! We are not to cause “distress” for him — not to cause any kind of *misery or disturbance* whatsoever for him.

(What an impact this would make upon churches and the world if we would live out this commandment!)

=> We are to do nothing that would destroy a brother. This is a forceful command: “Do not destroy him [me apollue].” The words mean to hurt and wound to the point of ruining. Such behaviour is absolutely forbidden of the Christian believer. We are to do absolutely nothing that would destroy or ruin our brother.

Thought 1. Imagine the judgment coming upon some because of their judging and criticizing, grumbling and divisiveness, habits and behaviour, drinking and partying. Just look at the very nature of some who are constantly causing problems and being a stumbling block for both young and old alike.

1 Cor 8:13 Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

1 Cor 10:24 Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

Rom 13:10 Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.

Rom 15:1-2 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up.

Gal 5:14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbour as yourself.”

James 2:8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbour as yourself,” you are doing right.

3. Third, we must keep in mind that Christ died for our brother. This is the clear reason we must not distress, much less destroy, our brother: Christ died for him. The argument is forceful: if Christ loved him enough to die for him, then we must love him enough to give up a few desires and activities.

1 Cor 8:11 So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.

2 Cor 5:15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Col 1:21-22 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

VII. *Romans 14:16–18 Christian Liberty vs. License*

Give no occasion for criticism. Christian liberty can be abused. A believer may be free to eat and drink some things and be free to go and participate in certain activities, but he *should not* do either. Why? Because his behaviour would be considered evil. Two facts are to be kept in mind by believers when they are considering questionable things.

1. The Kingdom of God is the believer's concern, not pleasure. Note: the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking; that is, it is not concerned with external matters but with the heart. It is not a sin to abstain from food and drink and questionable activities; therefore, the believer must readily stay away from anything that will distress or cause others to stumble. The Kingdom of God is...
 - righteousness: being and doing what is right; establishing and maintaining the highest possible good with God and man.
 - peace: being in a right relationship with both God and man and maintaining that relationship; working for the highest possible good between God and man.
 - joy: experiencing the fulfilment and happiness of a right relationship with God and man; bearing the fruit of being right with God and man.

The point is this: the believer is to be concerned with people and their relationships with God and with himself, not with the right to eat, drink and socialize. His primary purpose in life is to reach and build men up, not to distress and cause them to stumble.

2. The believer who puts the spiritual welfare of people before his own desires pleases both God and men. Note a crucial point: this is the person who is *acceptable* to Christ, the person who is a *genuine believer*. A man who professes to know God makes a questionable profession...
 - if he does not love God enough to do what He says.
 - if he does not love his brother and fellow man enough to keep from grieving and causing him to stumble.

Mat 7:21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

Mark 7:6 He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites: as it is written: ‘These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.’”

John 14:21 “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

Titus 1:16 They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

Note another fact: the believer who seeks the welfare of his brothers will be acceptable to men.

2 Cor 10:18 For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

1 Tim 4:12 Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.

Prov 22:1 A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.

Eccl 7:1 A good name is better than fine perfume.

VIII. Romans 14:19 Purpose of Believers

Pursue things that bring peace and edification. This is the very purpose for believers being on earth: to bring peace to men and to build them up. Men must secure peace with God and with each other and they must be built up in Christ. Believers have both the message of peace and of growth; therefore, they must *follow only* those things which will make peace and edify men.

Rom 12:18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Heb 12:14 Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

Rom 15:2 Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up.

1 Cor 8:1 Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

1 Cor 14:26 All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.

2 Cor 12:19 Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening.

Eph 4:29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

IX. Romans 14:20 Ruining the Work of God in a Believer

Do not destroy or ruin the work of God in another person's life — it is sin to do so. A person, child or adult, is far more important than having the right to eat and drink certain things and to attend and participate in certain social and recreational activities.

Mat 18:6 "But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."

1 Cor 8:13 Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

Gal 5:13 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

Phil 2:4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

1 Pet 2:16 Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.

X. Romans 14:21 Causing a Brother to Fall

Do nothing to cause a brother to fall. Note how clearly Scripture speaks: food, wine — nothing — is worth causing a brother, child or adult, to fall. What is right for one may be the downfall of another, for men do influence children and other adults; the fact is not debatable. The weak person, whether child or adult, may do something...

- because everyone else is doing it.
- because he does not wish to go against the crowd.
- because he simply does not wish to be different.
- because he does not wish to be criticized or ridiculed or unpopular.
- because he is weaker in stamina.
- because he looks up to and idolizes his friends (parents).

Acts 20:35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Rom 14:1 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

Rom 15:1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

1 Cor 8:9 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

1 Cor 8:11 So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.

1 Cor 9:22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

1 Cor 10:24 Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

Phil 2:4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

XI. Romans 14:22–23 Self-Condensation

Watch — do not condemn yourself. There are three ways a believer can keep from condemning himself.

1. By keeping his faith. *Faith* means the belief that a person can do a certain thing and that it is acceptable to God. If a believer feels free to do a certain thing, then he can do

it, but it is to be done in *private before God*. It is not to be paraded publicly and done before men. It is to be eaten and drunk and done only in private. Doing the thing privately and *offering it up to God with thanksgiving* are the only ways it is acceptable. *If it cannot be offered up to God with thanksgiving, then it should not be done.*

2. By not going against his conscience. The believer must not condemn himself in what he does and allows in his life and home. (Remember: the children and the wife or husband are being influenced by what the believer does.)
3. By acting on faith, from a conviction that God approves the activity. If there is any question, note how clearly and forcibly Scripture speaks: “Everything that does not come from faith is sin.” If a believer cannot eat, drink, and do the thing *in faith* — knowing it is acceptable to God — then *doing it is sin*.

Heb 11:6 *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

James 4:17 *Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*

Prov 14:21 *He who despises his neighbour sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy.*

Prov 24:9 *The schemes of folly are sin.* ■