

Romans 14 - Disputable Matters

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Romans 14. I'm going to go ahead and read the chapter. And then we'll open up in prayer. Verse 1,

"As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. 2 One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. 3 Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. 4 Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

5 One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. 7 For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. 8 For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. 9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." (ESV)

Let's stop there. We'll get through, probably, the rest of the chapter too. But I want to just pray here and get into it.

Father God, open our hearts to the ministry of Your Word this morning. And teach us from the Scriptures we pray. And we ask this Lord, in Jesus precious name, amen.

You'll notice that Paul introduces a new term into this letter to the Romans. And the term is *"weak in faith."* Verse 1, if you look with me there again. He says, *"As for the one who is weak in faith,..."*

I don't know if anybody here wants to volunteer for that particular moniker or title. It doesn't sound like something necessarily to be proud of, I suppose. But what is it? What is he talking about? Who of us would admit and say, yeah, that's me. I'm weak in faith.

What exactly is someone who is weak in faith? Well, I decided to come up with a definition for you. I'll put it up on the screen so that we can look at it together.

A weak Christian is one who has convictions over matters of either misdirected or non-salvation-related importance.

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Does that make sense? A person who has strong convictions perhaps, about things that really aren't as important as they think. And they've been misdirected to think that they perhaps are more important than they really are. Or, as it says here, they're super big on issues that really play no difference in a person's salvation. But they're just really strong on it. Have you ever met the kind? Of course we all have.

One of the first things I was introduced to at the church where I really got serious about following the Lord... There was a group of people in the church who... Well, there were a couple of different groups in the church who had very different opinions as it related to the timing of the rapture of the church.

And you had some pre-tribulation rapture people who believe that the rapture of the church or the catching away of the church would take place before the Tribulation.

And then you had some post-tribulation rapture folk in the church. I suppose there might've been some mid-tribbers there. But they didn't seem to get much of a voice.

And now there's even another position that has become popularized in the last 20 years. And that's pre-wrath, which is between mid and post just to confuse things a little.

And these groups were really passionate about their position. And I remember one time the Pastor decided - and I was not the pastor of the church. Praise the Lord! But the Pastor decided he was going to get these people and take them out for breakfast and have a talk with them. It didn't turn out that well. I got invited along.

And these people were just like, this is it! And it was like everything to them. That was my first introduction to the passions that so many times... Or, I

shouldn't say so many times. But sometimes, go along with situations that are not salvation-related, shall we say.

But Paul refers here to a situation where someone who is *"weak in their faith"* is holding strong to certain things. And frankly, against the counsel of God's Word and so forth. I looked up the word, weak by the way. In the Greek, guess what it means? It means, weak. Yeah, it was a boring find. There wasn't really much there. It just, weak or frail or feeble. Yeah. There's no hidden meaning there. Just wanted you to know that.

But when it says weak, he's not obviously talking about any kind of physical condition. He's talking about a spiritual condition - spiritually weak. And it causes the weak person to fixate on topics that grow in importance in their heart and mind to the point where they almost eclipse everything else.

And in the following verses, Paul begins some of the... to talk about some of the topics that were going on in the early church. And we have more today because we've had 2,000 years to grow more of them. And we've done a good job of growing more of those things.

But he begins to say in verse 2, as he talks about some of these, he said, *"One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables."*

By the way, this is not saying if you're a vegetarian you have a weak faith. Just wanted you to know that. Because there are people who are vegetarian for dietary reasons - purely health related. There are some people who just don't digest meat well. And they maintain a vegetarian based diet for purposes of health and digestion. That's not what Paul is addressing here.

Paul is talking about people who have chosen not to eat meat, frankly, for religious reasons. And here's why it mattered. Back in those days, the pagans who were very prevalent in the society, were also people who had animal sacrifices that went on in the various towns. And the meat from those sacrifices didn't all get burned up on an altar. Some of it ended up in the meat market. In the public market where people would buy it.

And those who sold the meat were anxious to let you know that it was meat that had been sacrificed to an idol. Because they knew, and you as a consumer knew, that was the choice cut of meat. Who's going to give an animal to their god, that is not in good shape. Right? That's a dumb thing to do. People would offer the best of their flock to their gods - plural. And therefore, the cut of meat

would be...They could get more money for it if they said on there, this meat has been sacrificed to an idol. Or, came from an animal that had been sacrificed to an idol.

Well, here was the problem. Some of the early Christians believed that it was wrong to ingest meat that had been dedicated to a pagan god. And probably some of us could even understand their reticence to do that.

Imagine for just a moment, if maybe just a few miles out of town, some cult group set up a headquarters, a ranch, just outside of town. And word gets around that they're sacrificing animals as part of their worship practices.

Now that'd be strange enough. But now imagine some of the meat from those sacrifices was winding up on the meat shelf at Albertsons. You're cruising down the meat aisle, and Albertsons, by the way, wants you to know that that meat had been dedicated to a pagan idol or to their cultic god. They want you to know that because again, that shows that it's good meat. Well, we have other ways to show good meat today. But just go with it here with me for a moment.

Let me ask you a question. Would you grab that hunk of meat and throw it in your cart and think nothing of it? And then just carry on with the rest of your shopping? And who cares sort of an attitude. Frankly, some of you probably would. But others of you would consider it fundamentally, maybe even, morally wrong to buy a cut of meat that had been dedicated to a god who is not a god at all. And that sort of thing.

Now imagine if you were the person who would eat that meat, you invite over for dinner a family who would not eat that meat. You see the problem, don't you? This is what was going on in the early church. Somebody had somebody over for dinner, for barbecue or whatever, hey, we got steaks on the grill. And somebody... And they just happened to ask, is that meat sacrificed to an idol? Yeah, best of the meat here. We only get the best for our guests. Oh, well, I think that's wrong. That's wrong to eat that meat. It's been dedicated to a god who isn't a god... And so forth.

You can see this is precisely the challenge that the apostle Paul was addressing in the early church. How should they deal with that sort of thing? Here's the Apostle's counsel.

Look at verse 3 in your Bible. *"Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him."*

Is that a little unsatisfying to you, like it is to me? Did you notice Paul doesn't address at this point, who's right and who's wrong? That bothers us. We like to know if I'm right. And I really would like the apostle Paul to show that this other guy over here, this lame brain who doesn't eat the meat, he's wrong.

And I want him to know he's wrong. Because that's what we're all about as Christians. It's being right! Even if it's at the expense of other people. You're wrong! Right? What do we do? We go to the Bible to prove that we're right. We can take it like a stick and hit people with it. You're wrong! There, see. I used my little proof text stick to show you that you're wrong.

Notice that Paul doesn't address who's right or who's wrong. Generally, what he does address is stop judging each other. If your brother is free to eat that meat, stop criticizing him and judging him. If your brother refuses to eat that meat on whatever grounds it may be, stop picking him apart and treating him like a second class citizen in the kingdom of God, like you're the big, strong, mature believer. And that is the issue that Paul talks about here as right and wrong, rather than the issue of eating meat. And I find there's something that just tickles me about that.

And the reason that he says it's wrong to despise or judge your brother, is because of what we're talking about here people, is a disputable matter. It's a gray area. It's just one of those things. And he says, "Hey, this is not a matter involving salvation. You eat meat, doesn't mean you're not going to be saved. You don't eat meat, doesn't mean you're not saved. Just chill and don't get so whacked out about it. Don't get so wound up about it."

Paul goes on to ask a question in verse 4. Look there. He says, In fact, *"Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And (frankly,) he will be upheld, (He will stand) for the Lord is able to make him stand."*

In other words, if your brother eats meat... If your brother would go to Albertson's and eat that hunk of meat that says it was sacrificed by a cultic group that lived on a ranch outside of town, that brother is not your servant and you are not his lord.

And if there's a brother or sister who refused to eat that meat on moral, or religious grounds, or whatever the case might be, Paul is saying, "You are not that person's master. Jesus is their master. And it is before Him that they will stand or fall. Not before you. They're not going to stand before you and answer

for their lives. Right? And you are not going to stand before your brother and answer for your life.

We stand before the Lord. And He says whether they stand or fall. That's up to Jesus. And by the way, Jesus will make them stand. He will cause them to stand. He's able to cause them to stand.

And then the apostle brings up another area of common disagreement within the body of Christ. Look at verse 5. Boy, this one might make some people uncomfortable. *"One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike."*

Now, this issue, of course, was a leftover remnant from the Sabbath commandment that God gave to Israel. By the way, well, okay, let me go on. Some people still considered Sabbath keeping to be so vital as to be absolutely essential. And others held no special place to any particular day of the week. And you had these people in the church.

Do we have these people in the church today? Yeah, this one's still going on. We're probably not into the eating meat... Now some groups might for various reasons. But is the issue of Sabbath keeping still an issue within the body of Christ? Yes, it is. And whether it's Sabbath keeping as in biblical Sabbath keeping or...

I was raised with Sunday Sabbath, keeping, which is really tweaked. When I was being raised in the 60s and so forth, Sunday was considered to be the day of the Lord. Which, frankly, is a biblical term. It is referred to as, the day of the Lord. Sunday is in the New Testament. And the reason it's referred to that is because it was the day that Jesus was raised from the dead. He was raised on a Sunday and so Sunday became the day, that people gathered and worshiped and that sort of thing.

But what happened over time is, people began to refer to Sunday as the Sabbath. Why are you working on the... And it's not the Sabbath. It never was the Sabbath. The Sabbath was always Saturday. It has a way of morphing and changing depending on who's talking about it. And how they feel about it. And on and on the other thing goes.

But then you got some people who are like, hey, every day is the Lord's. Monday's the Lord's day. Tuesday's the Lord's day; Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. They're all the Lord's day. Right?

What's the answer? Look at the last part of verse 5 again, *"Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind."* Isn't this great? Instead of going...We want Paul to go, you nitwits. Right? What are you doing? But he doesn't say that. And it's so interesting that he doesn't take sides at this juncture. Because if he did take a side...

Now, and by the way, that doesn't mean Paul didn't have a side. Paul had a side. But he's not going to take sides. Because if he does, those people who are looking for him to take a side, wouldn't hear anything past that point. And they would miss the larger point, which is: Would you just try to love your brother despite the fact that you're on this side and he's on that side. Right? That's what Paul wants to get to. That is, people, the larger issue. That is the most important issue.

Can I tell you right now that it doesn't matter what day of the week you worship on. What is important is how you love your brother. That's more important than the day you worship. And that's what Paul is trying to say, *"Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind."*

He says in verse 6, *"The one who observes the day, observes it in the honor of the LORD. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God."* Prays before he eats, says, God, thank You for this food.

And *"while the one who abstains* says, I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to eat that. He *abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God."* Right? What Paul is saying is that both individuals are trying to honor the Lord by what they do. Yeah, they're doing different things, but they're both trying to honor the Lord.

And so he's saying, why should I get upset if my brother is just trying to honor God? If my brother believes that he's honoring God by holding to one particular day of the week as special over another, so leave it alone. Because I'm trying to honor God by considering all days the same. All days are the day of the Lord. See, I think that honors God. But my brother thinks it honors God to consider one day as special. If we're both trying to honor God, what's the problem here? You see? That's what Paul's saying.

Verse 7, he says, *"For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord."* Then whatever we do, whether we're living or whether we're dying, we belong to the Lord.

And he says, in fact, *“to this end (verse 9) Christ died (To what end?) that he might be Lord”* of all. He says, to this end or, *“For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.”*

You understand what he's saying here? It's about lordship. It's not about the day you worship on. It's not about whether you eat that hunk of meat, or this hunk of meat, or don't eat meat at all. And you eat only vegetables. That's not the point. The point is lordship. Okay? The point is lordship. Making Jesus Lord. And if you've made Jesus, Lord of your vegetarian diet, Praise God! Right? Leaves more meat for the rest of us. I shouldn't say that.

Okay, another question. Verse 10. *“Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother?”* See, that's both sides. That's the weak believer and the one who is free. He says, *For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹ (as) 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 will give an account of himself to God.” Not to one another. Right?

“¹³ Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or (a) hindrance in the way of (your) brother.”

Now stop there for just a moment, people, because this is a very challenging statement. Don't put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of your brother.

Now, I think we could all agree that's... We don't want to do that. If somebody asked you, do you want to put a stumbling block in front of your brother or sister in the Lord? None of us would say, yeah, I want to do that.

Here's the problem. We don't think we're doing it. He tells us not to do it by judging them or criticizing. But a Christian would say, well, I'm not putting a stumbling block in front of my brother. I'm just trying to help him see the error of his ways. That's what I'm trying to do. So that he'll... I want to set him on the right path.

He's on the wrong path. I'm going to get him on the right path. I'm not putting a stumbling... I'm trying to keep him from stumbling. Don't you see that? You get it. We justify our criticism and our judgment by saying, I'm trying to help my

brother. Because he's a weaker brother and I'm stronger. So, don't give me any of this stumbling block junk. I'm doing good here. Well, Paul would say, you are not your brother's Lord, Jesus is.

Do you know what's interesting? We have every expectation that Jesus is going to work in our hearts. But we have very little expectation He's going to work in anyone else's. And that's why I feel like I need to get personally involved in straightening you out. Because, the Holy Spirit speaks to me. But I have serious questions about whether He ever gets through that hard cranium of yours. Therefore, sit down. I'm going to straighten you out here and get this thing worked out.

I don't know if that sounds familiar or resonates in your heart at all. But the fact of the matter is, we take a place of lordship over other people. We take a place of lordship when we insist on correcting them at every turn. And speaking out about every little thing in their life that doesn't happen to match up to our life.

Now, stop there for a moment. Let me clarify something that is an important clarification. Obviously, Paul is speaking here about convictions that are held by an individual that are not considered critical for salvation. Because I know some of you at this point are sitting there going, Paul, when are you going to talk about the things that are specific or critical to salvation? And we can talk about that.

But just understand that Paul isn't addressing those now. If they were issues that were critical to salvation, Paul wouldn't be using them as examples of disputable matters.

How do we know that Sabbath keeping is not a New Testament commandment? Because Paul uses it as an example here in Romans 14, as a disputable matter. If it were absolutely essential for salvation, he wouldn't have cited it as a disputable issue.

What if? All right, let's do the what if thing. What if someone elevates a belief in something to the point of salvation? In other words, they are resting on their practice. We'll use an example here. What if somebody says, I worship on the biblical Sabbath, which is Saturday. And if you don't do that, you're not saved. You are not a true born again Christian.

Well, in that case, you have a situation where we're not talking about disputable matters any longer. Because what that person has done is they have now fundamentally redefined the Gospel. That's different. It's one thing to say, I

believe we should worship on Saturday. It's another thing altogether to say, if you don't worship on Saturday, you're not going to heaven. In that case, the apostle Paul would not have considered it a disputable matter. Right?

And we know that because in Acts chapter 15, we had an issue come up there... I won't take you there. But you guys remember in Acts 15, it had an issue come up where some believers came into the church at Antioch in Syria, where Paul and Barnabas were hanging. And they started telling people, unless you get circumcised— these Gentiles get circumcised— they can't be saved. (Acts 15:1) Well, that's no longer a disputable matter.

See, a lot of people today believe in circumcision, but not for salvation. They see it as a, in some cases I suppose, it's tradition. In some people, I think it's hygienics. But if a person said, if you don't do this, you're not saved. Or, you can't be saved... We've just passed beyond disputable matters. And now we're looking at a re-definition of the gospel. And that needs to be addressed.

And Paul and Barnabas addressed it in the early church. You'll remember it says, they vehemently opposed these brothers who said, that is the way you are saved is by being circumcised, and so forth. And they would have argued against anything that redefined the Gospel.

In 2,000 years, how many of these gray areas have become areas of redefining the Gospel? Has eating or not eating meat. I probably, I can't remember anybody telling me if you eat that meat you're not saved. I mean, maybe cult groups. But I can't ever remember a Christian coming to me and saying, I don't eat meat and that's why I'm saved. That one seems to have fallen off the books since the time of Paul.

But some of the other things, this Sabbath keeping issue that he addresses here as a disputable matter. Has that become an issue of salvation in the hearts and minds of some people? Oh yes! And that's why, you see, whenever I deal with Sabbath keeping in the Bible, I have to address it as more than just a disputable matter. I have to teach on what the Bible says about Sabbath keeping. And I have to show in that teaching that it is not a requirement for salvation, even though there are many Christians, who believe that you must keep the Sabbath to be saved. Or, at least something similar to that.

Hey, in Paul's day, it hadn't gotten to that point. But water baptism has been elevated in the last 2,000 years to a salvation issue. Have you been baptized in water? No. Then you're not saved. That's what some people would say. See we don't believe that. Because we don't see it in the Word of God. But boy, there's a

lot of people who will defend that to their dying breath. We have to be clear about that.

And then there are some people who believe that if you have not spoken in tongues... If you have not received the gift of speaking in another language— a language that you've never learned before— supernaturally, you have not received the Holy Spirit. And therefore you are not saved. Well, see that's not a disputable matter. That's not where two people can just agree to disagree. And just go on their merry way and say, hey, let's fellowship together. We're brothers. Well, we got this problem, see...

The issue comes up and they become arguing-points over a person's salvation. And when they do, as I said, they are far more than a disputable matter. And that's when we have to deal very clearly and very decisively, from the Word. We don't have the luxury of saying, just chill. It's a disputable matter.

There are some of those in the church today. There are disputable matters. Like the timing of the rapture, in relationship to the Tribulation. It's a disputable matter. And if you happen to believe that Jesus is coming at the end of the tribulation for His church, that doesn't affect your salvation. Any more than my believing that He's going to come before the tribulation period affects mine. It's a disputable issue.

Paul goes on here and he says in verse 14, *"I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it (is) unclean."* Okay, stop there. This can be confusing.

What is Paul saying here? Is he saying that right and wrong are merely a matter of personal opinion? Cause it sounds like that. It sounds like he's saying, if you think it's wrong, then it's wrong. But if I don't think it's wrong, then it's not wrong. And that sounds like relativism doesn't it? And that's a very popular belief today; that there are no moral absolutes. There are only what individual people believe.

And which is really interesting. If anybody ever says to you, there's no such thing as moral absolutes. You know what they just told you? They gave you a moral absolute. It's truly. Yeah. They say, "Is this thing is moral absolutes. You say, really? They go, absolutely. You get the circular weirdness. Their thing cancels it out.

But Paul is not using relativism here. He's saying that if someone believes that something is wrong for them to go and then do that thing, would be a violation

of their conscience. And to violate a person's conscience - that is wrong. Here's why. Guys, your conscience is the mechanism that God has factored into a human life, and that He uses to bring conviction of sin.

Now, that conscience is not infallible. It can be affected. It can be, as Paul says elsewhere, crusted over. But it's still the mechanism that God uses to bring conviction of sin. He'll tweak your conscience. And hopefully, as a believer, your conscience is becoming more sensitive to the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

But what happens if you start violating your conscience? You know what you're going to do? You're going to start saying no to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. And eventually, you're going to get yourself into serious trouble. Because you're shutting down the communication mechanism between you and the Holy Spirit, whereby He will convict you of sin.

And that's why Paul says, listen, if a brother thinks that it's wrong to do something, for him it's wrong because he would be violating his conscience. Don't do that! I would rather see a brother do something wrong for the sake of conscience, than to do right in my eyes and violate his conscience. And in so doing become hardened to the ability of the conscience to get through to him under the Holy Spirit's direction, you see.

And that's what Paul is saying here. If my brother is wrestling with his conscience on a matter, that I consider disputable, I need to say to him, hey, you better follow your conscience on this one. And that here...

Let's put this into practical terms: If you have a brother who says, or sister... You know what I'm saying. I think that God wants me to go to church on Saturday..., and this is not a salvation issue with them, they're not redefining the Gospel. They just feel like that's their... They have a conviction that's what they should do. Rather than argue with them, which is what most of us would do, say, well, let's look this up in the Word. Rather than do that, we should say, well, I think you better follow your conscience there. Because who cares?

Who cares what day they go to church. Right? The important thing is that they're honoring God and they want to seek to know Him better and stuff like that. I mean you might warn them. Hey, don't get sucked into a situation where these convictions become salvation-dependent. But by the same token, Hey follow your conscience, man, even if I think you're wrong. If it's a disputable matter.

Now, if it's not a disputable matter, or it's an issue of morality, I just feel like God wants me to do this..., and we know that it's immoral, or clearly unbiblical. Well, you need to go and you need to tell your brother the truth. Right? You say, hold the phone here a minute. Let's get into the Word because I'm not going to sit back while a brother walks into immorality. And just say, well, follow your conscience, brother. Not going to do that.

But if it's a disputable matter, hey, my conscience is leading me to believe that, God is going to allow the church to go through the tribulation before He comes to get us..., somebody might say to you. You just say, hey man, whatever. This is not a salvation related matter.

Even if I think he's wrong... See, that's the hard part, because my pride enters into the equation. If I got a brother who comes to me and says, well, this is what I believe. And I think he's wrong, it's very difficult for me to ask myself the question: Is this a disputable matter? Is this a salvation issue? I just want to correct him. And I want him to know that I corrected him. And I want him to know that he's wrong and I'm right. Because that's what pride gets us to do.

But see, if I cause my brother to do something contrary to his conscience, I'm actually weakening his conscience. And its ability in him to hear from God the Holy Spirit. We need to learn to listen to God, the Holy Spirit. Amen. That's something... It's a... Do you guys understand that listening to God is a developed ability?

Some of you guys who are, maybe, newer in the Lord, or, who struggle hearing the voice of God, you watch other people who do. And you think they're a higher form of Christian or something like that. You meet somebody that's been in the LORD, for 20, 30, 40 years or something. And then you can tell that they're hearing from God. And you're like, oh, man. I wish I was spiritual like you. You're probably dealing with somebody who has developed an ear. A spiritual ear to hear.

But it took practice. That doesn't just happen overnight, you guys. We have to learn to listen— to incline our ear to the voice of the Lord, through taking His Word in. And causing it to live, to dwell within our hearts. And leaning in.

Leaning in to listen to the voice of God's Holy Spirit. Leaning in. And what that means is backing away from all the other voices that are clamoring for your attention and so forth. So that you might hear God's voice above the din of all the noisiness of the world.

It's hard. Hey, I've been walking with the Lord, now for a while. I'll tell you it's hard hearing God's voice sometimes. Very challenging. But if I start saying no to my conscience, violating my conscience, I'm going to make it even harder to hear His voice. Because now I'm shutting down the mechanism that His Spirit wants to use and speak to and utilize in my life, so that I might hear His voice.

Verse 15, *"For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, (In other words, your freedom to eat that meat.) you are no longer walking in love. (He says. And) By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died."*

I mean, doesn't that sound like dumb? And he's talking to the person whose faith is strong here. And when we talk about... , we say, faith is strong, we mean they have liberty. They walk through Albertsons, and they see a cut of meat on the thing, and it says, this was devoted to this weird god of these people living outside of town. They just go, yeah, big deal, it's meat. Boom. They put it in their cart, and they go on. They don't care. And they're fine with it because they know that there is no god, but one God who rules over all. And they're comfortable, and satisfied, and confident in that. And they don't care. They throw it in their cart.

But Paul says, listen, if you're flaunting that to the point where your brother is grieved by what you are doing, now you're not walking in love. Guys, can I just tell you, the greatest sign or proof of spirituality is love. The greatest sign of spirituality is love. It's not speaking in tongues. It's not doing miracles. It's not knowing the Bible frontwards and backwards.

That's not spirituality. It's not coming to church. It's not singing the songs. It's not playing the songs. It's not teaching Sunday school. It's not quoting verses every time somebody talks to you. It's loving.

Remember what Paul said, 1 Corinthians? If I can do all these things, but have not love, I am nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3) You want to be really spiritual, learn to love people. Even people who are hard to love. And that's hard. And especially, when they're wrong. And they you criticizing you for your freedom in Christ, you eat that meat?

Here I thought you were a spiritual person and you eat that junk. Do you know what you're putting in your mouth? Do you know? Do you know what satanic demons that meat has been devoted to and dedicated to over God knows what kind of a service? And you're eating that meat. Oh! Right? And that's enough to get your dander up a little bit. And make you want to defend yourself a little bit. Yeah, I eat that meat. Get off my back. Bible says your faith is weak. So, there!

Paul says, listen, if you're grieving your brother, that's not love. That's not spirituality. That's not maturity. Maturity suffers long, even in the face of accusation. In other words, make sure your brother in Christ is more important than what you put in your mouth. That's an easy way to say it.

Verse 16 says, *"So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil."* What Paul is saying here, in this statement, when he says, don't let what you regard as good to be spoken of as evil. He's not saying don't let people speak evil of your freedoms to you.

What he's saying is, don't so flaunt your freedoms that they become an evil thing. And they become spoken of as evil. Even though you are free to do them, don't flaunt them in such a way that you hurt your brother. And now it becomes an evil thing because you hurt your brother with it.

See, here's the thing. If I have the freedom to eat meat, but I beat my brother over the head with my freedom, now my freedom has become a bad thing. And people can speak badly of my freedom. Yeah, boy, you know that pastor Paul, he's free to do those things. But he also feels free to just beat people over the head with his freedom.

See, now my freedom has become a cause for evil because I had to flaunt it. I had to force it. You got to think like me or you're not right. Guys, do you get this? I mean, this is stuff we've done. We need to say, you know what? Busted, I've done this. I flaunted my freedoms in front of other people.

Look what he says in verse 17. Great reminder. *"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."*

What's so good about this reminder is that it reveals to us that we like to make the kingdom of God something else. I like to redefine the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is correct thinking. Right? Or, the kingdom of God is believing correctly about last day's events. And if you don't believe correctly about last day's events, well, I don't know if you're actually in the kingdom of God. Because that's what the kingdom of God is.

You see, we make the kingdom of God, or we make the kingdom of God about another disputable matter is how we worship. Oh, we Christians, we get so fixated on these things. We criticize people. We criticize them if they stand up too long. We criticize them if they sit down too early. We criticize them if they raise their hands. We criticize them if they don't raise their hands. We criticize

them if they dance. We criticize each other if we don't dance. And it goes on and on. I could cite example after example. And we make it what the kingdom of God is. The kingdom of God is freedom to worship like we do. That's what the kingdom of God is.

Paul says no you want me to define the kingdom of God. It's being Christlike not you-like. It's not being like you. It's being like Him. That's what the kingdom of God is all about. It's seeking after His righteousness. Right? It's not about seeking after a particular form of worship that makes you like the church down the street. Don't redefine the kingdom. The kingdom is about Jesus. Let's keep the main thing, the main thing. And the main thing is Him. It's not how we worship.

Verse 18. *"Whoever thus serves Christ..."* In other words, making Him as the goal of their life, a Christ like life. Whoever serves Christ that way, that person he says *"is acceptable to God and approved by men."*

I don't care how they worship. I don't care when they worship. I don't care whether they eat meat or just vegetables. *"¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding."* Or, building up of the saints.

Here's Paul's concluding remarks. He says, *"²⁰ Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats."*

Paul is agreeing here with the one who is stronger in their faith. And who has the liberty to eat everything. He says, I'm convinced that, yeah, everything is clean, there's nothing unclean in terms of food. But if I force that on my brother, then I'm the one in the wrong. And I'm making him stumble.

What is Paul's guiding principle in this matter? Look at verse 21. And if this isn't underlined in your Bible, consider doing it. Because this was Paul's way of handling it. *"It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble."*

You see, Paul's saying this, is it wrong to eat meat? No. Is it wrong to drink wine? No. Is it wrong to get drunk? Yes. But it's not wrong.

But I'll tell you what, here's Paul's statement, if it's going to cause my brother problems, I won't do it. I'll abstain. When I'm around my brother, when I go to dinner at his house, I'm not going to insist on having my diet, my way, my things. If my brother invites me to church on Saturday, I'm going to go to

church on Saturday. Yeah. Whatever it is, I'm not going to make a big deal of it. I'm just going to... I'm going to try to love my brother. I'm not going to cause him to stumble.

Verse 22, he says, *"The faith..."* And what he means by that is faith to live freely, eat meat, go to church any day you want. That sort of thing. *"The faith that you have, (just) keep between yourself and God."* Don't feel like you got to be telling everybody all about your freedoms.

"Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself (by) what he approves." Or what he's free to do. If you're free to do things, don't crow about it to the point where you end up being under judgment yourself because you've just been a loud mouth.

Verse 23, *"But whoever has doubts (that person) is (going to be) condemned if he eats, (Not by God, he's going to be condemned in his heart by himself.) because the eating is not from faith. (And then look what he says here.) For whatever does not proceed from faith is (a missing of the mark or) sin."*

What does Paul mean by that? This is a general principle, you guys. And what Paul is doing is he's giving us a guide to help us navigate those gray areas or disputable matters. If I don't possess the faith to eat meat that has been dedicated to a pagan god, then for me, eating meat like that is, is wrong. It's a sin because I'm not doing it out of faith.

I don't have the faith to do it. I really, truly do have concerns. If I don't have the faith to worship God on another day, then for me, it's a sin to do otherwise. Why? Because if I can't do it by faith, then that means I'm violating my conscience to do it. And that is wrong.