

## The Weaker Brother (1)

**Text:** Romans 14:1-12

### Introduction:

1. In this chapter the Apostle confronts a very practical problem that existed in the church at Rome between the 'weak' (immature) and the 'strong' (mature) believers. The weak brethren were sensitive in their consciences concerning certain matters relating to things like meat offered to idols or the observance of special days. The strong on the other hand, had a better understanding of their freedom in Christ on these matters, knowing that they were done away with at Calvary.
2. The Apostle Paul presents a plea for mutual acceptance of one another's positions to fulfill the greater purposes of unity and edification.
3. In this first section (Vs. 1-12), the Apostle Paul calls on both parties (weak & strong) to refrain from exercising a prideful spirit of judgment over the legitimate exercise of personal conscience in these matters.
4. Some introductory qualifications on the scope of Christian liberty
  - Christian liberty does not mean an accommodation of sin and compromise in the believer's life (e.g. false doctrine or loose morality) – *"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."* (Gal. 5:13)
  - Christian liberty does not mean the believer is never to exercise discerning judgment – *"But he that is spiritual judgeth all things..."* (1 Cor. 2:15) We are exhorted to "try the spirits" (1 John 4:1), to "prove all things" (1 Thess. 5:21) and to "earnestly contend for the faith" (Jude 1:3).
5. There are two kinds of judgment the believer is not to exercise:
  - Hypocritical judgment (Matt. 7:1-6). This is where the person judging another brother has the same issue himself!
  - Judgment concerning matters the Bible specifically leaves open to the exercise of the individual conscience (Rom. 14)

### I. The Exhortation not to Judge (Vs. 1-4)

#### A. The Duties of the Strong (Vs. 1-3a)

1. Avoid Disputations with the Immature (Vs. 1-2)
  - a. "weak in the faith" = clear that Paul essentially stands on the side of the 'strong' and desires the 'weak' to grow in their faith and understanding (Note Vs. 14). However, loving patience is to be exercised with these fledgling believers.
  - b. "receive ye" = to take to oneself. Refers to the need to extend warm fellowship to the immature brethren. This section starts with an exhortation to 'receive' the brethren and ends with a similar exhortation in 15:7.

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- c. “doubtful disputations” = not with a view to quarreling with him over opinions.
  - d. “one believeth” = hath faith. This believer (the strong) has a clear conscience to eat all things (e.g. meats offered to idols). He can do this in faith (Note Vs. 23)
  - e. “eateth herbs” = vegetables. The weaker brother, who has yet to grow further in his understanding of freedom in Christ, refrains from what he feels might be questionable in its associations.
2. Avoid Despising the Immature (Vs. 3a)
    - a. ‘despise’ = to consider as nothing, to look down upon, to belittle; a disdainful, condescending judgment (Moo). Same word translated “set at nought” in Vs. 10.
    - b. Note: While the judgment cast by both parties is distinct (the strong despising and the weak criticizing), both were the product of spiritual pride and hence share the same rootstock.

### B. The Duties of the Weak (Vs.3b-4)

1. The Requirement not to Judge (Vs. 3b)
  - a. “not judge” = the weaker brother felt he was more spiritual due to his “higher” standard in the disputed matters. This caused him to entertain a critical, pharisaical spirit towards his brethren who understood their liberty in those areas.
  - b. Denny: “It is easy to lapse from scrupulousness about one’s own conduct into Pharisaism about that of others.”
  - c. Note: The measuring stick for each of us is the truth of Scripture, not our personal convictions on areas of individual soul liberty.
2. The Reasons not to Judge (Vs. 3b-4)
  - a. “God hath received him” = if my brother in Christ is acceptable to God, then I can offer him no less. This is foundational to Paul’s argument and it is reiterated at the climax of his argument in 15:7.
  - b. “to his own master he standeth or falleth” = reference to approval or disapproval. Each believer is directly accountable to the Lord concerning the exercise of his own conscience.
  - c. “Who art thou” = In effect Paul says to the weaker brethren inclined to a critical spirit, “who do you think you are to elevate yourself to a position as judge over another brother?”

## II. The Explanation why not to Judge (Vs. 5-9)

### A. The Aim of Each Party was the Same (Vs. 5-6)

1. ‘esteemeth’ = judges, determines
2. “be fully persuaded” = each believer has freedom before the Lord to decide the matter for themselves according to the light they have.

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3. “unto the Lord”; “to the Lord” (Vs. 6) = both parties are motivated by the same principle – to please the Lord in their actions. “Both parties, by the line of action they choose, have the same end in view – namely, the interest of the Lord. The thanksgiving shows that in either case the Christian is acting to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31)
4. Note: This clearly rules out that there is any allowance in the Apostle’s teaching for the accommodation of sin and error. These believers were striving to please the Lord, not to live a loose, lax & worldly Christian life.

### B. The Application to Every Believer (Vs. 7-9)

1. “none of us liveth to himself” = no Christian is his own end in life; what is always present to his mind, as a rule of his conduct, is the will and the interest of his Lord (Wuest). Pleasing the Lord is our aim whether it be in life or death (Vs. 7-8)
2. “we are the Lord’s” = Pleasing the Lord is our aim since we belong to Christ. Note also servant & master illustration of Vs. 4.
3. “for to this end” = purpose of Christ’s death & resurrection was that he might reign as Lord and Sovereign in the lives of His people. (Vs. 9)
  - a. 2 Cor 5:14-15 *“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, **that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.**”*
  - b. Phil. 1:21 *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*

## III. The Encouragement not to Judge (Vs. 10-12)

### A. Our Appearance at the Judgment Seat (Vs. 10-11)

1. Both parties (strong and weak) are challenged again on their attitudes towards each other (Vs. 10a)
2. “we shall all stand” = every believer will appear at this judgment
3. “judgment seat of Christ” = the *bema* seat judgment. The “judgment seat” in Roman times was a seat where a Roman or Greek judge sat in judgment. Sometimes this was for judicial proceedings – e.g. Pilate’s sentencing of Jesus (John 19:3). Sometimes it was for non-judicial purposes such as when judges who officiated the Greek games pronounced rewards or disqualifications. It is this usage that is in view. Some important things to remember in relation to the Judgment Seat of Christ are as follows:
  - a. This judgment is distinct from the Great White throne Judgment described in Revelation 20 which is clearly for the unsaved. This judgment is for believers and occurs after the rapture.

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- b. This judgment is not to review the believer's salvation but his service; not his position but his practice. Salvation not lost at this judgment but rewards can be (1 Cor. 3:11-15)
4. Paul is challenging both parties to humble themselves in light of this awesome reality.
5. "For it is written" = Paul backs up his statement with a quotation from Isaiah 45:23

### **B. Our Account at the Judgment Seat (Vs. 12)**

1. "So then" = a conclusion is drawn
2. "give an account" = 'account' is the word *logos* most commonly translated 'word'.
3. "of himself" = highlights the personal nature of the Bema Seat. We will not give an account for other believers nor will we stand trial to other believers. The Lord will review and judge each individual believer.

### **Conclusion:**

1. Are we puffed up in spiritual pride and hence entertaining a wrong attitude towards one another in the local church?
2. Are we growing from 'weak' to 'strong' in our understanding of Christian liberty?
3. Are we living in subjection to the Lordship of Christ, with a desire to please Him in all things?
4. Are we allowing the truth of our future standing before the Judgment Seat of Christ to produce humility in our hearts towards each other?