



# Disputable Matters

Romans 14<sup>1</sup>



## The Weak & the Strong

- In Romans 14:1-15:13, Paul addresses two groups in the church – the “weak in faith” (14:1) and the “strong” (15:1). The “weak in faith” are mainly Jewish Christians who abstain from certain kinds of food, and observe certain special days, because of their commitment to the Old Testament regulations on these matters (14:2, 5).<sup>2</sup> The “strong” feel free to eat anything, and consider every day alike. Read Romans 14:1-12.
  1. What wrong attitudes are evident among “the weak” and “the strong?” (14:1, 3)<sup>3</sup>
  2. Paul instructs believers to avoid these wrong attitudes. According to this passage, why should believers avoid judging other Christians on “disputable matters?” (14:3-4, 10-12)<sup>4</sup>
- Paul says, “Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind” (14:5b). Each one should be able to say, “The things I believe and do, I do ‘to the Lord (to honor him)’” (14:6-9). As believers, whatever we do, “we belong to the Lord” (14:9). Christ died and rose to be the Lord, so we must live for him (14:9-10).
  3. How can we identify “disputable matters?” (14:1).<sup>5</sup> What kinds of “disputable matters” exist in the Christian church today?

<sup>1</sup> Romans 14:1-15:13 is one unit of teaching, but this lesson will be confined to Romans 14.

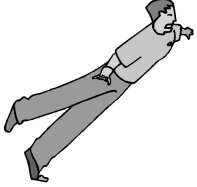
<sup>2</sup> Other proposals have been offered for the identity of “the weak” but this one has the strongest basis. They are considered “weak in faith” (*asthenounta tē pistei*) because of a deficiency in their faith that constrains them to observe Old Testament regulations. These regulations did not prohibit all meat, but “the weak” may be abstaining from all meat to be safe (due to fear of improper preparation and/or association). Jesus had “declared all foods ‘clean’” (Mark 7:19), and the “strong” realize that truth. In any case, the main point of this passage is not to distinguish between the “weak” and “strong,” but to address the attitudes between them. In modern “disputable matters,” the designations “weak” and “strong” may not be appropriate, but the prescribed attitudes still apply.

<sup>3</sup> The strong “pass judgment” and “look down on” (despise) the weak. The weak “condemn” (judge) the strong.

<sup>4</sup> The context here concerns “disputable matters” (*dialogismōn*) – “inward reasoning, opinion.” These matters are “disputable” because the New Testament teaching does not explicitly define what is right and wrong, and there are different opinions about what is proper. There are various “disputable matters” in the church today.

<sup>5</sup> See footnote 4. Also, in this context, “disputable matters” are connected to reasoned thought and commitment to the Lord (14:5-10).

## Instructions to “the Strong”

- ❑ In verse 13, Paul begins to specifically address “the strong.” Read Romans 14:13-23.
  4. In verse 13, what does Paul instruct believers *not* to do? (*also 14:20-21*)<sup>6</sup>
  
- ❑ Believers must not “put any stumbling block or obstacle in [another believer’s] way” (14:13). We must not do anything that causes another believer to “fall” in a spiritual sense (14:21). The consequences can be serious. Paul writes, “do not...destroy your brother” (14:15) and “do not destroy (tear down) the work of God” (14:20).
 
  5. If we are convinced that a particular behavior is acceptable (relative to Scripture), how can we cause another Christian to “fall?” (14:14-15, 23)<sup>7</sup>
  
  6. Christians should avoid actions that cause others to be distressed, stumble and/or fall. What attitudes and values will help us avoid such actions? (14:15, 17-18, 19)<sup>8</sup>
  
- ❑ Instead of “[tearing down] the work of God” (14:20), “let us...make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual [building up]” (14:19). “It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else that will cause your brother to fall” (14:21, NIV).
  7. How might this passage (Romans 14:13-23) apply to some of the modern “disputable matters” identified in question 3?

### Reflection/Application

- While Romans 14 is about ethics (right behavior among people), it is interspersed with the basis of Christian ethics – Christ himself. Christ is the supreme example (14:15) and Lord. Christ died and rose to be *the Lord* (14:9). Do you need to submit to His Lordship?
- As a Christian, what “disputable matters” have affected *your* relationships with other believers? Reflect on Romans 14:1-15:13 and determine what you need to do to avoid wrong attitudes and actions, and instead, do what leads to peace and mutual edification.

<sup>6</sup> Paul says again, do not pass judgment on them (14:13). He also says, do not put “any stumbling block (*skandalon*) or obstacle (*proskomma*) in your brother’s way” (14:13b; cp. 14:20-21).

<sup>7</sup> If another believer is convinced that something is wrong, our belief that it is acceptable does not make it right for that person (even if our belief is correct). It is “sin” for a believer to act against his/her sincerely held convictions about what the Christian faith allows him/her to do, or prohibits him/her from doing (14:14, 23). We may convince others to modify their convictions, but we should not influence them to act against their sincere convictions.

<sup>8</sup> Helpful attitudes and values include love, as Christ loved us (14:15), the kingdom values of “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (14:17), humble service (14:18), and the building up of God’s family (14:19). Wrong attitudes and values include spiritual arrogance and the insensitive exercise of Christian liberty (Christian “rights”).