



Receiving The Weak In Faith

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Introduction

The central message of Romans 14:1–4 is that **Christian liberty should be governed by love, humility and accountability to Christ** when it comes to receiving the weak in Christ. The passage does not teach that truth does not matter; rather, it teaches us not to turn legitimate differences over non-essential matters into occasions for condemnation and division.

The Church of Jesus Christ is made up of people who have been saved by the same Lord, washed by the same blood and given the same Holy Spirit, but who do not necessarily have exactly the same convictions about every secondary matter. We agree on the great foundations of the faith, such as:

- a) Jesus Christ is Lord.
- b) He died for our sins.
- c) He rose again.
- d) Salvation is by grace through faith.
- e) The Bible is the Word of God.
- f) We are called to holiness.
- g) Christ is coming again.

Yet Christians can sincerely disagree about matters that Scripture does not constitute fundamental conditions of salvation. Romans 14 addresses how we are to behave when such differences arise. Paul identifies two groups:

- a) **“one believeth that he may eat all things:**
- b) **another, who is weak, eateth herbs.”**

One Christian had liberty to eat; another, because of his conscience and understanding, restricted his diet. Paul's concern was not merely **what they ate**. His concern was **how they treated one another**.

The problem was that one was tempted to **despise**, while the other was tempted to **judge**. That is a serious lesson for the Church today. Sometimes the thing that causes the greatest division among believers is not a fundamental doctrine but a secondary matter that we have elevated to the level of a fundamental doctrine. Paul therefore gives us three important commands centred on Receive, Refrain and Remember. Let's consider each one in detail.

1. RECEIVE ONE ANOTHER WITHOUT TURNING DIFFERENCES INTO DIVISION

“Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.” — Romans 14:1. Paul begins with **reception**, not rejection. The word “receive” means

to welcome, accept and take someone into fellowship. The Church is not a gathering of people who agree on every personal preference. It is a family of people who have been received by Christ, and who needs to understand and embrace the salient principles in points A to D below:

A. Christ received us before we were perfect

Romans 15:7 says: **“Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.”** Notice the standard: **“as Christ also received us.”** How did Christ receive us? He received us with our weaknesses, ignorance, immaturity and imperfections. He did not wait until we knew everything before He saved us. He did not wait until our understanding was perfect before He called us His own.

Romans 5:8 says: **“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”** If Christ was patient with us while we were growing, we must learn to be patient with others who are growing.

B. Spiritual maturity does not mean demanding uniformity

There is a difference between **unity** and **uniformity**. Uniformity says: “You must think exactly as I think.” Unity says: “We may differ on this matter, but we belong to the same Lord.” Ephesians 4:3 says: **“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”** Paul does not say that everyone must have identical opinions. He says: **“Keep the unity of the Spirit.”** There is room for legitimate differences within Christian fellowship.

C. Not every disagreement deserves a theological battle

Paul says: **“but not to doubtful disputations.”** In other words, do not receive someone merely so that you can argue with them. There is a danger of turning every difference into a debate. Some people seem unable to have a conversation without turning it into an argument. They want to establish their interpretation, preference, tradition, practice and opinion. But the question is not simply: **“Can I prove my position?”** The question is also: **“Does my position help build the body of Christ?”** Remember the wise saying in Proverbs 15:1 that: **“A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.”**

D. There are essential truths and non-essential matters

This passage must not be misunderstood. Paul is **not** saying that doctrine does not matter. The Bible commands us to contend for the faith: **“earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”** — Jude 3. Paul also warned Timothy about false doctrine. Galatians 1:8 says: **“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.”** Therefore, there are truths over which the Church must stand. But Romans 14 deals particularly with matters such as food and observance of days—areas where sincere believers may differ without denying the Gospel.

To illustrate, a building needs both foundations and decoration. You cannot say, “It does not matter whether we have a foundation.” It matters enormously. But you can have legitimate differences about the colour of the walls. The tragedy occurs when people fight over the colour while neglecting the foundation. Therefore, we must ask: **Is this a Gospel issue, a biblical command, or simply a matter of Christian liberty and personal conviction?** If it is a clear command of Scripture, we obey it. If

it concerns a fundamental doctrine, we stand for truth. But if it is a legitimate area of Christian liberty, we must be careful not to make our personal conviction God's universal law.

2. REFRAIN FROM DESPISING AND JUDGING OTHERS CONSCIENCE

This calls for leaving room for Christian Conscience. Romans 14:2–3 says: **“For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.”** Paul identifies two opposite dangers:

A. The strong must not despise the weak. **“Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not.”** The person who understood his liberty could look down upon the person who did not share that liberty. His attitude could become:

- a) “You are unnecessarily restricted.”
- b) “You do not understand Scripture.”
- c) “You are too narrow.”
- d) “You are immature.”

Paul says: **Do not despise him.** Knowledge can become a source of pride. 1 Corinthians 8:1 says: **“Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.”** It is possible:

- a) To know more and love less.
- b) to have greater liberty and less grace.
- c) to be right about something and wrong in the way we treat someone.

B. The weak must not judge the strong. Paul warns: **“and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth.”** The person who abstained could say: “Because I do not do this, anyone who does it must be compromising.” That is also dangerous. The person with stricter personal convictions can sometimes assume that his personal standard is automatically God's standard for everyone else. But Romans 14:3 gives the reason we must not judge: **“for God hath received him.”** That is powerful. If God has received someone, we must be extremely careful about rejecting someone whom God has received.

To avoid these two danger extremes, we must guard these three areas:

A. Christian liberty must be controlled by love. Paul develops this principle further in Romans 14:13: **“Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.”** The question changes from: **“What am I allowed to do?”** to: **“How will my action affect my brother?”** That is Christian maturity. 1 Corinthians 10:23 says: **“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.”** The mature Christian does not merely ask: **“Is it permitted?”** He asks: **“Is it beneficial?”**

B. Your liberty should never become another person's stumbling block. Paul gives a strong principle in 1 Corinthians 8:13: **“Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.”** That is extraordinary. Paul had liberty. But he was willing to

restrict his liberty for the sake of another believer. This is not weakness. It is strength under control.

To illustrate, a powerful vehicle can travel at high speed, but the responsible driver slows down when approaching a school crossing. The ability to go faster does not mean that you should always go faster. Likewise, Christian liberty is not merely about what I **can** do. It is about whether love requires me to **restrain** what I can do.

- C. **We must distinguish judging behaviour from judging the person.** The Bible tells us to exercise discernment. Jesus said: **“Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.”** — John 7:24. There is therefore a difference between **discernment** and **condemnation**.
- a) Discernment asks: “What does Scripture teach?” whereas Condemnation says: “I have decided what kind of person you are.”
 - b) Discernment examines conduct whereas Condemnation assumes authority over another person's standing before God.
- Romans 14 tells us not to take God's place.

3. REMEMBER WHOSE SERVANT EVERY CHRISTIAN IS

Christ is their master and judge, and He has not yet delegated the associated responsibilities of those roles to Christians. Romans 14:4 contains the strongest challenge: **“Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?”** Paul does not merely say: **“Do not judge because judging is unpleasant.”** He gives a theological reason. **The other person belongs to somebody else.** Note the following salient points:

A. Another believer is God's servant, not yours. **“Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?”** Imagine walking into another man's house and finding his servant doing something according to his master's instructions. You begin criticising the servant. The master could rightly ask: “Who gave you authority over my servant?” That is Paul's argument. The believer belongs to Christ. 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 says: **“ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.”** We belong to Christ. Therefore, we must be careful about acting as though we are the master of another Christian's conscience.

B. “To his own master he standeth or falleth” -Romans 14:4. So:

- a) Whose servant is he? - **His master's.**
- b) Who ultimately evaluates him? - **His master.**
- c) Who has the final authority? - **His master.**

This does not eliminate church discipline or biblical correction. The Church must deal with genuine sin and false doctrine. Jesus gave instructions for dealing with serious wrongdoing in Matthew 18:15–17. Galatians 6:1 says: **“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.”** Notice the objective: **Restore.** Biblical correction is designed to restore a person, not to humiliate him.

C. God is able to make His servant stand. Romans 14:4 concludes: **“Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.”** What a wonderful statement! Sometimes we look at another believer and think: “How can that person possibly stand?” Paul says: **“God is able to make him stand.”** Our confidence is ultimately not in ourselves. It is in God's grace. Philippians 1:6 says: **“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”** God is still working in His people.

D. Give people room to grow. Peter did not become a mature apostle overnight. He denied Jesus. He misunderstood Jesus. He spoke impulsively. He made mistakes. Yet Jesus did not discard him. After Peter's failure, Christ restored him. John 21:15–17 records Jesus asking Peter three times: **“Lovest thou me?”** And Jesus then gave him responsibility: **“Feed my sheep.”** Peter's failure was not the end of his story. God was able to make him stand. The same God who was patient with Peter is patient with us.

E. We will all ultimately answer to Christ. Romans 14:10 says: **“For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”** And verse 12 says: **“So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”** Notice the emphasis: **“every one of us.”** I will give account of myself. You will give account of yourself. Therefore, I should spend more time examining my own life than conducting a spiritual investigation into everybody else's life. 2 Corinthians 13:5 says: **“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.”** There is plenty of work to do in our own hearts.

CONSIDER THESE THREE QUESTIONS FOR EVERY BELIEVER

Romans 14:1–4 therefore gives us three practical questions.

- a. **HAVE I RECEIVED MY BROTHER?** **“Him that is weak in the faith receive ye.”**
Am I making room for people who are still growing? Am I welcoming people who do not yet understand everything as I understand it? Am I helping them grow—or making them feel condemned?
- b. **AM I DESPISING OR JUDGING?** Paul says: **“Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not.”** And: **“let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth.”** Which temptation is stronger in my life?
 - a) **Despising?** - “Why don't they understand?” or
 - b) **Judging?** - “How can they possibly be right with God?”Both attitudes damage Christian fellowship.
- c. **HAVE I REMEMBERED WHOSE SERVANT I AM?** **“Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?”** Before I criticise another believer, I should remember that **He belongs to Christ**. And before I become overly concerned about another person's life, I should remember that **I also belong to Christ**. My first responsibility is to make sure that **I am standing faithfully before my Master**.

IN CONCLUSION, KEEP THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING

Romans 14:1–4 gives us a beautiful picture of Christian maturity. Maturity is not simply knowing more. Maturity is knowing **what matters most**.

- a) The immature Christian says: "You must agree with me." The mature Christian says: "Let us stand together on the truth of Christ and show grace where Scripture allows liberty."
- b) The immature Christian says: "I am right, therefore I can look down on you." The mature Christian says: "Even if I am right, I must walk in love."
- c) The immature Christian asks: "What can I get away with?" The mature Christian asks: "What will edify my brother?"

And the mature Christian remembers the Biblical challenge: **"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?"**

Let us therefore: Receive one another. Refuse to despise or condemn one another over legitimate differences. Remember that every believer ultimately belongs to Christ. There are some hills upon which we must stand. There are truths for which we must contend. There are sins which must be confronted. There is false doctrine which must be rejected. But there are also matters where sincere Christians may differ. In those matters, let us not destroy fellowship over issues that Christ has not made conditions of salvation.

Romans 14:19 gives us the right direction: **"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another."** And Romans 15:5–6 gives us the ultimate objective: **"Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."**

Finally:

- a) When we disagree, **let Christ remain Lord.**
- b) When we differ, **let love remain strong.**
- c) When we have liberty, **let humility govern its use.**
- d) When we see weakness in another, **let grace respond.**
- e) And when we are tempted to judge another servant of God, let us remember Paul's question: **"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?"**

He is **Christ's servant**. I am **Christ's servant**. And our responsibility is not to become one another's master. Our responsibility is to **love one another, edify one another, help one another and remain faithful to our one Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. Amen.**