

# **DISPUTABLE MATTERS** (aka, Matters of Opinion)

Adult Class, 2/2/2014

**In matters of faith, UNITY  
In matters of opinion, LIBERTY  
And in all things, LOVE**

(Note: Main topics, #1, #2, ..., #7) are clickable within the document.)

1. [Scripture](#)
  - a. 1 Corinthians 5.1-5
  - b. 1 Corinthians 8
  - c. 1 Corinthians 10.14-33
  - d. Galatians 4:8-11
  - e. Romans 14
  - f. Acts 16.1-5
  - g. Galatians 2.1-5
2. [What Paul Did Not Say](#)
3. [Over-Arching Principles](#)
4. [JUDGE \(1 Cor 5\) or DO NOT JUDGE \(Rom 14\) ??](#)
  - a. Hold Your Ground, or
    - i. Accommodate?
    - ii. Give In?
    - iii. Adapt?
    - iv. Compromise?
    - v. Get Used To?
    - vi. Accept?
5. [Disputable Matters: Examples of, Examples Not](#)
6. [Stumbling Block: Examples of, Examples Not](#)
7. [Weaker Brother: Examples of, Examples Not](#)

# SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

## 1 Cor 5:1-5 NKJV

**5** It is actually reported *that there is* sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named\* among the Gentiles — that a man has his father's wife! **2** And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. **3** For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. **4** In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, **5** deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.\*

## 1 Corinthians 8

<p>1 Cor 8 – NIV</p> <p><b>8</b> Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. <b>a</b> Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. <b>2</b> The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. <b>3</b> But the man who loves God is known by God.</p> <p><b>4</b> So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. <b>5</b> For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), <b>6</b> yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.</p> <p><b>7</b> But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.</p>	<p>1 Cor 8 -- The Message</p> <p><b>8</b> The question keeps coming up regarding meat that has been offered up to an idol: Should you attend meals where such meat is served, or not? We sometimes tend to think we know all we need to know to answer these kinds of questions — <b>2</b> but sometimes our humble hearts can help us more than our proud minds. <b>3</b> We never really know enough until we recognize that God alone knows it all.</p> <p><b>4</b> Some people say, quite rightly, that idols have no actual existence, that there's nothing to them, that there is no God other than our one God, <b>5</b> that no matter how many of these so-called gods are named and worshiped they still don't add up to anything but a tall story. <b>6</b> They say — again, quite rightly — that there is only one God the Father, that everything comes from him, and that he wants us to live for him. Also, they say that there is only one Master — Jesus the Messiah — and that everything is for his sake, including us. Yes. It's true.</p> <p><b>7</b> In strict logic, then, nothing happened to the meat when it was offered up to an idol. It's just like any other meat. I know that, and you know that. But knowing isn't everything. If it becomes everything, some people end up as know-it-all who treat others as know-nothings. Real knowledge isn't that insensitive.</p> <p>We need to be sensitive to the fact that we're not all at the same level of understanding in this. Some of you have spent your entire lives eating "idol meat," and are sure that there's something bad in the meat that then becomes something bad inside of you. An</p>
--	--

<p><b>8</b> But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.</p> <p><b>9</b> Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.</p> <p><b>10</b> For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols?</p> <p><b>11</b> So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. <b>12</b> When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.</p> <p><b>13</b> 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.</p>	<p>imagination and conscience shaped under those conditions isn't going to change overnight.</p> <p><b>8</b> But fortunately God doesn't grade us on our diet. We're neither commended when we clean our plate nor reprimanded when we just can't stomach it. <b>9</b> But God does care when you use your freedom carelessly in a way that leads a Christian still vulnerable to those old associations to be thrown off track.</p> <p><b>10</b> For instance, say you flaunt your freedom by going to a banquet thrown in honor of idols, where the main course is meat sacrificed to idols. Isn't there great danger if someone still struggling over this issue, someone who looks up to you as knowledgeable and mature, sees you go into that banquet? The danger is that he will become terribly confused — maybe even to the point of getting mixed up himself in what his conscience tells him is wrong.</p> <p><b>11</b> Christ gave up his life for that person. Wouldn't you at least be willing to give up going to dinner for him — because, as you say, it doesn't really make any difference? But it does make a difference if you hurt your friend terribly, risking his eternal ruin! <b>12</b> When you hurt your friend, you hurt Christ. A free meal here and there isn't worth it at the cost of even one of these "weak ones." <b>13</b> So, never go to these idol-tainted meals if there's any chance it will trip up one of your brothers or sisters.</p>
---	---

## 1 Corinthians 10

<p><b>1 Cor 10:14-33 – NIV</b></p> <p><b>14</b> Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.</p> <p><b>15</b> I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. <b>16</b> Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? <b>17</b> Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.</p> <p><b>18</b> Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar?</p>	<p><b>1 Cor 10:14-33 – The Message</b></p> <p><b>14</b> So, my very dear friends, when you see people reducing God to something they can use or control, get out of their company as fast as you can.</p> <p><b>15</b> I assume I'm addressing believers now who are mature. Draw your own conclusions: <b>16</b> When we drink the cup of blessing, aren't we taking into ourselves the blood, the very life, of Christ? And isn't it the same with the loaf of bread we break and eat? Don't we take into ourselves the body, the very life, of Christ? <b>17</b> Because there is one loaf, our many-ness becomes one-ness — Christ doesn't become fragmented in us. Rather, we become unified in him. We don't reduce Christ to what we are; he raises us to what he is. <b>18</b> That's basically what happened even in old Israel — those who ate the sacrifices offered on</p>
--	--

**19** Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? **20** No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. **21** You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. **22** Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

**23** "Everything is permissible"-but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"-but not everything is constructive. **24** Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

**25** Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, **26** for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." **c**

**27** If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.

**28** But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake **d**—

**29** the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? **30** If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?

**31** So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

**32** Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— **33** even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

God's altar entered into God's action at the altar.

**19** Do you see the difference? Sacrifices offered to idols are offered to nothing, for what's the idol but a nothing? **20** Or worse than nothing, a minus, a demon! I don't want you to become part of something that reduces you to less than yourself. **21** And you can't have it both ways, banqueting with the Master one day and slumming with demons the next. **22** Besides, the Master won't put up with it. He wants us — all or nothing. Do you think you can get off with anything less?

**23** Looking at it one way, you could say, "Anything goes. Because of God's immense generosity and grace, we don't have to dissect and scrutinize every action to see if it will pass muster." But the point is not to just get by. **24** We want to live well, but our foremost efforts should be to help others live well.

**25** With that as a base to work from, common sense can take you the rest of the way. Eat anything sold at the butcher shop, for instance; you don't have to run an "idolatry test" on every item. **26** "The earth," after all, "is God's, and everything in it." That "everything" certainly includes the leg of lamb in the butcher shop. **27** If a nonbeliever invites you to dinner and you feel like going, go ahead and enjoy yourself; eat everything placed before you. It would be both bad manners and bad spirituality to cross-examine your host on the ethical purity of each course as it is served. **28** On the other hand, if he goes out of his way to tell you that this or that was sacrificed to god or goddess so-and-so, you should pass. Even though you may be indifferent as to where it came from, he isn't, and you don't want to send mixed messages to him about who you are worshipping.

**29** But, except for these special cases, I'm not going to walk around on eggshells worrying about what small-minded people might say; I'm going to stride free and easy, knowing what our large-minded Master has already said. **30** If I eat what is served to me, grateful to God for what is on the table, how can I worry about what someone will say? I thanked God for it and he blessed it!

**31** So eat your meals heartily, not worrying about what others say about you — you're eating to God's glory, after all, not to please them. As a matter of fact, do everything that way, heartily and freely to God's glory. **32** At the same time, don't be callous in your exercise of freedom, thoughtlessly stepping on the toes of those who aren't as free as you are. **33** I try my best to be considerate of everyone's feelings in all these matters; I hope you will be, too.

## Gal 4:8-11 -- NIV

<sup>8</sup> Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. <sup>9</sup> 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? <sup>10</sup> You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! <sup>11</sup> I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

- What was the background of the Galatian Christians? (Jews? Paganism?)
- “Turning back” to WHAT?
- What were the “special days and months and seasons and years” dedicated to?

## Romans 14

### Rom 14 -- NIV

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

2 One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.

3 The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. 4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

5 One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

6 He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. 7 For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. 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.

9 For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

### Rom 14 – The Message

14 Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don't see things the way you do. And don't jump all over them every time they do or say something you don't agree with — even when it seems that they are strong on opinions but weak in the faith department. Remember, they have their own history to deal with. Treat them gently.

2 For instance, a person who has been around for a while might well be convinced that he can eat anything on the table, while another, with a different background, might assume all Christians should be vegetarians and eat accordingly. 3 But since both are guests at Christ's table, wouldn't it be terribly rude if they fell to criticizing what the other ate or didn't eat? God, after all, invited them both to the table. 4 Do you have any business crossing people off the guest list or interfering with God's welcome? If there are corrections to be made or manners to be learned, God can handle that without your help.

5 Or, say, one person thinks that some days should be set aside as holy and another thinks that each day is pretty much like any other. There are good reasons either way. So, each person is free to follow the convictions of conscience.

6 What's important in all this is that if you keep a holy day, keep it for God's sake; if you eat meat, eat it to the glory of God and thank God for prime rib; if you're a vegetarian, eat vegetables to the glory of God and thank God for broccoli. 7 None of us are permitted to insist on our own way in these matters. 8 It's God we are answerable to — all the way from life to death and everything in between — not each other. 9 That's why Jesus lived and died and then lived again: so that he could be our Master across the entire range of life and death, and free us from the petty tyrannies of

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.

11 It is written:

"As surely as I live,' says the Lord,  
'every knee will bow before me;  
every tongue will confess to God.'" a

12 So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

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. 14 As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean.

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. 16 Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil.

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. 21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

22 So whatever you believe about these things

each other.

10 So where does that leave you when you criticize a brother? And where does that leave you when you condescend to a sister? I'd say it leaves you looking pretty silly — or worse. Eventually, we're all going to end up kneeling side by side in the place of judgment, facing God. Your critical and condescending ways aren't going to improve your position there one bit. 11 Read it for yourself in Scripture:

"As I live and breathe," God says,  
"every knee will bow before me;  
Every tongue will tell the honest truth  
that I and only I am God."

12 So tend to your knitting. You've got your hands full just taking care of your own life before God.

13 Forget about deciding what's right for each other. Here's what you need to be concerned about: that you don't get in the way of someone else, making life more difficult than it already is. 14 I'm convinced — Jesus convinced me! — that everything as it is in itself is holy. We, of course, by the way we treat it or talk about it, can contaminate it.

15 If you confuse others by making a big issue over what they eat or don't eat, you're no longer a companion with them in love, are you? These, remember, are persons for whom Christ died. Would you risk sending them to hell over an item in their diet? 16 Don't you dare let a piece of God-blessed food become an occasion of soul-poisoning!

17 God's kingdom isn't a matter of what you put in your stomach, for goodness' sake. It's what God does with your life as he sets it right, puts it together, and completes it with joy. 18 Your task is to single-mindedly serve Christ. Do that and you'll kill two birds with one stone: pleasing the God above you and proving your worth to the people around you.

19 So let's agree to use all our energy in getting along with each other. Help others with encouraging words; 20 don't drag them down by finding fault. You're certainly not going to permit an argument over what is served or not served at supper to wreck God's work among you, are you? I said it before and I'll say it again: All food is good, but it can turn bad if you use it badly, if you use it to trip others up and send them sprawling. 21 When you sit down to a meal, your primary concern should not be to feed your own face but to share the life of Jesus. So be sensitive and courteous to the others who are eating. Don't eat or say or do things that might interfere with the free exchange of love.

<p>keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. <sup>23</sup> But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.</p>	<p><sup>22</sup> Cultivate your own relationship with God, but don't impose it on others. You're fortunate if your behavior and your belief are coherent. <sup>23</sup> But if you're not sure, if you notice that you are acting in ways inconsistent with what you believe — some days trying to impose your opinions on others, other days just trying to please them — then you know that you're out of line. If the way you live isn't consistent with what you believe, then it's wrong.</p>
---	--

Acts 16:1-5 NASB

**16** And he came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, <sup>2</sup> and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. <sup>3</sup> Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. <sup>4</sup> Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees, which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe. <sup>5</sup> So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.

Gal 2:1-5 NIV

**2** Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. <sup>2</sup> I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain. <sup>3</sup> Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. <sup>4</sup> [This matter arose] because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. <sup>5</sup> We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.

## WHAT PAUL DID NOT SAY

There are multiple theories on WHY the book of Romans was written, and what its “theme” is (assuming a theme exists.) One is that Romans was written IN ORDER to include Chapter 14, and help heal a division in the church among the Gentile and Jewish Christians. This may be true. Another “theme” suggested by many is that **Paul is commending to these saints in Rome the doctrine of justification by grace through faith.** Paul explains that one is allowed to have STRONG convictions on multiple issues affecting one’s walk with the Lord, but is NOT free to bind those perceptions and convictions on another Christian.

So before we try to see how we should respond to Romans 14, let’s look at a few things that Paul is NOT saying in that chapter.

- He is not discussing direct commands from God. The issues in Romans 14 do not have anything to do with doctrines God has spelled out unambiguously for us in His Word.
- Neither is he discussing matters of indifference. The examples he used in this chapter were Heaven and Hell “salvation issues” to the people he was writing to. Yes, they were matters of “difference” between the Roman Christians, but they were not INDIFFERENT, “take it or leave it” matters.
- And note that Paul never suggests compromise as a solution! He never suggests “giving in” or “giving up” on the principles involved. He does emphatically say that we are to ACCEPT each other, even when we hold different convictions!
- Paul does not use the word faith in this chapter to imply “The Faith.”
  - Jude: 3 Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for **the faith** that was once for all entrusted to the saints. 4 For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.
  - Rather, when Paul uses “faith” in this chapter he uses it in the sense of a firm, studied belief in the understanding we have regarding some doctrine or practice.
  - Romans 14:22-23 "The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin."
  - Paul refers to these "opinions" (aka, "disputable matters") in this chapter as matters of "faith" for those who hold them.
  - Our convictions, therefore, become for each of us matters of deep personal faith. Understanding this will help us not to seek to bind our own "faith" upon a brother or sister, or a congregation, or to judge them as "faithless" if their convictions differ with ours!
- We should also note a point that Paul is not making in this text, although it is often read into it. The weak brother or sister is not someone who has a susceptibility to a particular vice, and Paul does not urge the strong believer to abstain because he is worried that our example may lead that individual to a life of degradation. This type of argument is especially brought up in

connection with the drinking of alcohol. We are told that we ought to avoid drinking because our example may lead someone who has a weakness for alcohol to indulge to excess and so bring physical and perhaps even spiritual ruin to that person. *This **concern** may well be valid,* but it is not what Paul is teaching here. The weak are not those who have a propensity to eat meat or to drink wine. Their weakness is spiritual: an inability to see that their faith *allows* them to drink. The potential problem is not that they may indulge to excess but that they may drink even when their faith is still telling them not to.

## Over-Arching Principles

- What was the issue (or issues) that Romans 14 was written to resolve?
  - Eat meat sacrificed to idols? NO
  - Observe holy days? NO
  - ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER!
  - Both sides were “right;” God accepted *both* groups.
  - The problem was not the “issue(s);” the problem was the *division* in the church.
  - Uniformity was not required. But UNITY is an absolute necessity.
- JESUS IS LORD!
  - Eight times in verses 4-9 (depending on version) Paul reminds us that JESUS IS LORD.
  - There is only ONE Lord... and we are not He!
  - Romans 14:4-9 (NIV) -- 4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. 5 One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. 7 For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. 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. 9 For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.
- JESUS IS JUDGE!
  - Rom 14:10-12 (NIV) -- 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. 11 It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" 12 So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.
  - We may (indeed, *must*) share His judgments revealed in His Word to the world. But we should pay especial attention that we do not attempt to “fill in” for The Judge!
- UNITY IS REQUIRED; UNIFORMITY IS NOT.
  - Rom 14:16-19 (NIV) -- 16 Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. 19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

## **JUDGE (1 Cor 5) or DO NOT JUDGE (Rom 14) ??**

Hold Your Ground, or

- i. Accommodate?
- ii. Give In?
- iii. Adapt?
- iv. Compromise?
- v. Get Used To?
- vi. Accept?

- Difference between the situations in 1 Cor 5 and Rom 14?
  
- How about the difference between the Timothy and Titus situations, in Acts 16 and Galatians 2?

## Disputable Matters / Examples

In 1 Cor 5 Paul says, “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked man from among you.” The reader of 1 Corinthians 8, where the issue of eating meat offered to idols is raised, will have in his mind this powerful statement from chapter five. He will know that the debatable/disputable matters of Christian liberty are something very different than clear-cut sins such as sexual immorality.

Paul and his original audience understood that the “disputable matters” in Romans 14—behaviors which Christians are not to pass judgment on their brothers concerning—are not matters God has revealed in His Word as sin.

Rather, the disputable matters are things which God does not explicitly condemn, and which fall within the circle of Christian liberty. Whether these behaviors are right or wrong depends on the convictions and heart attitude of the one doing them. Of course, not everyone will agree about what God’s Word clearly condemns and what it doesn’t. Sometimes this is the basis of dispute.

In 1 Corinthians 5 we are commanded to judge our brother, and in Romans 14 we are commanded *not* to judge our brother. This appears to be a contradiction. But it isn’t, because the passages are talking about two very different issues. 1 Corinthians 5 is talking about definite sins for which we are to judge our brothers in light of God’s revealed truth. We are to go to them in love, confront them, and call them to repentance.

There’s an Internet article by a former pastor who claims homosexual behavior is a disputable matter and that according to Romans 14 we should consider it acceptable in the body of Christ. Of course, this was not considered disputable to Paul or the early church. It’s not considered by him to be a gray area, any more than a man having sex with his step-mom.

Romans 14 addresses matters of Christian liberty. It tells us we shouldn’t judge our brother if he doesn’t feel the liberty to do what we do. And we shouldn’t judge our brothers who feel the liberty to do what we in good conscience cannot.

In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul calls upon the Corinthians to *narrow* their view of Christian liberty. In 1 Corinthians 8-10 (and again in Romans 14) he calls on them to *broaden* their view of Christian liberty. In the one case, where it is black and white, we should exercise judgment concerning sin. In the other case, where it is gray, we should withhold judgment and give our brother the benefit of the doubt.

Which of the 100 items on the next page are Disputable Matters?

## A list of 100 items which have precipitated church splits:

01 taking of oaths	51 re-baptism of Baptists and Christian Church members
02 serving in the military	52 the "five items of worship"
03 inflicting capital punishment	53 use of choirs, choruses, quartets, solos, etc.
04 using force to defend oneself or others	54 serving the Lord's Supper on Sunday evening
05 voting for political candidates	55 serving the Lord's Supper other than in assemblies
06 serving as a government official	56 integration of races
07 engaging in political activism	57 smoking
08 Christmas or Easter programs	58 total abstinence from alcoholic beverages
09 letting a non-member lead prayer	59 membership in fraternal orders
10 lifting hands while singing	60 contributing to public charities
11 joining a ministerial alliance	61 use of Bible class literature
12 indwelling of the Holy Spirit	62 youth directors, youth rallies, youth camps
13 work of the Holy Spirit	63 the six days of creation being literal days
14 baptism of the Holy Spirit	64 the extent of evolution
15 prayer for healing	65 the operation of Christian hospitals
16 the Trinity	66 awards and prizes for church activities
17 special providence	67 debating religious issues
18 how God answers prayer	68 ministers of education, ministers of music, etc.
19 fasting	69 benevolence to fellow-disciples only
21 translations of the Bible	70 the baptismal "formula"
21 use of Thee and Thou in prayer	71 formal confession before baptism
22 authority of elders	72 going to law against disciples
23 who selects and appoints elders	73 dedicating babies
24 qualifications of elders	74 signing contribution pledge cards
25 tenure of elders	75 children's homes under eldership or a board
26 elders presiding at the Lord's Table	76 dancing
27 qualifications of deacons	77 women wearing shorts and slacks
28 deaconesses	78 women wearing slacks to church services
29 enrolling widows	79 girls leading prayer in family devotionals
30 addressing disciples as Major or Doctor	80 girls leading prayer in youth devotionals
31 long hair on men	81 clapping hands during singing
32 midweek contributions	82 buying VBS refreshments from the treasury
33 dimming the lights during prayer	83 the present day activity of demons
34 singing as the emblems are passed	84 applauding in the assembly
35 use of church buildings for secular activities	85 use of God's name as a by-word
36 use of pictures of Jesus	86 use of euphemisms of God's name in by-words
37 use of symbols such as the cross	87 use of contraceptives
38 use of steeples and stained glass windows	88 abortion
39 use of the term Sunday School	89 adopting out an illegitimate child
40 passing of the collection baskets	90 women working outside the home
41 eating in the church building	91 Children's Bible Hour
42 grounds for disfellowshipping	92 bussing children to services
43 support of colleges from the church treasury	93 "What is to be will be."
44 divorce for any cause	94 bodily resurrection
45 remarriage of a divorced person	95 if we shall know each other in heaven
46 preacher officiating at a wedding of a divorced person	96 degrees of reward and punishment
47 disciples marrying non-members	97 whether heaven and hell are literal places
48 preacher officiating for a mixed marriage	98 dress code for men serving the Lord's Supper
49 use of an instrument in "church" weddings	99 whether Christ came in AD 70
50 method and type of inspiration of the Bible	100 a name for the church

(This listing borrows heavily from a list by Patrick M. Phillips, who also gives credit to James Robert Jarrell, in Mission Messenger, May 1971.)

## A Stumbling Block: What is it?

The stumbling block of 1 Corinthians 8 (and Romans 14) is an action, taken by a biblically informed believer, that does not in itself violate any scriptural precept or principle, but which a less knowledgeable or less mature believer might imitate, in a way that violates his conscience.

In context, the mature believer feels free to eat meat offered to idols, because meat is meat and it's a provision of God, and idols are nothing. But the immature believer has come from a background of idol worship, so when he sees his brother eating meat, it eggs him on to do it. However, he associates the meat with the idols, and therefore is violating his conscience by eating it.

A stumbling block, then, is not just anything that causes someone to be offended.

- It is not a stumbling block to commit adultery, because adultery is inherently sinful. It's always a bad example to do wrong, obviously, but this isn't what the passage is dealing with.
- It is not a stumbling block for a man to have long hair and a pony tail, if the people who are offended by this are not thereby tempted to have a pony tail themselves, and in doing so violate their conscience.
- It cannot be a stumbling block when a woman is offended at a man's beard, unless she is tempted to grow a beard and in doing so would violate her conscience. It is not a stumbling block when a man is offended at a woman nursing a baby in church, since he is presumably not going to be tempted to start nursing a baby.
- The church people who are most offended by wine drinking would typically never be tempted to drink wine in the first place. Drinking alcohol may be a stumbling block, but not to those offended by it, but rather to those who may imitate this action without sufficiently strong conscience and self-control. They might not be able to handle it, so it would do them damage, become addictive and lead them into sin.

The biblical stumbling block involves a more mature believer exercising Christian liberty in a way that hurts a younger less mature believer. It does so by prompting him to say "I guess I can go ahead and drink alcohol (or whatever)" when by doing so he will end up sinning because of being unable to handle this action that another believer might be able to handle.

*In many churches, it is older Christians, who think of themselves as more mature, who are offended at the behavior of younger Christians. Almost never are they tempted to do what the younger Christians are doing that offends them (such as listening to rock music), and therefore their offense has nothing to do with the stumbling block of 1 Corinthians 8 or Romans 14.*

## Weaker Brother / Examples

**Weaker Brother Syndrome** --- The practice of *strong*-willed disciples who use the claim of being the "weaker brother" as a weapon to get their way in a congregation. When an individual, or group of individuals, control a congregation in this manner, then both they and the congregation are at fault --- the strong-willed, "weaker brother" for doing it, and the congregation for allowing it!

- This is one of the greatest abuses of Romans 14.
- Instead of saying "you shouldn't do that because it's a stumbling block to me," these "professional weaker brothers" should engage in healthy biblical dialogue concerning the subject and learn to accept those things that are no more than differences in taste. They should not pull out "stumbling block" as a trump card that means "you can't exercise Christian liberty in any area I'm uncomfortable with." In fact, those who are biblically informed enough to even be familiar with the term stumbling block should be mature enough not to trip over one.

But also, there *are* brethren who are *genuinely* weak in their faith; whose convictions are *unsettled* (the true meaning of the Greek word employed by Paul) and thus still in the formative stage; who are sincerely striving to grow and develop in their understanding of God's will. We *must* be sensitive to *these* brethren, and not seek to be a source of stumbling as they mature spiritually.

On the other hand, there are certain persons in virtually every fold who are *fixed* and *hardened* in their ways, opinions, ideas, and preferences, and who have absolutely no desire or intention whatsoever of changing their views. If their whims are ever seriously threatened you can count on them whipping out this "weaker brother" ploy to manipulate the congregation. Such persons must NEVER be given in to .... *never* ... or they will be a continual hindrance to the forward progress of the church and its mission.

Paul makes it very clear, by his own example and by the inspired words he penned to the Galatian brethren, that yielding to these "false brethren" is an affront to the Gospel (Galatians 2:4-5).

Remember that those who are "weaker" are *not* to judge and condemn those whose convictions differ from theirs. "But you, why do you judge your brother?" (vs. 10). The "weaker" brother has no right to judge the brother who differs with him on some matter of personal conviction. For the "weaker" brother to characterize the "stronger" brother as an "apostate," or a "heretic," or a "false teacher," for example, because of differing convictions, is just as much a sin as the "stronger" brother regarding with utter contempt the "weaker" brother who has not yet come to appreciate his full freedom in Christ. **Both must accept the other.**

Misc...

Drs. Jamieson, Fausset and Brown write, "Of course, this is not to be over-pressed, as if it were wrong to discuss such points at all with our weaker brethren. All that is here condemned is such a zeal for small points as endangers Christian love" [*Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 1179]. Paul is certainly not forbidding those who are settled in faith from sharing their convictions with others; what he is forbidding is the *imposing* of those convictions upon others and also the *flaunting* of those convictions before others. By all means, *discuss* your differences, perhaps even debate them, but do not divide over them, and do not denounce and defame those with whom you differ.

*The editor of one of "our" Christian papers quoted from a letter he received, as follows:  
"FNAME LNAME shows his faulty reasoning throughout his sermon. He seems to contradict himself more than once. He needs to be exposed for the ignorant false teacher he is." He then added his own words: "With this statement I agree." CFTF,  
July/August 2012.*

Further, the strong must never allow the weak to *dictate* unto them the parameters of their own walk with the Lord. "For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?" (1 Cor. 10:29-30). If my fellow disciples choose not to engage in some activity because it would violate their conscience, that is their right. Indeed, I applaud them for this resolve. However, if they seek to bind their scruples upon me, they will be met with resistance. Our liberty must never be forfeited. It was won at too high a price! "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). Paul spoke of "some false brothers who had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves," and he declared emphatically, "We did not give in to them for a moment!" (Gal. 2:4-5). Neither must we. **There is a vast difference between those who are unsettled in their faith, and those who are calcified in their convictions,** playing the "weaker brother" card in order to get their way. To those in the former category we show sensitivity in the exercise of our freedom; to those in the latter category we *never* defer for even a moment. A perfect example is when Paul circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3), yet did not circumcise Titus (Gal. 2:3). Different crowd; different concerns.