

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

### **Material to cover for 3/30/2014 (final class for this topic) →**

1. Acts 16:1-5 Timothy
2. Gal 2:1-5 Titus
3. Gal 5:1-12 Slavery
4. Acts 21:17-26 Vow
5. Audio Foree
6. Romans 14 Issue
7. Discussion Three Back
8. What is: A Stumbling Block?
9. Who is: The Weaker Brother?

**Acts 16:1-5 NASB** (Pre "Judge" and leads into audio selection also...)

**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.**

**Gal 5:1-12 NIV**

**5** 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**.

<sup>2</sup> Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. <sup>3</sup> Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. <sup>4</sup> You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. <sup>5</sup> But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. <sup>6</sup> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

<sup>7</sup> You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? <sup>8</sup> That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. <sup>9</sup> "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." <sup>10</sup> I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be. <sup>11</sup> Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. <sup>12</sup> As for those agitators, **I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!**

## Acts 21:17-26 NIV

<sup>17</sup> When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. <sup>18</sup> The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. <sup>19</sup> Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

<sup>20</sup> When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and **all of them are zealous for the law**. <sup>21</sup> They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, **telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs**. <sup>22</sup> What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, <sup>23</sup> so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. <sup>24</sup> Take these men, join in their **purification rites** and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. <sup>25</sup> As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality."

<sup>26</sup> **The next day** Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

## Foree Grove Audio

#1 – 3 minutes

#2 – 6 minutes

## REPEAT FROM PRIOR CLASS TIME →

- 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 of thought, belief, and practice was not required. But UNITY is an absolute necessity.**

**Discuss THREE items from the list of 100 below.**

- Something YOU have personally encountered
- Preferably, present both sides of the issue

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

The biblical stumbling block involves a more mature believer exercising Christian liberty in a way that hurts a 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 his not being *confident* that it is acceptable to the Lord, i.e., by not being able to do it "in faith."

*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 work to NOT be a source of stumbling as they mature spiritually.

On the other hand, there are certain persons in virtually every congregation 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.**