

DISPUTABLE MATTERS

Part Three

3/30/2014

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, ²and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. ³Paul 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. ⁴Now 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. ⁵So 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. ² 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. ³ Yet **not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised**, even though he was a Greek. ⁴ [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**. ⁵ **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**.

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

7 You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? **8** That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. **9** "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." **10** 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. **11** Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. **12** As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

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

20 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.** **21** 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. **22** What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, **23** so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. **24** 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. **25** 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."

26 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? Observe holy days?
 - **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.**

THREE ITEM DISCUSSION

- **Personal Encounter**
- **Present Both Sides**

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.

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.**

WEAKER BROTHER / EXAMPLES (slide one)

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.

WEAKER BROTHER / EXAMPLES (slide two)

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).

WEAKER BROTHER / EXAMPLES (slide three)

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.