

Romans 14¹ and 15:1-4

It's important to understand the context of this chapter to fully comprehend it. First of all this letter was written to both Jew and Gentile believers in Rome. The Jews, under the law had multiple restrictions when it came to food such as pork, shellfish, and certain birds and insects (see Lev. 11). Additionally, in the meat markets of Rome, there were no guarantees about how the meats had been prepared. Since the Jews were forbidden from eating blood, the blood of all "clean" animals had to be drained thoroughly before it could be prepared. They could not be sure the meats that were being sold were processed this way. There was even a possibility that the meats sold had been recently offered in worship of idols. For this reason, many Jews found it easier to eat vegetarian². The Gentiles, on the other hand had no food restrictions.

The second thing we need to understand is that in Paul's writings there are two basic attitudes about this topic. He was harshly opposed to anyone thinking that keeping the Jewish laws concerning food in some way brought justification (righteousness) before God or in some way improved their standing with God. On the other hand, as in this passage, he makes room for people to follow their conscience.

Here is the classic example of Paul rebuking believers for believers for making food or holidays a religious issue:

Colossians 2: 16-17; 20-23

So let no one judge you in **food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths**, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

20 Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations— 21 "**Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,**" 22 which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

Paul even equated such religious thinking as apostasy!

1 Timothy 1:1-4

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will **depart from the faith**, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, 3 forbidding to marry, and **commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving** by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; 5 for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

¹ In this lesson, the number of the comment corresponds with the number of the verse.

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² Andrew Wommack Living Commentary, Romans 14

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To the Gentile believers in Galatia who were beginning to embrace aspects of the Jewish law as a means of justification, Paul spoke in the harshest terms that doing so was to fall from grace and become estranged from Christ.

Galatians 4:8-19

*But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. 9 But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the **weak and beggarly elements**, to which you desire again to be in bondage? 10 **You observe days and months and seasons and years.** 11 I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.*

Galatians 5:4

You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

Yet in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, Paul speaks more along the lines of Romans 14. He speaks of meat that has been offered to idols. Some thought it was wrong to eat it, and others believed it was what it was... just meat, and yet Paul teaches there much as he does here, not to offend our brothers by how we eat.

So, with these things in mind, we can more easily understand Romans 14.

1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. 2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. 3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.

1. Paul is clearly saying that someone who has a guilty conscience about what he eats or drinks or what days are celebrated is weak in the faith. This person does not yet understand that all foods are clean and there are no dietary restrictions. This person has likely brought his/her former way of thinking into Christianity. Paul is not talking about thinking one is saved or made more holy by what he/she eats or drinks. That would bring about a different response as noted above.
2. This group of people was likely the Jews of Rome who had become vegetarian as a way to avoid eating the “contaminated” meat available to them.
 - a. We will always have among us people who are transitioning in their thinking about things. We don’t need to correct them. Give them time to come to realizations about different areas in their lives.
 - b. What about vegetarians today?
 - i. There are two basic groups. The first believes it is better to not eat meats as far as health goes. This is not a religious issue. It doesn’t even involve one’s conscience, but a dietary choice. Most people in this group see it as such and don’t care that others eat meat.
 - ii. The other group finds it IMMORAL to eat animals. This has to do with conscience. However, Paul describes such people as weak because they don’t understand that it is acceptable before God to eat any meat.

3. Paul shows in verse three that despising people for what they eat or don't eat is a two way street. There is a tendency for the one who can eat meat with a clean conscience to look down on someone who can't. There is also the tendency for someone who thinks eating meat is wrong to look down on those who do. Paul is saying, if both persons are born again... God has received them both... so don't despise each other.

4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

4. "His own master" refers to God. This statement must be seen in context. Clearly, in other writings of Paul, he did judge what people believed and what they were doing. This is talking about what people eat and drink and what days they observe. Again, this is not about those who teach that in order to be right before God we must not eat certain foods (which Paul condemned in Galatians).
 - a. Paul is pointing out that each of us stands before God as individuals. He is able to make us stand, even if we are weak in our understanding.

5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

5. He now discusses which days we observe³. For us this would be about what day of the week we gather. Some might suggest Sunday is the only appropriate day. Others might think any day of the week is fine. Whatever you do, be convinced of it in your own mind.
 - a. This might also apply to the observance of days like Christmas. Some believers love to celebrate Christmas, and others see it as just another day. Either view is fine.
6. Whatever you do, do before the Lord and give Him thanks. Whatever you don't do, don't do it before the Lord and give Him thanks.

7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. 8 For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. 9 For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

7. Here Paul is referring to the fact that none of us live completely isolated. We are part of each other as the body of Christ. We are all the Lord's
8. Each of us lives and dies to the Lord for we are His.
9. Jesus Christ is our Lord whether we are alive or dead.
 - a. Sadly, some use verse 9 to support the heresy that all are saved. Paul is not speaking of all men in this chapter. He is speaking of born again believers. His people are His whether they are alive or dead. It does not mean that all people, even those who have died outside of Christ are His. This would be to contradict the gospel. Although the offer of salvation is given to all men, only those who receive it are His.

³ By "observe", it could be referring to days of fasting or feasting.

10 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. 11 For it is written:
“As I live, says the Lord,
Every knee shall bow to Me,
And every tongue shall confess to God.”
12 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

10. In verses 10-11 and the rest of the chapter Paul is talking about not showing contempt for how another believer chooses to live.

a. **It's important to understand that this has nothing to do with our eternal salvation. If we believe in Jesus, we are made righteous before God and are saved. We will not be judged in the sense of our eternal salvation.**

John 5:24

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

- i. The word for “judgment” in John 5:24 is “krisis”. It comes from the word “krinō which means to try, condemn, punish: - avenge, conclude, condemn, damn⁴.
- ii. Believers in Jesus Christ will not be judged (condemned to hell, punished for sin, damned; God will not take vengeance on us).
- iii. The word for “judgment” in Romans 14:10 is “bema” and means “a step, that is, foot breath; by implication a rostrum, that is, tribunal: - judgment-seat, set [foot] on, throne.”

b. Nor does it mean that after we are forgiven of our initial sins, the ones we commit afterward are all recorded and we have to give an account for them. There will be NO DVD of our lives broadcast to all of mankind. No! We are continually forgiven for all sin.

John 1:7

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

The Meaning of the Judgment (Bema) Seat⁵

Both Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:9 speak of the “judgment seat.” This is a translation of one Greek word, the word bema. While bema is used in the gospels and Acts of the raised platform where a Roman magistrate or ruler sat to make decisions and pass sentence (Matt. 27:19; John 19:13), its use in the epistles by Paul, because of his many allusions to the Greek athletic contests, is more in keeping with its original use among the Greeks.

This word was taken from Isthmian games where the contestants would compete for the prize under the careful scrutiny of judges who would make sure that every rule of the contest was obeyed (cf. 2 Tim. 2:5). The victor of a given event who participated according to the rules was led by the judge to the platform called the Bema. There the laurel wreath was placed on his head as a symbol of victory (cf. 1 Cor. 9:24-25).

⁴ Unless otherwise stated, all definitions are from Strong's Concordance.

⁵ Taken from: <http://bible.org/article/doctrine-rewards-judgment-seat-bema-christ>

In all of these passages, “Paul was picturing the believer as a competitor in a spiritual contest. As the victorious Grecian athlete appeared before the Bema to receive his perishable award, so the Christian will appear before Christ’s Bema to receive his imperishable award. The judge at the Bema bestowed rewards to the victors. He did not whip the losers.” We might add, neither did he sentence them to hard labor.

In other words, it is a reward seat and portrays a time of **rewards or loss of rewards** following examination, but it is not a time of punishment where believers are judged for their sins. Such would be inconsistent with the finished work of Christ on the Cross because He totally paid the penalty for our sins. Chafer and Walvoord have an excellent word on this view:

With reference to sin, Scripture teaches that the child of God under grace shall not come into judgment (John 3:18; 5:24; 6:37; Rom. 5:1; 8:1; 1 Cor. 11:32); in his standing before God, and on the ground that the penalty for all sin—past, present, and future (Col. 2:13)—has been borne by Christ as the perfect Substitute, the believer is not only placed beyond condemnation, but being in Christ is accepted in the perfection of Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:6; Col. 2:10; Heb. 10:14) and loved of God as Christ is loved (John 17:23).

Again, Chafer writes concerning the Bema, “It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the judgment is unrelated to the problem of sin, that it is more for the bestowing of rewards than the rejection of failure.”

From: The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

As Lord, Jesus will one day review and evaluate the ministry of His servants at His **judgment seat** (bēma; see comments on 2 Cor. 5:10). Paul affirmed the certainty of this event by quoting Isaiah 49:18 and 45:23, pertaining to everyone standing **before** Christ and confessing Him as Lord (cf. Phil. 2:10-11). At that event **each** believer **will give an account** (lit., “a word”) **of himself to God**. Since Paul was writing to the Christians in Rome (Rom. 1:7) and included himself with them in the first personal plural pronoun and verb (“we will all stand,” 14:10), “God’s judgment seat” is only for believers in the Lord. What is here called God’s judgment seat is the judgment seat of Christ in 2 Corinthians 5:10. Because God judges through His Son (John 5:22, 27), this judgment seat can be said to belong to both the Father and the Son. **The issue of the believer’s eternal destiny will not be at stake; that was settled by his faith in Christ** (cf. Rom. 8:1). **Each believer’s life of service will be under review in which some loss will be experienced** (cf. 1 Cor. 3:12-15), **but he will be rewarded for what endures** (cf. 1 Cor. 4:4-5). This judgment of believers climactically demonstrates God’s lordship. -The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

OVERVIEW OF JUDGMENT

A. There are two judgment seats mentioned in scripture.

a. The Great White Throne Judgment

Revelation 20:11-15

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.¹² And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.¹³ The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.¹⁴ Then

Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

b. The Judgment Seat of Christ

Romans 14:10

But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:10

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

B. Believers will not be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment.

a. The Great White Throne Judgment is the final judgment.

- i. It will take place after the millennium (thousand years of peace on earth).
- ii. It is a judgment of the dead. Since all believers will have been resurrected and live during the millennium (hence, they are alive and not dead at the time of this judgment) they will not be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment.

C. Only believers in Jesus Christ will stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

a. Most commentators believe this judgment happens sometime after the rapture.

D. What is the purpose of the Judgment Seat of Christ?

a. We will all give an account for what has been done in the body BOTH good and bad.

- i. How will this judgment take place? Some picture a large gathering of all believers and each person coming individually before Christ to give an account before all. However, it could be that it will happen simultaneously, all believers giving an account at the same moment.
- ii. Some say that the Judgment Seat of Christ will only be for giving out rewards, but it is difficult to come to this conclusion.

2 Corinthians 5:10

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

iii. Knowing that Jesus has taken the punishment for our sins and that they are forgiven, the Judgment Seat of Christ:

1. Will NOT DETERMINE ULTIMATE SALVATION.
2. Will not include a punishment for sin.

iv. Since the scriptures are not clear about for what we will give an account, we are left to speculate.

1. The “good” will doubtless be for the good we have done in our bodies and toward each other.
2. The “bad” for which we will give account will likely be for actions which we refused to change, going against our conscience, and loss of reward for certain works we’ve done.
 - a. A parent who raised their children (provided for their needs) but who was unkind, unloving, or even abusive. God cannot reward someone for this. So, this person will “suffer loss” (lose his reward).
 - b. A pastor who abused His flock by lording over them or who added law to grace. Even though he worked hard at being a pastor, God cannot reward someone for abusing others or laying faulty foundation.

- c. A believer who acted outside of faith; who went against his conscience (as seen in this chapter)
 - d. People who do works (praying, fasting, giving, etc.) to “be seen of men”.
- b. Those who teach and minister in the body of Christ will be held accountable for what they have taught and how they have ministered.

1 Corinthians 3:5-17

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. **But let each one take heed how he builds on it.** 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 **each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.** 14 **If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.** 15 **If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.** 16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

- 1. **This passage is not referring to the individual temple of God which each one of us is. It is referring to the corporate temple of God, the body of Christ, which we all are. God holds His temple, His body, in high regard and does not take lightly any action that defiles His temple.**
- E. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, we not only give an account of “bad”, but we are also rewarded for “good”. The good for which we are rewarded can be summarized this way.
- Believing in Him (our faith)
 - Loving one another (our acts of kindness to each other)
- a. Rewards are clearly going to be given to believers at the judgment seat of Christ, but it is easy to get in the wrong frame of mind about rewards.
- Some begin to work for the reward instead of for the Lord and out of love.
 - Others begin to see things backwards... that if they don’t work sufficiently, they might not even go to heaven if they don’t do enough works.
- b. **However, “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). We are not saved by good works, but it will be a natural fruit of our relationship with God. God **DOES** take note of our good works. In fact, it would be unjust for God to ignore them.**
- Hebrews 6:10**
- For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, **in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.**

c. What rewards does the New Testament mention?

i. Crowns (notice the reason for each)

1. Crown of Righteousness

2 Timothy 4:8

Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also **to all who have loved His appearing.**

2. Crown of Life

James 1:12

Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised **to those who love Him.**

3. Crown of Glory

1 Peter 5:1-4

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: 2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, **you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.**

ii. Rewards: That we will be rewarded there is no doubt. Here are a few of the many Scriptures that speak to this. Remember, that our rewards are based on our faith in Jesus and loving each other.

1. Our Faith

John 6:29

Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you **believe** in Him whom He sent."

Hebrews 11:6

But without **faith** it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a **rewarder** of those who diligently seek Him.

Matthew 5:12

(Those who are persecuted) Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for **great is your reward in heaven**, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 6:6

But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will **reward** you openly.

Colossians 2:16-19

So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. 18 **Let no one cheat you of your reward**, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.

Hebrews 10:35

Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. 36 For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise

2. Loving Others

Colossians 3:23-25

And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. 25 But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.

1 Corinthians 3:8

Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and **each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.**

1 Corinthians 3:11-15

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and **the fire will test each one's work**, of what sort it is. 14 **If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.** 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Matthew 16:27

For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will **reward each according to his works.**

Matthew 6:3-4

"But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret **will Himself reward you openly.**"

Matthew 6:18

"But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret **will reward you openly.**"

Matthew 10:41

"He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a **prophet's reward.** And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall **receive a righteous man's reward.**"

Matthew 10:42

And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, **he shall by no means lose his reward.**"

Luke 6:35

But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and **your reward will be great**, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.

13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way. 14 I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 15 Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. 16 Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil;

13. Instead of passing judgment on our brother's scruples or what we consider a lack of them, let us focus on not being the reason our brother goes against his conscience.
14. There is no unclean food. However, if someone considers it to be unclean, it is unclean to him because of his conscience.

15. You are right in knowing that all food is clean, but the weaker brother does not yet have a clear conscience about this. So, don't eat what he won't in front of him. To do so would be to not walk in love and to destroy the one for whom Christ died. This isn't referring to eternal destruction, but that you would be destroying their faith.
16. It's "good" to eat any food, but don't let that "good" be spoken of as evil.

17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.

17. The kingdom of God is not about what we eat or drink or don't eat and drink. It is about righteousness (the righteousness that we have as a gift by faith in Jesus Christ), and peace (both with God and in life), and joy in the Holy Spirit. Yes, JOY!
18. In considering our brother's weakness, we are serving Christ. Our actions will be acceptable to God and approved by men.

19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. 21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.

19. Pursue gives the picture of making a continual effort. Be at peace with your brother about food and drink. Instead of criticizing and judging, think about ways to build each other up.
20. Food is not worth destroying someone's faith.
21. When in the presence of someone who is weak in the faith, abstain from meat or drink which would be offensive.

22 Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

22. When you are away from the weak brother, you are free to eat and drink as you please. Do both before the Lord.
23. Paul is giving a specific truth and then a general truth.
 - a. The specific truth is that if we eat something outside of our conscience, we are guilty in this case.
 - b. Whatever is not from faith is sin means that we are not to extend our actions beyond our God-given and newly created conscience.

Romans 15:1-4

As we know, the letter was not divided by chapters. Paul doesn't start a new topic in chapter 15. We will discuss verses 1-4 here as it appears to sum up what he has said in chapter 14.

1 We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.

1. "Those who are strong" refers to those who understood that all foods are the same and that there are no special days of fasting or feasting (likely the Gentiles). The weak were those who for conscience sake would not eat certain foods (such as meat offered to idols) or wine (likely the Jews).
 - a. The strong were to tolerate the scruples of the weak and not please themselves.

- 2. We are to build each other up and do that which pleases our neighbor⁶. This doesn't mean we all need to become vegetarians and refuse to drink wine, but that in the presence of those who are weak to refrain. In 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, Paul writes in a way that is more specific and gives us a clearer picture of how this is to be understood and lived out.**

1 Corinthians 8

Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.² And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.³ But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.⁴ Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that *there is no other God but one*.⁵ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords),⁶ yet for us *there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live*.⁷ However, *there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled*.⁸ But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.⁹ But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.¹⁰ For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? ¹¹And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? ¹²But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. ¹³Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

The next passage gets down to some specifics of how this would play out.

1 Corinthians 10:23-33

All things are lawful for me⁷, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. 24 Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. 25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; 26 for "the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness." 27 If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. 28 But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness." 29 "Conscience," I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience? 30 But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for the food over which I give thanks?

⁶ All of this discussion about meat and drink has to do with a moral conscience. It is not referring to people who have chosen to eat vegetarian for health purposes. However, it would be quite rude to invite a vegetarian over for dinner and grill steaks! On the other hand, a vegetarian should not be offended if meat is being served in his presence. Simply eat the salad and don't eat the meat. Also, there are within our society people who are abstaining from alcohol, not for religious reasons, but because they do not believe they are capable of having one sip without "falling off the wagon". Whatever your views on that topic might be, it is inappropriate to offend someone in this position. You have faith to drink wine. Drink it before God and give thanks, but if you invite someone over for dinner who is weak in that area, don't serve wine with dinner. Also, if you don't have faith to drink wine, and you end up in a situation where wine is being served, you don't need to take over and tell the hosts to put away the wine. Just don't drink it. Additionally, we are not to make it our purpose to "educate" the weak about what they do. Encourage them, rather, to follow their conscience. As they are transformed by the renewing of their minds, it is entirely possible that God will make them strong in that area. The point of this whole passage is to accept all believers within our fellowship whether they be weak or strong.

⁷ Paul is referring to what he eats and drinks. He is not saying it is okay to murder and break the civil law.

³¹ Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ³² Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

Think about this. Where would you stand on this issue?

One might think, “I don’t want anything to do with idol worship or anything associated with it.”

I know I would feel this way. Even though I know it’s just meat, just the thought of any such association would offend my conscience.

You might have a different position, “What is the big deal? It’s just meat. Pass the steak sauce!”

You are strong. I am weak. We must receive each other and love each other. I have to take care not to look down on you for your “freedom”, and you must make sure not to eat meat offered to idols in my presence...not for your conscience sake, but for mine. That’s the kind of love Paul is discussing here. I don’t think you are less saved, and you don’t think I am less saved. We are just respecting each other’s conscience and showing acceptance for each other.

³ For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.” ⁴ For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

- 3. In verse three, we are given the ultimate example to follow: Jesus Christ. He willingly humbled Himself in order to serve us.**

Philippians 2:1-8

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ² fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. ³ Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

1 John 4:9-11

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

- 4. Verse four gives us yet another example. It is saying that even the entire Old Testament scriptures were recorded for our learning. By reading them, we are inspired, comforted, and learn patience. This is strong evidence that even though we are free from the Law, we can still benefit from the examples of those who lived lives well-pleasing to God. Without the benefit of having been born again, and without the indwelling presence of God, many lived in such a way to encourage us and did exploits to inspire us. This can give us HOPE... joyful anticipation of good things.**