***How the Stronger Christian Deals  
with the Weaker Christian  
RO171-02***

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Today, we turn to Romans 14:1-12 once more. Our topic is "The Spirit of Toleration," and this is segment number two.

**Grace**

The key word which describes the church age is the word "grace." The word "grace" refers to God's basic method of dealing with believers today in Christianity, in contrast to the era of Judaism under the Mosaic Law. The word "grace" connotes favor received as an unmerited gift from God. The word "grace" implies also great personal freedom in living one's own life.

Anyone who is versed in Scripture would much prefer living as a believer today under the age of grace than under the Old Testament legalistic, restrictive system. The benefits and the liberties of grace, however, do not imply freedom to violate the moral code of God, or any of His directives in Scripture concerning proper Christian conduct. And we do have a great deal of guidance in the Word of God concerning proper Christian conduct.

**Live and Let Live**

The principle of grace leaves the door open, in the very nature of the case, to a variety of individual preferences in the personal lifestyle of Christians. Within any local congregation, these personal preferences are in evidence, and sometimes can become points of conflict. Some Christians indeed have habits, and they have ways of doing things which other Christians find offensive and even mindless. Some Christians feel that they cannot do certain things before God, while other Christians do not feel such inhibitions. The matter of personal Christian liberty in Christ is so complex that the only governing principle is "live and let live."

The issue of church-age Christian conduct is directly affected by the spiritual maturity level of believers. Some Christians remain spiritually immature, and in their sincerity to please God they seek spirituality through legalistic conduct. So, they draw up sets of things that Christians should do and should not do in order to be godly, spiritual people.

The weak Christian usually views himself as being the one who is actually the strong Christian. And he is offended, as a weak Christian, by those who are exercising their grace and their freedom in Christ. The mature Christian is tempted to cast aside the weak brother as an irritant, and as a drag on his liberty in Christ. Both of these positions: the weak Christian criticizing and holding in condemnation the strong Christian; and, the strong Christian holding in contempt the weak Christian – both of these positions are condemned in the Word of God.

Those who are spiritually mature are called upon to treat kindly those who are immature, and to leave their immature preferences with God. The strong believer is not to use his liberty in Christ; his deepened knowledge of doctrine; or, his spiritual maturity, to ridicule; to intimidate; to harass; or, to upset the weak Christian unnecessarily.

**Four Basic Principles**

The strong Christian deals with the weak believer, therefore, on the basis of four basic laws, which we ought to review, because sooner or later, you are going to run into a Christian who will criticize you, or will indicate disapproval of something in your lifestyle. And if you are a Christian who is concerned with what God thinks in these matters, you must act according to the proper responses, or else you bring yourself into condemnation, and knock yourself out of your own temporal fellowship. Two Christians are faced with making decisions that they must then deal with one another on.

1. **The Law of Liberty**

When a strong Christian (a mature Christian) comes up against a weak brother, the first principle we have to observe is what we call the law of liberty. You'll find this described in 1 Corinthians 8. Every Christian enjoys this basic law of liberty. The apostle Paul says in this particular passage, to illustrate the Christian's personal liberty: "Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge, but knowledge puffs up, but love edifies." Just to know what is the truth about these matters might make you arrogant. But if you deal with them in Christian love, you will not do that.

"And if any man thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if any man loves God, the same is known of him. As concerning, therefore, the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven, on earth, as there are many gods and as many lords, there is but one God – the Father of Whom are all things, and we in Him; and, one Lord Jesus Christ by Whom are all things, and we by Him. However, there is not in every man (in every Christian man) this understanding. For some with conscience of the idol unto this hour, eats a thing offered unto an idol, and their conscience being weak is defiled. But food does not commend us to God, for neither if we eat, are we the better; and, neither if we eat, are we the worse."

The principle that the apostle Paul lays down here is that the Christian is freed from the domination of his old sin nature so that now he can walk quite freely under the guidance of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Christian, furthermore, has liberty in Christ to live his life as unto the Lord, seeking both temporal and eternal blessings on his life. The Christian is free, however, also to curtail his liberty and his freedom lifestyle for the Lord's glory.

Here in this passage, the question is about eating meat which was once offered to an idol. Paul says, "There is nothing wrong with the meat. You may eat it if you wish. You may not eat it if you do not wish. The idol is nothing, and it is of no significance to God. We as Christians have an enormous amount of freedom on living our lives as Christians: what we do; what we don't do; where we go; where we don't go; and, the whole ball of wax. That's the first law to begin with – the principle of liberty.

1. **The Law of Love**

There is a second law, however, that comes into play when we run into Christians who are offended by what you may feel free to do. This is called the Law of Love. We have it in 1 Corinthians 8:7-13. Paul says, "Now there is not in every man that knowledge, for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled." You shouldn't cause another Christian to sin by having him go against his conscience: "But food does not commend us to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; and, neither, if we not, are we the worse. But take heed, lest by any means, this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak. For if any man sees you, who has knowledge, sitting at the table in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols. And through your knowledge, shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died? But when you sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Wherefore, if food makes my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world stands, lest I make my brother to offend."

The "agape" love of the believer will restrain him, as a strong Christian, from using his liberty to cause spiritual injury to weaker Christians. This same concept was enunciated by the apostle Paul in Galatians 5:13-14, where Paul says, "For brethren, you have been called unto liberty. Only do not use liberty for an occasion to the flesh; but out of love, serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

So, the law of love comes in, and in tenderness, you will back off from doing things that will unnecessarily offend and wound a weaker Christian brother. Don't do the things which cause the less mature Christian to ignore his own conscience, and thus to sin. The weak Christian may react to your freedom, and go into excesses against his own conscience, and so fall out of his own temporal fellowship.

1. **The Law of Beneficiality**

There is a third law that governs what we do as Christians when we are confronted by those who are offended by our freedom in Christ and our lifestyle, and that is the law beneficiality. You find that in 1 Corinthians 10:23-33. The apostle Paul says, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not profitable. All things are lawful for me, but all things do not edify. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth. Whatever is sold in the market, eat that, asking no questions for conscience sake. For the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof. If any of them that do not believe bid you to a feast, and you be disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no questions for conscience sake. But if any man says to you, this is offered and sacrifice and to idol, do not eat, for his sake, that showed it, and for conscience sake; for the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof – Conscience, I say, not your own, but of the other, for why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience? For if I, by grace, be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that which for which I give thanks? Whether, therefore, you eat or drink, or whatever you to do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the gentiles, nor to the church of God. Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved."

**Don't Cause a Stumbling Block**

Here the apostle Paul says, "Avoid doing things which are not spiritually beneficial to others. If a thing does not help to build up spiritually, don't do it. And particularly here he points out, avoid doing those things that the unbeliever will find a stumbling block in coming to Christ. Now we come to something that is even a more serious problem. Here you are a Christian. You act as a Christian. You identify yourself as a Christian among the people that you are associated with. They look upon you, and here are the unbelievers who put you in a certain category of expectation. They expect something better of you. There are certain things that unbelievers, right or wrong, think Christians should not do. That being the case, and if you want to influence them, while you're in their presence, just don't do it. Avoid doing the thing that will turn off the unbeliever from giving a hearing to the gospel. That's what the apostle Paul is saying.

In other words, our Christian freedom is governed (limited) by the law of love. Our Christian freedom in Christ is limited by the law of beneficiality. If it is not beneficial, don't do it.

1. **The Law of Supreme Sacrifice**

Then there's one other, and that's the law of supreme sacrifice. This is in 1 Corinthians 9:1-27. We won't read that whole chapter. But in this chapter, the apostle Paul proceeds to declare that he, as an apostle, has certain rights. He is a Christian. He is free to eat certain things, or not to eat certain things; or, to drink certain things, or not to drink certain things. He has a right to have a wife, or not to have a wife. He points out that those who labor in God's work are entitled to benefit from their labors, just as the ox who grinds the corn is permitted to eat the product of what he makes, and so on.

**Freedom in Christ**

Through this chapter, there is the principle of freedom in Christ. At the end of the chapter, the apostle Paul says, "There is, however, one governing principle. I don't let things get out of hand. I view myself as a runner in a race, and I treat my body accordingly, and I keep under my body. I do not let my sensual appetites overpower me and take charge. There are certain sensual desires which I may indeed indulge, and do so legitimately, but I remain the master over them. In verse 27, then, Paul concludes this by saying. But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." The apostle Paul said, "It would be a great tragedy for me to have taught people to live their lives so God will reward them for how they lived in eternity, and then I live in such a way as to lose my reward.

So, the law of supreme sacrifice comes in here, where the apostle Paul says, "I'll set aside my rights (my preferences) for the sake of enabling somebody else to advance spiritually – for my own sake, of being capable of doing God's work." There are certain things that you may do as a Christian, and if other people see you doing that, you can just kiss goodbye to any influence that you may have in their lives. If you want to have access to being an influence, as a Christian, you take that into consideration. The strong believer has to keep his eyes on the Lord, not on the weaker brother, but the weak brother needs to get his eyes off the strong brother, and get his eyes on the Lord.

**Irrelevancies among Christians**

The apostle Paul, here in Romans 14, has been illustrating all this potential conflict of differences of lifestyle, and pointing out that there are certain irrelevancies among Christians. And he uses the illustration that some Christians are omnivores. They'll eat vegetables and meat. Others are vegetarians. They'll only eat vegetables. Now either dietary practice is acceptable with God, Paul points out. Neither has any spiritual significance. Christians, therefore, are not to try to impose their eating habits on others, nor make them a condition for Christian fellowship and service.

When you come to the realm of eating, this opens up quite a can of worms. There are all kinds of things that will offend you in what people eat, not the least of which is how much some people eat. And here's an example of: how does this come into your relationship with this individual. This person has terrible dietary habits; and, this person has terrible eating habits. You make this a matter of Christian fellowship. You make this a matter of working with them in the Lord's work. And Paul's point is, "No, these are irrelevancies." A Christian scruples may have no biblical justification, but if he has them, respect them, and don't belittle them.

So, if you're the kind of a person who likes to sit down to supper and eat a whole meal, and then when you get to the end of it, start over again, and eat a second whole meal, and that offends people in your presence, then eat one whole meal in their presence, and after they go home, eat your second meal. There's no need to unnecessarily offend them. And you need not laugh, because I know people who do this. They sit down and eat a meal, and they get through, and they start at the first dish, and they go right around, and they have a whole second meal right there before your eyes. I find that fascinating. I'm dumbfounded that people can do that. That's not easy to do. On about two or three occasions, in my era of association with the Berean Church ministry, I've been invited to peoples' homes for an evening where they did not make clear: "Why don't you come by this evening for sort of a visit. We're going to have cake and coffee." So, when I arrived (on three distinct occasions), there was a banquet meal set out, and I had just finished supper at home. Now, what are you going to say? "You didn't make it clear this was supper. I've already eaten. Get this stuff out of here." No, you put your shoulders back, like a good marine, and you breathe deeply. And I have sat down and eaten a second meal. That's why I have great admiration and awe for people who can do that on a regular basis. They just go around the thing twice.

You can have a lot of offensiveness and distress over the matter of food and of eating – not only what you eat, not how you eat. The strong Christian is free to exercise his liberty before God in private when we other Christians are not around to be offended.

So, those are the basic principles that have been laid out for us in Romans 14:1-2.

Verse 3 continues: "Let not him that eats despise him that does not eat." The word "eat" here ("him that eats") is referring to the person who eats vegetables but not meat, here in this context. And this is his particular lifestyle. And he is told that he should not despise the Christian who eats meat. The Greek word is "exotheneo." "Exotheneo" is a strong Greek word which means "to hold someone in contempt." This means to look down your nose at somebody. And Christians are told to that they should not look down their nose at the Christian who feels free to eat both vegetables and meat.

It is easy, on the other hand also, for the person who eats both meat and vegetables to despise the vegetarian. So, the point here is that whatever hangups a person has on this is not a ground for you to exercise contempt. And the weak Christian here, in verse 3, is told not to judge him that doesn't eat. The word judge is the Greek word "krino." And "krino" here means to condemn the person as doing something which is sinful. The vegetarian here is not to condemn the meat-eater and to try to pressure him to change his eating habits.

The reason for this, we're told, is that: "God has received him." God (indicating the Father) has received this person. The Greek word for "receive" is the word "proslambano." This word "pros" before the main verb "lambano" there is face-to-face. So, what this is saying is that God has taken this person intimately to Himself, whether he's a vegetable-eater, or whether he is a meat-eater. So, therefore, God does this. And this is in the middle voice, which indicates that it's of personal interest to God. It's His personal preference, and He benefits by accepting all styles of life that Christians have.

So, this does raise the question, of course, in verse 3, of the place of standards. If God has no problem with a meat-eater, the vegetarian is out of line to condemn him on spiritual principles. It is the weak Christian who tends to see himself as holier than others. And in fact, the weak Christian views himself as holier than God. This legalistic, weak Christian is very self-righteous, and he's ready to criticize other people.

Now this eating here is just an illustration. This can be in many other areas. There are many personal taboos that certain Christians have. They are not based upon doctrine, necessarily. Therefore, they do not carry divine authority. There are certain taboos in Scripture, and they are the orders from God. Those we hold to. And we must condemn the violation of those. But the strong Christian, who can feel free to do things that the weak Christian is not free to do, should not treat that weak Christian abusively, or look upon him with contempt. You don't treat him in a tactless and a thoughtless way.

**What about Alcohol and Tobacco?**

God, we must remember, is in fellowship with meat-eaters; and, God is in fellowship with vegetarians. So, it's not a moral issue, and it should not disturb the harmony of the local congregation. There are other areas in which you can multiply this on your own. For example, in areas of habits like the use of alcohol or the use of tobacco. How do you respond to a Christian who is involved in these? Well, you might say that there is a principle of self-destruction which clearly is involved in both of these patterns, and that, therefore, violates the principle of taking care of the human body as the indwelling temple of God the Holy Spirit. But whether a Christian does this or not is his own business. The only restrictions that the Bible places on the use of alcohol, for example, is that you must not become drunk. But there may be other reasons why it would be wise not to use it. And you may prefer not to do that. But this does not give you the right to impose that upon other believers.

Even in your presence, you do not have the right to make an issue over the fact that they may use alcoholic beverages. They may sit in your presence and smoke. You may be very offended by that for a variety of reasons – both spiritual and physical realistics. But it is not your right as a Christian to condemn them, and say, "Now I break fellowship with you." It is true that, while you do not harass the person, you do not condone. And when you don't condone, you do indeed find that people who have certain habits do put a barrier between you and themselves. You're not their enemy, but you do not have a ground of camaraderie of close friendship because of their lifestyle.

The point, however, is that, when this takes place (and we're talking about Christian-to-Christian), you back off, and you leave the door open for that individual (between himself and God) to make those choices. If the door is open for you to give an advisement of your opinion, then you're perfectly free to do that.

**Religious Organizations**

Now a religious organization is a little different. A religious organization has the right, and the necessity, to lay down ground rules to enable it to perform its ministry. I have no hesitancy whatsoever in telling my teachers (my lady teachers) in Berean Christian Academy not to wear shorts to school. That is inappropriate dress for teachers, and therefore the organization makes that rule. And we have been told: "You're terribly legalistic." And the implication is that we are trying to please God in some way by doing that. No, we are using a procedure that we think is necessary for us to achieve our educational objectives.

There are certain activities that we, as an organization, think that our youth leaders in our club should not be participants in because they're in bad taste. And it is very easy, when you're around kids, and you're having fun, and you're joking, to do things that are in bad taste. And we, as an organization, have a right to tell leaders there are certain things they should not do.

**Language**

The language should be edifying. When we deal with young people and adults in this ministry, they should be free from having to listen to crude language. They should be free from having to listen to offensive language, and to be verbally abused in any way. An organization has the right to lay down rules for that. And there are many personal habits that you, as a Christian, are free to do, indeed, but which we think, under certain conditions of an organizational structure (as a Christian group), then we tell you: "This is out-of-line and unfitting and unbecoming for you to do, because it will work against your influence and the objectives that we are seeking in the spiritual realm.

You can read more about this in Acts 15:1-35. You can see that, in the early church, this whole business of how much the gentiles had to come under the rules of the Mosaic Law came to a head. And finally, Acts 15 talks about a church conference where the leaders gathered together to decide: "Now that these gentiles are pouring into the church, do we have to impose the old Jewish customs upon them?" And the decision was: "No, what belonged to the Mosaic Law, and how you like to observe the old customs, that's all right, but don't impose them upon gentile Christians."

On the other hand, the apostles said, "There are certain things that offend the Jew, and we would ask gentile Christians not to do these things." And there were certain moral practices, and certain dietary practices, and they just mention them, and they said, "You're a gentile. In the presence of Jews, don't do this; and, as a matter of fact, you'll be better off if you won't anyhow.

So, the Word of God, here in Romans 14:3, is saying that Christians should not despise each other for their lifestyle – here, illustrated by what they eat or don't eat, because God has received them both. And this same principle applies to all the different variations in the life of Christians – that they choose, because they're living their lives as unto the Lord.

**Paul's Conflict with Peter**

Now, when there is a compromise of principle, then we also have the duty to say, "That's wrong." Then we do not hesitate to tell you that you are out of line. One example of this in the early New Testament church was the apostle Paul rebuking the apostle Peter, because Peter withdrew fellowship from gentiles because he was criticized by some Jewish brethren who did not believe in associating with gentiles. In Galatians 2:11-15, we have that referred to, when Paul says, "When Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face because he was to be blamed." He says, "I took him to task before the congregation."

Now this was really a touchy situation. Here you have Peter, a well-known, prominent leader of the apostles. Here you have the apostle Paul, a highly respected leader. And these two leaders now confront one another here in the presence of other Christians. And Paul says, "Peter, I must rebuke you before all these people, because you were really out of line in your lifestyle." In what respect?

Verse 12 says, "For before certain men came from James, he did eat with the gentiles." He was talking about gentile Christians. Before certain Jewish Christians came up from Jerusalem, Peter had no problem sitting down and having fellowship with gentile Christians: "He did eat with the gentiles. And when they were come (these Jewish Christians) from Jerusalem, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them who were of the circumcision. And the other Jews compromised in like manner with him, insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their false pretense."

What Peter did was to set a bad example for others, and others began following him. So, pretty soon, you had this division between Christians here in this city. Gentiles were turned off by the Jewish Christians; and, the Jewish Christians were refusing to have any fellowship with gentile Christians: "But when I saw that they did not walk uprightly, according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter, before them all: 'If you, being a Jew, live after the manner of gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why do you compel the gentiles to live as the Jews?'"

So, Paul's point was that even Peter didn't keep all those Jewish customs anymore; and, that even Peter lived on the scale and the style of a gentile. And Paul said, "It's terrible for you, as a Christian Jew, and a leader of the church, to be turning your back on gentile Christians, just to please those weak yo-yos that came up here from Jerusalem and put the pressure on you. At that point, you should have said, "Now you've gone too far. You are free, if you wish, not to associate with these gentile Christians for whatever convictions you have about that. But you are not free to tell me not to do it, or to tell any other believer not to do it."

In Romans 4:4, we have the prerogative of judgment – this business of who's going to pass judgment on you and me as Christians for how we live our lives. Paul says, "Who are you?" And in the Greek Bible, the first word is this word "you" ("su"), and it stands right out there: "You – who do you think you are? And he is speaking to the weak Christian in an emphatic way. The Christian that, in verse 3, where it says "not to judge" – talking to the weak Christian in verse 3, "not to judge," here in verse 4, he's talking about the same person: "Who are you that judges another man's servants? Who are you coming along and pronouncing condemnation on what somebody else is doing?"

The word "servants here is a significant one. Let me show you something. It's the Greek word "oiketes." This an unusual word for certain. More often, the word for "servant" is "doulos," which means "a slave." But here the Holy Spirit says, "I'm talking about an "oiketes". And "oiketes" was a house servant rather than an outside slave. This was a servant who was inside the master's house, and he was part of the family.

Therefore, Paul is establishing that he's talking about someone who is in personal contact with (and observation of) his master. His master is there living with him, knowing what he is doing, and knowing what he is not doing. And in this analogy here, it refers to the place of each Christian in God's family under our Master Jesus Christ. We are in intimate fellowship with Him. The Lord Jesus Christ indwells every believer. Therefore, we are like "oiketes" servants. We are personal house servants in the most intimate contact.

So, two Christians here are being compared again. One Christian is not the Lord and master over other Christians. The weak Christian is not to presume to condemn the strong; and, the strong believer is not to have contempt for the weak. This is dealing here with the impropriety of meddling in the personal lives of other Christians: "Who are you?" You think you're strong, but you're really the weak Christian. You're really the immature one: "Who are you to be passing condemnation on the Master's personal house servant?"

Then Paul goes on and says, "To his own master." The word "own" is the Greek word "idios," stressing his personal contact. And it says, "It is his master: his "kurios." It refers to the one who holds final authority over the house servant. The servant's own master is the one who is in the position to decide whether the servant's conduct is appropriate or not: "To his own master, he stands." This means to stand in the sense of being a prude: "Or he falls:" – falls in the sense of being disapproved. It is the servant's own master who decides whether his conduct is proper or improper.

**The Lord Jesus Christ Decides how we Live our Lives**

So, we establish this principle. For you and me as Christians, there is one person who is in position, and authorized to pass judgment on how we live our lives, and that is our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. For the rest of you, it is none of your business. You do not seek to impose yourself into the lifestyle of other Christians. And you seek to assist them. When they are out of line with the Word of God, you must properly call their attention to that. But you have to really be careful that what is your personal preference is not being portrayed as being the mind of God, because you're not going to decide it. A Christian is responsible for pleasing his Lord Jesus Christ. He is not responsible for pleasing other Christians.

So, the point is this. If God has not, in Scripture, made something a basis for fellowship with other Christians, you have no right to make it a ground of separation from other Christians. If a Christian holds a true doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ (the deity of Christ – the God-Man), and a true doctrine of salvation by grace, then you have a ground of compatibility for association with that Christian. He may have a lot of other crazy ideas; offensive ideas; and, mindless ideas, but that is between him and the Lord. But it is not up to you. If God has not made something an issue of fellowship, then you cannot do that.

Now there are times when God has very clearly made a thing an issue, and then you break off from other believers. I'll give you a few of these. 1 Corinthians 10:20 says, "You do not partake of anything that some Christian does which, in effect, is worshiping a demon. 1 Corinthians 10:20: "But I say unto the things which the gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God. And I would not that you should have fellowship with demons. You do not follow the practices of pagans in worshiping demons through sacrifices to the demons, even if the person is a Christian.

I told you about the time that I was in China, visiting Peking, with another Marine officer, and we were taken into a temple, and it had a huge Buddha. At first I thought that the legs were two pillars supporting the roof. Then as I looked up, and my eyes got accustomed to the dark, I saw that there was a monstrous Buddha looking down upon us. There were candles there, just like in a Roman Catholic Church. And our guide was a very famous guide in Peking, and his name was Buddha. He handed us a taper, and he said, "You light this candle, and you have long life." And the other officer was a Roman Catholic. This is very comfortable to him. He had no difficulty in taking the taper. He'd been used to lighting candles to spirit beings out there – saints, and so on. When Buddha (our guide) turned to hand the taper to me, I shook my head and said, "No, not me." And the reason I did that was because I knew that lighting that candle was an act of worship of a demon god, which was behind the Buddha statue.

Now, at that point, here was an officer that was a good friend of mine, but who had made his choice such that I could not have fellowship with him in the Christian sense, because he was doing an act which was, in effect, a worship of demons. And the Bible says, "Break off."

**Don't be Unequally Yoked with Unbelievers**

Furthermore, the Bible is very explicit that there are great limitations on how far you can go in entering enterprises with unbelievers in 2 Corinthians 6:14. How many Christians, in their social life; in their business life; in their academic life; and, in their married life have gotten into trouble because they have not obeyed this principle, because they thought they were dealing with somebody that was a Christian, and the Christian was engaged in a questionable enterprise, and they went along with it, and found that they had gotten stung. 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship does righteousness have with unrighteousness; and, what communion does light have with darkness?"

So, when you're dealing with unbelievers, the Bible says, "Keep them at a distance." Certainly, don't marry them. Have great reservations about being in business with them, or becoming partners with them. Limit your social activity. They'll lead you downhill if you become part of them. Many Christians, indeed, I see constantly who are all agog and all carried away with doing something. And the people who are with them are there quoting to me, and they are some unbelievers that they're associated with that they become enamored with.

**Have no Fellowship with Christians who Practice Evil Deeds**

Ephesians 5:11 tells us to break off fellowship with the Christian who is practicing evil deeds: "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." A Christian who is doing what is morally evil, is not a Christian with whom you can have spiritual camaraderie.

In 2 John 10, we were told that we are to have no toleration for anybody who denies the doctrine of the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God: "If there come any unto you, and do not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house, neither bid him Godspeed." And the doctrine there in the immediate context, you may read, is that Christ has come incarnate. Don't bring these people into your house, and don't bid them Godspeed.

Now the apostle Paul tolerated many Jewish customs of Jewish Christians that they carried over from their Judaism. But he always resisted any attempt to impose circumcision, for example, on gentile Christians as being necessary conduct for them to be accepted by God. If the Jewish Christians wanted to do that, that was OK with Paul. The minute they said, "You Christians (you gentiles) have to do this," then Paul said, "Wait a minute. Back off. Now you're butting in to their lifestyle, and you're out of line."

Paul was sensitive to what the Jews did think. That's why you remember that he took his young associate, Timothy, who was a half-Jew (he had a Jewish mother), and had never been circumcised. He's going to work with Paul among the Jews. Paul says, "This will be an offense, Timothy." And Timothy was circumcised (Acts 16:2-3). However, the apostle Paul, on the other hand, refused to take his young associate, Titus, who is a pure gentile, and to circumcise him (Galatians 2:3-5). The Jews didn't like it, but Paul said, "Butt out. This is not necessary. You're stepping over the line, and I will not tolerate that."

One thing that I thought is significant that the apostle Paul then later goes on here, in this text, to point out to the Galatians is that if they tried to add a human work like circumcision to the payment of Christ on the cross, they were told that Christ would be of no benefit to them.

**Fallen from Grace**

In Galatians 5:2-4, Paul says, "Behold, I, Paul, say unto you that if you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ has become of not effect unto you. Whosoever of you are justified by the law, you have fallen from grace." Now those are chilling words. Christ would be of no benefit to them.

This is the same principle that you have in Romans 4:4-5 that says, "If you work for it, it's a payment. It's not a grace gift."

Romans 11:6 says, "You can't have grace and works mixed together."

Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "You can only be saved by grace."

So, here the apostle Paul is telling these same Galatians that if they try to add their works like circumcision to what Christ has done, then Christ will be of no benefit to them, because they have added works to the death of Christ, and they will not be saved.

So, here an irrelevant religious act (merely a preference) can become an act of apostasy and the kiss of eternal death. You can't tell another Christian that his conduct is under divine disapproval on non-moral issues. Those are mere personal opinions.

So, two Christians with oppressive practices relative to food and drink have to decide before God what is right and what is wrong for them. The strong meat-eater does not have to justify himself to the weak vegetarian. A spiritually immature Christian does think that he is the strong one. Actually, he is the weak one, because he is limited in his doctrine, and limited in his discernment. But he's big on arrogance, and he cannot stand the relaxed freedom of the lifestyle of the mature Christian. And the tyranny of the weak Christian will often exceed the tyranny of the strong. So, confidence in your own spiritual strength is a dangerous thing.

**God Save you, and Keeps you Saved**

So, in Romans 4:4, Paul says, "Just who do you think you are, weak Christian, who judges another man's household servant? To his own master, he stands or falls." Only his master decides whether his conduct is acceptable or not: "Yea, he goes on and says, "He shall be held up, for God is able to make him stand." As a matter of fact, Paul goes on to point out that it is the omnipotence of God alone that is able to make an individual stand in his eternal life. Even the strong Christian does not keep himself in his eternal life. The strong Christian is kept in his eternal life because God Himself is keeping him there. In the matter of salvation, it is God who holds the believer in that status of eternal life. It is not the action of the believer. So, what others thinks about what you deserve as a Christian, relative to heaven or hell, or blessing or not, it's irrelevant. It's only what God thinks.

I leave a few verses with you that stress this fact that whether we go to heaven or hell, once we're born again, is a matter of God Himself maintaining your status. It is the power of Jesus Christ who holds the Christian in salvation. You'll find is clearly taught in John 10:28-29: "No one can take you out of the Father's hand."

You'll find this in Romans 8:35-39: "No one can separate you from the love of God."

You'll find this in 1 Peter 1:3-5: You have an inheritance in heaven that's preserved for you.

You'll find this in Jude 24-25, which tell you that God has given you a salvation that he is perfecting, and that will never fall by the wayside.

The strong Christian will be enabled to stand by the Lord's grace. The strong Christian does not stand just because of his own determination.

**The Weak Christian vs. the Strong Christian**

So, what the weak Christian actually condemns in the strong Christian is the very fact that the strong Christian has entered into the grace of God – the very thing that enables that strong Christian to survive in the devil's world, and to go on to an eternity in heaven. The very grace of God that the strong Christian has come to understand, that enables him to have this relaxed, easy, free lifestyle, is the very thing that the weak Christian is condemning. The weak Christian does not like you acting in that kind of grace freedom. He wants you to be more ascetic like himself. He wants you to pull things down upon a system of rules. And the result is that he is the weak one, and he is the ineffective one against Satan. God's power is what maintains our position in Christ, and our personal spiritual integrity. So, standing or falling as a Christian, the apostle Paul says in verse 4, has to do with what God Himself has done for us.

There is one other factor that we should mention in closing. How you stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ, relative to reward's is going to be determined by the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not going to be determined by other Christians who don't think you're living your life and investing it for each. Maybe you're not, but that is the freedom of grace. You have the freedom to make your life count, but you also had the freedom to blow it. And a lot of you will do that. You will blow it rather than make it for maximum effect. But that is where grace comes in. But it is no one else's business to tell you that you have to change, or to try to force you to change. Whatever advisements they may give you, the ultimate decision is yours. Standing or falling as a Christian in salvation and in rewards has to do with what the Lord Jesus Christ thinks, not with what other people think.

So, if this principle were followed and obeyed among us, as believers, we would be a lot less heavy-handed with one another in certain respects. And even though, out of our sincerity and distress, because we see elements in the lifestyle of believers that are just bad (they shouldn't be there), and they are going to cost them, and we know it, and we wish that they could know it, you can only go so far in sounding a word of caution. Then everybody is his own priest, and everybody makes his own decision, and everybody's going to live with that decision for all eternity.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1988

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