

Romans 14:12-23—Don't Cause Your Brother To Stumble, And Don't Cause Yourself To Stumble

Memory Verse

Romans 12:1-2 NKJV

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Introduction:

Romans 14:1, “*Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things*”, starts a new topic in the book of Romans. It is a part of Paul’s theme of Christian living (how a Christian should behave) in Romans 12-16. Remember that Romans chapters 1-11 show us what God has done for us, while Romans chapters 12-16 show us how we can demonstrate our thankfulness to God in light of all that He has done for us.

“*Doubtful things*” refers to things that are not morally wrong, but rather preferences or opinions that we may have regarding things like diet (meat or no meat), and days of worship (one day or everyday). There are many things that modern believers today disagree with amongst themselves. These things have nothing to do with the gospel, and are not morally wrong. For example: styles of music, what bible translation to read, whether or not to have musical instruments in church, whether or not to only sing hymns or not, how often to have communion, and the list goes on. As mentioned previously, these “doubtful things” have caused much unnecessary confusion and division in the church.

Another source of division is that of differences in theology. “Major” or “important” doctrines, the teachings that concerns salvation, are not negotiable—there can be no compromise allowed. The true gospel must be vigorously defended against two very evil substitutes that can and will dam someone to hell—a works based gospel (denies grace), and the prosperity gospel (denies repentance). However, there are many doctrines or teachings that are “minor” or “less important” because they don’t directly concern how a person gets saved (if a person gets it wrong, it won’t result in them not being saved). Examples of “minor” doctrines include eschatology, cessationism, calvinism, and spiritual gifts. While these are not moral issues, and they are not directly “salvation” issues, they are *truth* issues. Similar to “doubtful things”, we need to learn to respectfully “agree to disagree”, while still seeking to come to a closer understanding of what the Bible actually teaches as we mature in our faith and understanding of God’s word.

Important: Paul is not saying that a church should accept someone who is continuing to live an immoral lifestyle, because that is not a “doubtful thing”. It is a cut and dry moral issue—it is a matter of a sin that needs to be repented of. *Moral issues, things that can be clearly defined as right or wrong, are not “doubtful things”, and must not be tolerated in the church.*

Outline:

1. Revision: How living in the expectation of Christ’s soon return affects the way we treat other—we don’t judge (condemn) them, and we don’t do anything that would cause them to stumble (vs 12-13)

2. First *know*, and then be *convinced*—the importance of remaining teachable and humble (v 14)
3. The first test for doing or not doing doubtful things—Will it hurt others? Am I walking in love? (v 15)
4. The second test for doing or not doing doubtful things—Will it benefit the kingdom of God? What is my first priority? (vs 16-18)
5. Learning to think about others by asking the question, “How will what I do affect the other person?” (vs 19-21)
6. Faith is required to please God—How not to stumble ourselves (v 22-23)

Romans 14:1-23 NKJV

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. 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.

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. 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. 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. 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; 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.

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. 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.

1. Revision: How living in the expectation of Christ's soon return affects the way we treat other—we don't judge (condemn) them, and we don't do anything that would cause them to stumble

Romans 14:12-13 NKJV

So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. 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.

v 12 **So then each of us shall give account of himself to God:** This has been a recurring theme in Romans chapters 13 and 14. Our primary motivation for serving God is that we will all have to give an account of ourselves to God. Therefore, we want to do what is right not only for conscience sake, not only because we are concerned for others, and not only because we want to avoid God's loving yet painful hand of discipline (fear of consequences), but also because we love God and therefore want to please Him—we want to hear God say to us, *"Well done, good and faithful servant... Enter into the joy of your lord."*

Matthew 25:21 NKJV

His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

Here is a summary of the references that we have covered so far in Romans chapters 13 and 14 that remind us that we are accountable to God:

Romans 13:2 NKJV

Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

Romans 13:11 NKJV

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep.

Romans 14:4 NKJV

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.

Romans 14:10 NKJV

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. First know, and then be convinced—the importance of remaining teachable and humble

Romans 14:14 NKJV

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.

v 14 **I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself:** As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 8:4-7, eating meat sacrificed to an idol doesn't change the meat—it was created by the only true God for our enjoyment and nourishment.

1 Corinthians 8:4-7 NLT

So, what about eating meat that has been offered to idols? **Well, we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God.** ⁵ There may be so-called gods both in heaven and on earth, and some people actually worship many gods and many lords. ⁶ **But for us,**

There is one God, the Father, by whom all things were created, and for whom we live. And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things were created, and through whom we live.

⁷ **However, not all believers know this.** Some are accustomed to thinking of idols as being real, so when they eat food that has been offered to idols, they think of it as the worship of real gods, and their **weak consciences** are violated.

The reality is that with these “doubtful things”, these things that are neither right nor wrong in and of themselves, they don’t affect our standing with God. Consider what Paul says—*“It’s true that we can’t win God’s approval by what we eat. We don’t lose anything if we don’t eat it, and we don’t gain anything if we do”* (1 Corinthians 8:8 NLT). *In other words, it doesn’t matter if I do it, and it doesn’t matter if I don’t do it, so why make a big deal out of it.*

v 14 **I know and am convinced:** Notice the order here. First we **know**. We study the word of God and learn what it says. *Then*, second, we accept it by faith to be true—I... **am convinced**. We may not *want* it to be true, and it may not *feel* right or normal, it might not match the way we were raised, but we accept it to be true anyway because that’s what the Bible teaches).

“Many, on the contrary, are persuaded before they know; and such will not be persuaded to know.” (Trap)

Pride is what stops many from coming to a knowledge of the truth, and so they are not willing to change their ideas. For example, many think, at least subconsciously, “if my denomination says that that’s the way it is, then that’s the way it is, because my denomination is right and everybody else is wrong!” It’s amazing how many people will only go to a church of their own denomination, because that is what *feels* right to them.

Again, the correct order is that we first **know**, and are then **convinced**. If we are first convinced, but not based on knowledge, but rather based on tradition or emotion, then we will never come to knowledge, and will therefore never mature—we will remain weak in our faith and conscience. *How important it is that we are humble and teachable so that we don’t remain babes in Christ.*

v 14 **But to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean:** This refers back to verses five and six, where Paul shows us that we must never violate our conscience, and we must never encourage others to violate their conscience.

3. The first test for doing or not doing doubtful things—Will it hurt others? Am I walking in love?

Romans 14:15 NKJV

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.

v 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:** Far more important than my personal liberty (my free choice, my rights) is how what I choose or prefer affects others. If I really love God, then that will be evidenced by how I treat others—what is best for others will always trump (be more important than) what I want. How the “doubtful thing” affects others will always be more important than how it affects me.

“But the issue is not, “How does it affect me?” so much as, “If I do this, how will it affect my brother?” Will it make him stumble? Will it grieve him or even destroy him by encouraging him to sin? Is it really worth it to harm a brother just so I can enjoy some food? No!” (Warren W. Wiersbe)

1 John 2:9-11 NLT

If anyone claims, “I am living in the light,” but hates a fellow believer [by causing them to stumble and fall], that person is still living in darkness. ¹⁰ **Anyone who loves a fellow believer is living in the light and does not cause others to stumble.** ¹¹ But anyone who hates a fellow believer is still living and walking in darkness. Such a person does not know the way to go, having been blinded by the darkness [they are out of fellowship with God].

For example, drinking alcohol in moderation is not wrong, and a person may enjoy a glass of wine with their dinner. However, if that person invites someone over for dinner, and that other person is an ex-alcoholic, then it is absolutely wrong to drink in front of them; it is pure selfishness to put your own preference over what is best for the other person. Think about how cruel it is, to insist on having your glass of wine with your dinner, if it will cause the other person to fall back into their alcohol addiction!

1 Corinthians 8:1 NKJV

We know that we all have knowledge. **Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.**

“The strong Christian has spiritual knowledge, but if he does not practice love, his knowledge will hurt the weak Christian. Knowledge must be balanced by love.” (Warren W. Wiersbe)

“Often little children are afraid of the dark and think there is something hiding in the closet. Of course, Mother knows that the child is safe; but her knowledge alone cannot assure or comfort the child. You can never argue a child into losing fear. When the mother sits at the bedside, talks lovingly to the child, and assures him that everything is secure, then the child can go to sleep without fear. Knowledge plus love helps the weak person grow strong.” (Warren W. Wiersbe)

“Christian behaviour is founded on love, not knowledge; and the goal of the Christian life is not knowledge, but love... Both **knowledge** and **love** have an effect on our lives in that each of them make something *grow*. The difference between **puffs up** and **edifies** is striking; it is the difference between a *bubble* and a *building*. Some Christians grow, others just swell!” (David Guzik)

v 15 **Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died:** If Jesus was able to give up His life for us (remember that His preference would have been to keep it), then we must be willing and able to give up our steak dinner (for the vegetarian), glass of wine (for the ex-alcoholic), or bacon, pork and ham (for the Seventh Day Adventist)—those who have a weak conscience or are weak in that area. In the light of what Jesus has already given up for us, giving up our preferences should be easy.

Jon Courson has a good illustration and application: “You might have the freedom to chomp down a big piece of meat, but don’t do it in a way or at a place where the weaker brother, the legalist, the vegetarian will be offended, turned off, or uptight.

In the early days of World War II, German U-boats attacked Allied ships traveling from the East Coast to Europe. To remedy this, they traveled in large convoys. But the convoys could go only as fast as the slowest boat. So the faster boats slowed down to the speed of the slowest boat in order that they all might be protected from attack.

The same holds true in spiritual life. You might be freer and faster and stronger than your brothers and sisters in Christ—but keep in mind with whom you are traveling. We’re linked together. Don’t do something that will cause a slower boat to be exposed to the underwater attacks of the Enemy, to be torpedoed by Satan. Slow it down. We’re in this together.”

4. The second test for doing or not doing doubtful things—Will it benefit the kingdom of God? What is my first priority?

Romans 14:16-18 NKJV

Therefore do not let your 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.

v 16 **Do not let your good be spoken of as evil:** Yes, believers are free from the constraints of the law; we don’t have to keep the Sabbath, we don’t have to keep the Passover, we don’t have to abstain from pork, etc. The New Covenant is definitely good news for us. There is nothing wrong with enjoying the liberty we have in Christ. However, if I use what is good, the freedoms I have in Christ, to destroy a brother, then I cause what is good to be described as evil. This selfish and confrontational attitude brings much shame to the Lord and His church.

v 17 **For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit: Eating and drinking** represent fleshly appetites—the immature believer still seeks pleasure and fulfillment in worldly or physical things. In contrast, the mature believer seeks **righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit**—they are seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Matthew 16:31-33 NLT

“So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ ³² These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your Heavenly Father already knows all your needs. ³³ Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need.

“If we place **food and drink** before **righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit**, then we are hopelessly out of touch with God’s priorities and His heart.” (David Guzik)

“Not the externals, but the internals must be first in our lives: righteousness, peace, and joy. Where do they come from? The Holy Spirit of God at work in our lives (see Rom. 5:1–2). If each believer would yield to the Spirit and major in a godly life, we would not have Christians fighting with each other over minor matters. Spiritual priorities are essential to harmony in the church.” (Warren W. Wiersbe)

v 18 **For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God:** Remember that only those things done with the right motive (to please God because we love Him) will be rewarded.

v 18 **And approved by men:** It is only as we put God’s kingdom ahead of our own desires that we will be willing and able to demonstrate agape love, unselfishness, and consideration to others. Only then will others will see God’s love in action, and so glorify God.

5. Learning to think about others by asking the question, “How will what I do affect the other person?”

Romans 14:19-21 NKJV

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.

v 19 **Therefore:** Paul begins his summary of this section of Scripture.

v 19 **Let us pursue the things which make for peace:** Actively seeking to reconcile people together is the opposite of being argumentative and confrontational. We must seek to break down walls that are currently dividing people, and not put new ones up. Importantly, Paul says that we must **pursue** (chase or hunt down) **peace**. When it comes to “doubtful things”, living at peace with others must be our first priority, otherwise unity will be lost and disharmony and discord will result.

Matthew 5:9 NKJV

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

v 19 **And the things by which one may edify another:** Everything I do will have one of two effects; either it will build the other person up, or tear them down. I need to **pursue** (chase or hunt down), ways to edify or build others up. What this tells me is that building others up is not something that happens all by itself. The way of the natural man is to seek our own way and in the process destroy others. The only way to overcome this sinful tendency is to actively, intentionally, and deliberately **pursue** (chase, and hunt down) opportunities to help others to grow in their relationship with God.

v 20 **Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food:** Yes, I have liberty in Christ to do what I want (as long as it is not morally wrong), but I do not have liberty to abuse my freedom and cause others to stumble, hurting and weakening their faith and their conscience.

v 20 **All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense:** When it comes to “doubtful things”, things that are not morally wrong to do, yes they are **pure** or good. However, we must never violate our conscience. Paul has already stated

in verse five, “*One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.*” Simply put, if I, for example, think that drinking any alcohol is wrong, then it is wrong for me to drink alcohol, because I am going against my conscience. Eating with offence means that I do something when I am not fully convinced that it is actually the right thing to do.

v 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:** Remember that this only refers to “doubtful things” (see verse 1). When it comes to teaching the truth, we can expect people to be offended. Jesus offended many people, but it wasn’t over “doubtful things”—Jesus always spoke the truth—He was a God pleaser and not a man pleaser, and so to should all believers. Truth will always be offensive to those who are not seeking it.

Matthew 15:12 NKJV

Then His disciples came and said to Him, “Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?”

6. Faith is required to please God—How not to stumble ourselves

Romans 14:22-23 NKJV

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.

Again, it all comes down to motive. Anything that is not done for the correct motive—a desire to love, serve, and please God—is sin, and so will receive no reward.

v 22 **Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves:** As an example, I know that all food is given to us by God to eat. However, someone who is still under the law, like a Seventh Day Adventist, will believe that they need to adhere to the dietary guidelines described in the Law of Moses. I personally have faith that there is nothing wrong with eating pork because I understand that the New Covenant has replaced the Old Covenant, and therefore all those rules and regulations do not apply to the New Testament believer. However, if I go to the Seventh Day Adventist church or school, and start telling them that the Bible says it’s okay to eat pork, then I will be condemned by them. When it comes to “doubtful things”, I often just need to keep my faith to myself, and not force it upon others who have a weak conscience.

“Do you have faith? If you have [strong] faith, and feel liberty to partake of certain things, praise God! But have your strong faith **before God, not before a brother who will stumble.”** (David Guzik)

Application: Condemning myself by what I choose to do—just because something is permissible for me, it doesn’t mean that it is beneficial for me

v 22 **Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves:** Another way of applying this concerns ourselves. I know that in my own life I can know that something is good and right, and that I am morally free to do or have it. However, I may also be aware that it negatively affects me, and therefore I shouldn’t do it; *if it negatively affects my relationship with God, then it’s wrong for me to do or have.*

1 Corinthians 6:12-13 NKJV

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. ¹³ Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them.

1 Corinthians 6:12 NLT

You say, "I am allowed to do anything"—but not everything is good for you. And even though "I am allowed to do anything," I must not become a slave to anything.

1 Corinthians 6:12 AMP

Everything is permissible (allowable and lawful) for me; but not all things are helpful (good for me to do, expedient and profitable when considered with other things). Everything is lawful for me, but I will not become the slave of anything or be brought under its power.

For example, technology in all its forms is neither good nor evil. However, for many people it leads to addiction or addictions (social media, gaming, or pornography etc). If I know that technology is hurting my relationship with God, then I also know that I should not be doing it—it is wrong for *me*. The temptation is to justify the continuing use of technology because others can, and it isn't wrong for *them*. But I need to listen to what God is saying to *me* personally.

For me, playing a ken ken maths game can detract from my relationship with God because I can get addicted to it and end up playing the game instead of reading my Bible—therefore it is wrong for me to continue playing it. If I continue to play the game, then I am going against the conviction of the Holy Spirit in me—*I am condemning myself*. Another example for me is chocolate. While others may have the self-control required to regulate how much they eat, I don't, so I've found that things go much better for myself when I choose to just not eat chocolate at all.

We all have weaknesses, and we must protect ourselves from being ruled by even simple things that can so easily become idols in our lives. A good rule of thumb concerning any "doubtful thing", any non-moral issue, is this; *if it controls me, then it's got to go—I need to keep my flesh under control, subdued, otherwise the Holy Spirit will not be directing my life.* Living life controlled by my sinful nature, and so being out of fellowship with God, is far too high a price to pay for simply getting what I want—e.g. eating chocolate and playing ken ken.

1 Corinthians 6:12 NLT

You say, "I am allowed to do anything"—but not everything is good for you. And even though "I am allowed to do anything," I must not become a slave to anything.

1 Corinthians 9:27 NKJV

But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

1 Corinthians 9:27 AMP

But [like a boxer] I buffet my body [handle it roughly, discipline it by hardships] and subdue it, for fear that after proclaiming to others the Gospel and things pertaining to it, I myself should become unfit [not stand the test, be unapproved and rejected as a counterfeit].

“Not every Christian knows this happiness. There are things God may challenge us to give up, but we go on approving them in our life—thus we **condemn ourselves**. It may not be that the thing itself is clearly good or bad, but it is enough that God speaks to us about the matter.” (David Guzik)

“Each of us must ask: “God what is there in my life hindering a closer walk with You? I want to know the happiness that comes from not condemning myself by what I approve in my life.” This takes faith, because we often cling to hindering things because we *think* they make us happy. Real happiness is found being closer and closer to Jesus, and by not being condemned by what we approve.” (David Guzik)

Summary and Conclusion

v 23 **Whatever is not from faith is sin:** What a wonderfully simple way to live life—if personally, I feel that something is hindering me in my walk with God, then I get rid of that thing, whatever it may be. I don’t force my convictions on others, but rather simply seek to draw as close to God as I can.

“This is a wonderful check on our tendency to justify ourselves in the things we permit. If we are troubled by something, it likely isn’t **of faith** and likely **is sin** for us.” (David Guzik)

Hebrews 11:6 NLT

And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.

Hebrews 11:6 NKJV

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.