

Romans 14:1 As for the one who is **weak in faith**, welcome him, but not to quarrel over **opinions**.

² One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. (TYPES OF FOOD)

³ Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.

⁴ Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? **It is before his own master that he stands or falls**. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

⁵ One person esteems (judges, makes a moral decision) one day as better than another, while another esteems (judges) all days *alike* (*NOT IN TEXT*).¹ Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. (HOLY DAYS)

⁶ The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.

⁷ For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.

⁸ For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

¹⁰ Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;

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 will give an account of himself to God.

¹³ Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

¹⁴ I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.

¹⁵ For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.

¹⁶ So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil.

¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸ Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.

¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

²⁰ Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats.

²¹ It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.

²² The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.

²³ But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is **sin**.

(Rom 14:1 ESV)

¹ In using "judges," Paul equalizes the religious and moral foundation of each position.

Martin Luther, "Up to this time you have heard the real, true word; now beware of your own thoughts and wisdom. The devil will kindle the light of reason and lead you away from the faith, as he did the Anabaptists and Sacramentarians... I see clearly that, if God does not give us faithful preachers and ministers, **the devil will tear our church to pieces by the fanatics**, and will not cease until he has finished. ... If he cannot accomplish it through the Pope and the Emperor, he will do it through those who are now in doctrinal agreement with us." (1546 Sermon, Wittenberg). Fanatics are schismatics and sectarians, those who are constantly splicing into smaller and smaller groups over ever increasingly minor issues. In Luther's day they were Anabaptists (non-confessionalists), and those who denied the real presence of Christ in the Supper.

One cannot enjoy the 'good news' and then live as if it isn't true for him or her

testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.

⁴ You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.

(Gal 5:3-4 ESV)

Bahnsen Colossians 2:16f. looses us from the ceremonial elements of the Sabbath system

The Effects of the Good News:

Romans 14

Romans 14 is about **Christian Liberty**, one of the most practical doctrines in all of Scripture in that it directly concerns how we live. The liberty we have in Christ is stunning. Christians are released from bondage and slavery to the law, and for the first time they are free. As it refers elsewhere in this letter, we want to obtain the “glorious *freedom of the children of God*” (Rom 8:21 NIV). Or as this Apostle says in other places, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is *freedom*” (2 Cor 3:17), and “It is for *freedom* that Christ has set us free” (Gal 5:1).

But there are some who do not like Christian freedom, and they come into our midst to spy it out “so that they might bring us into slavery” again (Gal 2:4). So he says, “Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:13), because if you do, then you are obligated to the whole law (Gal 5:3). This is what those who do not like Christian liberty always forget. But if righteousness comes by or is kept through law, then Christ died for nothing (Gal 2:21). But on the other hand, there are those who use their liberty as **freedom to sin**. But Peter exhorts, “Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God” (1 Pet 2:16). And Paul also says, “Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but [and here is the key] through love serve one another” (Gal 5:13). In other words, Christian liberty is directly related to how we live together as the church.

Now, in **the broad sense**, Christian freedom is set against anyone who uses the law as a means of advancing righteousness. Whether directed towards the person who is not saved or saved already, it does not matter. Anyone who thinks that righteousness is advanced through the law has not yet come out from under the terms of the covenant of works. Yes, it is true that Deut 6:25 says that the statues of God “will be righteousness for us,” but only “if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God.” How much? All! Perfection to all of the law is the terms of this weaker covenant unable to give what it promises. This is why I quoted earlier that you are obligated to keep the whole law, without a single mistake.

This is a subtle and deceptive doctrine to those who have not yet been converted. Do you remember the Galatians, who had some infiltrate their ranks in order to force them to be circumcised? Well, **the commandment to be circumcised is right there in the OT**. It isn't like they are making up “a commandment of men.” Yet, keeping this law as a means of justifying or sanctifying righteousness would mean the undoing of the covenant of grace, for it is by grace that we are saved, not law keeping. And it is by grace that we are *kept*, not law-keeping. And so Paul is not talking to the unconverted here, but to those who started with grace and were now trying to be perfected by the flesh (or in good semi-Pelagian fashion, the flesh mixed with grace).

But there is a **narrower sense** that Christian Liberty is concerned with, it pertains to quarrels over “**opinions**” (Rom 14:1; ESV), “**disputes over doubtful things**” (NJKV) or more literally, “**judging someone else’s opinions**” (NAS). This is what Romans 14 is primarily concerned with, and it assumes that you have come to grips with the broader concerns already. Let’s look at this narrower sense. First I want to **identify what these “doubtful things” are and are not**. Then I want to say a word about **what it means that they are “doubtful.”**

These disputed matters are, in the context, differences of opinion respecting the **eating of meat**, the **observance of holy days**, and the **drinking of wine** (vv 2, 5, 21). Observe, “**One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables**” (2). There were many problems with food for both Jew and Gentile. In the law, God said you can’t eat certain kinds of food. Also, in those days, foods were literally sacrificed to idols and then resold, and some had guilty consciences over the eating of such food (not realizing that idols are nothing). Today, we have problems with food too, don’t we? There is an assault on **fatty foods, sugary foods, processed foods**, foods that have **pesticides**, foods that come from **cages**, foods with growth **hormones**. Some want to make it illegal to eat some or all of these foods. Others want the freedom to eat however they wish. In those days, like today, there were some who would indulge in such food all the time, others could not for the sake of their faith eat in good conscience, still others forced other people not to partake because of their own personal conscience, and still others who would lord their freedom over others by eating in front of them to spite them. **I’ll deal with all of these groups in a while.**

For now, I believe that our own problems, while different in some ways, are still about the same issue of *freedom*. Yes, there is food that is bad for you. I’m a living testament to how bad food can really harm your body. But according to a vegetarian, meat is bad for you, yet God told Peter that all food was now clean, so that didn’t seem to be God’s primary concern. There is food that is addictive. We have a serious problem with what and how much we eat in this nation. But I’m not going to tell you it is a sin to eat them (even though some of you might want me to), because I understand freedom in Christ. This kind of a stance will upset the legalist (the person who wants to have power over others, by forcing them to eat what they want them to eat), but this is just the point of the chapter.

Wine (brought up in vs. 21) is similar. Though people have all kinds of *personal* reasons for not drinking fermented drink, there is nothing in the Bible that ever prohibits it, except in the case of certain vows such as the Nazarite vow (which applies in the same way as the food and days in the chapter as a ceremonial law that has passed away). In fact, sometimes it is commanded (as in to Timothy with his stomach) and it is often partaken.

Notice again, “**One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike**” (vs. 5). The word “esteem” here means to **make a personal judgment**. In other

churches, some Jews were imposing feast days or fasting days or festival days from the Torah upon Christians as a means of legal righteousness for all Christians (in the same way they imposed asceticism, and rules about marriage, and other civil and ceremonial applications). Here, the issue has not gotten to that point, it is still personal with some feeling the need to keep the feasts and others, not. As he says, “Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.”

What do all of these things have in common? **First**, they are **not moral obligations**, as the Ten Commandments are (including Sabbath rest and worship). These things have to do with how we treat created things, not ethical obligations. God made all (edible) food, wine, and days good at creation. Yes, people twist them to their own ends, but that is a problem with people, not the thing itself. If you understand that principle, you can easily take it apply it to relevant issues today that have to do with the same kinds of issues.

Second, these things were all **part of the ceremonial and civic life of Israel**. Israel was a typological nation, and his laws regarding unclean food, and not taking wine with a vow, and coming together for feast and fasting days were typological applications pointing to Christ. As Christ has come, the shadows of the ceremonies and restrictions fade away.

Third, these things had become matters of **corporate taboos**, as one person’s conscience imposed their own convictions upon the rest of the body. Though it had not reached the level of apostatizing from the gospel, yet, it is clear that both sides were judging each other, quarreling about disputable matters, despising one another, and hindering the growth of the body.

What kinds of things are like this today? We have an almost inexhaustible number of them, don’t we? **Music**: you can’t listen to anything with a “satanic beat.” **Education**: Every Christian must home-school. **Law**: We must bring back Mosaic law to America. **Dating**: All Christians must court before marriage. **Movies**: Anyone who sees Harry Potter sins. We even do it, ironically, with the exact same examples that Paul uses in Romans 14. **Drink**: You cannot have anything fermented. **Days**: You cannot celebrate Christmas. **Food**: You cannot eat trans-fat. You name the area of life, people have ways of imposing their personal beliefs (legalistically) upon the community. So what are these beliefs or “judgments”? They are **hobby horses**. People usually ride their particular horse because 1. Like the Rich Young Ruler, they have convinced themselves that they are obeying this particular regulation perfectly. 2. They are actually very guilty of breaking it regularly, but they think that nobody else knows that, and to ensure that the façade is kept up, they ride the horse so that everyone knows that they are against it. Both of these fit into the category of the Pharisee.

But when referring to a Christian who abstains, he has in mind someone else: the weaker brother. What is the difference between the weaker brother and the Pharisee? How do you tell the two apart? This is **one of the most important distinctions you can come to understand** in all of the Bible. The **weaker brother** is the one whose *own* conscience will not allow him or her to

partake in that which God has created good. The **Pharisee** is the one whose conscience will not allow for *everyone else* to partake in it. The weaker brother takes away his *own* freedom because he cannot participate in the freedom others have *by faith*. The Pharisee wants to take away everyone else's freedom. The weaker brother rarely rides any horse, because they know that they fall short. For them, the issue is intensely personal and they are very introspective, though they will let you know that for them it is a problem. The Pharisee is concerned with the hobby horse for personal gain, exploitation, or self-righteous reasons. His issues need to become a matter of public policy. But he is a hypocrite, because the very things he imposes upon others, he does not himself keep.

The passage does not address the Pharisee, *per se*, but it is important to bring him up here. How are we to respond to the Pharisee? The Apostle is very blunt in other places. **“Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths (i.e. feasts). . . Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels. . . [the elemental spirits of the world say] ‘do not handle, Do not taste, do not touch’. . . these things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh” (Col 2:16-23)**. Pharisaical righteousness is so deadly because it actually prevents people from arriving in the kingdom. This is why Paul, in the circumstances at Galatia, warned that to be circumcised by these Pharisees was to make Christ of no effect. Pharisees use the good things of the law *unlawfully*, so that they do not drive you ever back to Christ, but rather in towards yourself and the deceit of your own heart.

And yet, on at least one occasion, Paul circumcised one of his Gentile disciples. Why? Because for Paul, circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, eating meat sacrificed to idols is nothing and not eating meat to them is nothing. As he says here, **“I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself” (Rom 14:14)**. And **“everything is indeed clean” (20)**. So, when the command is not being used unlawfully, then if the circumstance calls for it, it is ok to keep it, even though the shadow.

What makes the thing a problem is not the thing itself, but a person's personal conscience against themselves. As Paul continues, **“but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.”** And again as he says at the very end, **“Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” (23)**. Now, this is absolutely remarkable. Because in discussions over what is sin and what isn't sin, we are almost always black and white, or at least we want to be. We say this thing is a sin, and this thing is not. But, in matters of indifference, **the very same thing can be sin for one person and not for another**. You simply have to come to grips with that, no matter which side of a controversy you fall on, because you have obligations no matter who you are. **What makes the difference is faith or lack there of**, conscience and its inability to come into the freedom of Christ as fully as possible.

Now listen carefully, because we are speaking of things central to the gospel itself. **John Calvin** says, “Apart from a knowledge of justification, consciences dare undertake almost nothing without doubting, they hesitate and recoil from many things; they constantly waver and are afraid” (Institutes 3.19.1). The weaker brother must come to understand that God gives the Christian freedom so that the conscience, in seeking assurance of justification before God, should rise above and advance beyond the law, forgetting all law righteousness (3.19.2). You see, for Calvin, Christian liberty is treated immediately after justification because it is “especially an appendage to justification and is of no little avail in understanding its power” (3.19.1). As **Michael Horton** says, “One cannot enjoy the good news, and then live as if it isn’t true for him or her.”² And so Romans 14 is directly related to the gospel.

This is the goal, to move from weakness to strength, and it serves a couple of different purposes. It helps the troubled soul come to greater and greater security of their salvation, because they understand more and more that it has absolutely nothing to do with their obedience, either before or after regeneration. But moving from weakness to strength is also for the sake of the body, in that it keeps them from moving to the next step of judging their brother and thus becoming a Pharisee. Thus, there are commandments that are given to the weaker brother in this passage. “Let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats” (Rom 14:2). Why? For several reasons.

First, because “God has welcomed him” (vs. 2). That is, God has welcomed him because salvation is not a matter of obedience to the ceremonial law (a matter of eating and drinking) or especially to a pretended law of God that you made up to make you feel moral, but through the free merits of Jesus Christ offered in the gospel and given by the Holy Spirit, the Gentile is now acceptable “just as they are.” **Second**, we must not pass judgment upon someone else’s servant (vs. 4). Judging is the key to everything having to do with the weaker brothers, both for himself and the way he treats others. If God bought us, then we belong to him. No Christian therefore, has the right to lord personal convictions over anyone else, because they do not own that person. God does. **Third**, the one who partakes or eats or drinks or more basically enjoys his or her freedom, does so “to the Lord.” That is, this is their spiritual act of worship! “He gives thanks to God” (vs. 6). **Forth**, none of us lives unto himself or dies unto himself (7). But we are called to a body, and we must act lovingly towards one another. How many of these kinds of issues have resulted in church splits and even whole new denominations? I guarantee that the nearly 40,000 Protestant denominations exist overwhelmingly because of matters of indifference, which is all you have left to fight about once the core of the faith is already jettisoned. **Fifth**, passing judgment upon these matters “despises your brother” (10). Children, we are members of one family with God as our sole father. Individual preferences, biological ties, household rules, you put these off when you come into each other’s presence, because this is your truer family. **Sixth**,

² Michael Horton, “Recovering the Art of Christian Prudence,” *MR* March/April 2000, 17.

God is the judge of all, but this also includes those who call him father. “We will all stand before the judgment set of God” (10). Therefore, just as we have seen in chapter 12 and 13, all of these matters of interconnected church life must keep in mind that God is the judge and that he will do what is right. We do not have to take his seat and do his work for him. **Seventh, the kingdom is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (17).** This righteousness is not our own, but an alien righteousness give to us by Christ. The peace we have can only be known when we come to understand the freedom we really do have in Christ. The joy we have cannot be had by constantly judging others and ourselves over disputable matters of the OT law. **Eighth, we are to pursue what makes for peace and the mutual upbuilding of the body (19).** We are not to destroy the work of God for the sake of a hobby horse. Is there anything more abominable than tearing down the temple of God? **Ninth, your faith is between yourself and God on these matters (22).** While it is certainly fine that you let others know about your convictions, so that they can be sensitive to your weakness, your faith is not “The Faith.” Your conscience is not the same as everyone else’s on these matters. And to make yourself the ideal is to put yourself in the place of God, and erect an idol like Nebuchadnezzar where all must bow before your golden image. **Tenth, whoever doubts is condemned if he eats.** Thus, you do not want to stay in this position forever, do you? But rather, come and see the glorious freedom that belongs to the saints because of what Christ has done.

But now, it is not only to the weak that Paul writes this chapter. He also has in mind what might be implied as “strong” brothers, though he doesn’t use that term and I’ll tell you why. While strength in these matters is the ideal, that is in terms of the way one comes to understand liberty, for it shows a greater understanding and acceptance of justification, there are some very real dangers that “strong” brothers and sisters have to watch out for. And when they act as some who are supposedly strong act, they are in no way acting better than the weaker brother who judges them. Thus, it isn’t really right to call them strong at all!

Before I get to that, I must mention the evil twin of the stronger brother. Just as Pharisees can masquerade as weaker brothers, so too can antinomians masquerade as stronger brothers. Antinomians are those who are literally “without law.” The antinomian not only knows that the law has no legal hold upon a believers, he acts as if he has no moral obligation to keep it as well. Sometimes you will find Christians who say that we have no obligation to keep the moral law of God, *in any sense*. And while it is true that we do not have a legal obligation to keep it for righteousness, it is not true that the law no longer guides us and shows us the way, for the moral law is a reflection of God himself. Now, some have a theology that the law has no place in the NT, but don’t act that way. Others have the theology to go with it. But just like the Pharisee, it is not the antinomian who is in mind here. There is a danger that the stronger brother can move into antinomianism, but the first step is to understand how you are to relate to the weaker brother in matters of indifference. The Apostle has a lot to say here as well.

First, the one who is not weak on a particular issue **must** “welcome in faith” the one who is. **Verse 1** is actually directed to this person, not the weaker brother. Just because some people seem to you to have serious hang-ups, it does not mean that they are not saved! To clarify the point, as I said earlier, there are a lot of people who are “strong” in one matter, but weak in another. One person will drink wine with no problem, but then never consider going to a single movie ever made because they are all of the devil. One of the problems here is that, like the weaker person, the stronger person might insist that everyone be free with regard to such a such an issue, but then never bring up the one that he personally has a problem with, because he doesn’t want to be convinced about his weakness in that area. Also, it is just plain easy to look down upon those you consider inferior to you, and this is a grave sin. Thus, **second**, the stronger person **must not** “despise the one who abstains” (3). Despising of each other is thus a two-way street. Both persons are capable of despising, and neither is justifiable. **Third**, despising is **judging** in both cases (3). If you despise your weaker brother because he is not able to do what you do, you pass judgment upon him as surely as he is able to judge you. But the weaker brother was bought at the same price as you and his master is God and not you. And God is able to make him stand on the Day (4). **Forth**, the one who abstains abstains in honor of the lord and **gives thanks to God** (6). That may seem like a strange thing to you, because you know that to abstain is nothing. And yet, he does so because he believes that this is what God would have him to do. **Fifth**, **God is their judge** as much as he is yours (10-11). Every knee will bow to Christ, including your weaker brother. **Sixth**, **we all will give an account to God**. The point pertains to both groups too. If I must stand before God for my weakness, then you must not worry about judging me. God will take care of me, and I would rather have him deal with me than you. **Seventh**, **you must not put a stumbling block in your brother’s way** (13). It says, “**If your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.**”

This one will take a little explaining, because it is twisted by most people beyond what the text says. You have surely heard that if someone thinks you must not drink wine, that you must therefore never drink wine in their presence. But think carefully about what has just been said. The person thinks that *you* must not drink wine. Who is the one that thinks such a thing? The Pharisee! The issue should be that they cannot drink it. Instead, they say that you should not. That is not what the verse is talking about. How do I know this? Because he say, “**Do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil**” (16). That is what the Pharisees does, he speaks of what you are doing (or not doing) as evil. How did Jesus respond to such things? He drank in their presence!

But, you say, why then would it say that the weaker brother is grieved by what you eat? (15). **He is not grieved for your sake, but for his own!** That is, it may very well be that in drinking in front of your brother, that you are enticing him to go against his own conscience or causing him to be in a situation where he will not be able to control himself, and thus sin because

his participation would not be in faith, but out of some kind of peer pressure. This is where I have seen some Reformed people go off the deep end. They think that because they have freedom to drink, *that they must always use that freedom*, even around those who are weaker, in fact *because* they are weaker.

But freedom is not freedom if you always have to participate. Freedom is only freedom if you are free to participate or free to abstain. Otherwise, you are in bondage! As Calvin says, “Those who think that freedom does not exist unless it is used before men, and consequently, in using it have no regard for weaker brethren” are not free (3.19.9). To participate knowing to spite your weaker brother’s weakness is not to use a thing indifferently (3.19.10). Freedom is a spiritual thing, “whose whole force consist in quieting frightened consciences before God—that are perhaps disturbed and troubled over forgiveness of sins, or anxious whether unfinished works, corrupted by the faults of our flesh, are pleasing to God, or tormented about the use of things indifferent.” Thus, “It is perversely interpreted by those who allege it as an excuse for their desires that they may abuse God’s good gifts to their own lust” (3.19.9). Freedom, is freedom to partake *or abstain* depending upon the circumstances, but **it is never freedom to sin**, either in the way you treat your brother, or in abusing the gift that God has given and so turning it into an idol. Gluttony, drunkenness, and disobeying the Sabbath rest on the Lord’s Day are never ok.

And so, if you know that your brother will have problems with temptation or peer pressure or giving into some habit that has become for him a sin, *then don’t do it around him*. Exercise your freedom to abstain. The weaker brother must not judge you because you drink, but you are not to entice him into sin and so have no regard for your sibling in Christ.

Thus, **eighth**, the stronger brother is to **pursue what makes for peace** and for mutual upbuilding. The goal is to move the weaker brother to a stronger position, but not to do so by force or quarreling or disrespect of his person. The goal is also for the stronger brother to have regard for the rest of the body. **Ninth**, your faith is likewise between you and God. “**Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves**” (22).

I need to say a word about how the church can help facilitate the principles in this chapter without siding with one person or the other. There is a way, and it is called the Regulative Principle. The **Regulative Principle** says that in corporate activities, we do only what we are commanded. The principle was developed by the Reformed primarily for the purpose of not causing weaker brothers to sin when they come to worship. You see, when we add things to worship that God has not prescribed, we may inadvertently be fostering doubt and anxiety in weaker brothers. This is why we do not celebrate Christmas in the corporate worship of God (though we do celebrate Christ’s birth, and we do it more than once a year). It is why we do not have an American Flag here. It is why we do not sing God Bless America here. Some of you

might be offended (I count myself among them). The regulative principle prevents the church from imposing unbiblical regulations upon the community in sensitivity to the weaker brother.

However, *outside of the corporate worship of God*, the church has no more right to tell you that you must drink as that you can't drink. She can't tell you how you must raise your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, only that you must do so. She can't tell you how you must choose to discipline them, only that you must discipline them. She can't tell you not to go see Harry Potter, or not to listen to Talk Radio or KBCO or KOSI, only that you must honor God in all that you do. One person can't honor God faithfully doing those things. Another can. That's what the text says here. These may be matters of indifference, so long as they are used indifferently. Thus, the church is able to maintain obedience to this chapter, by being sensitive to the weaker brother and the stronger position, by not letting the church become a "Christ-and" community, and by not letting it forsake the moral law because of Christian liberty.

There is so much more to say about this issue, and I recommend Calvin's *Institutes* 3.19 and Martin Luther's *On Christian Liberty* for you to read. But I want to leave you with this thought. Luther was once asked by a Catholic priest, "If your doctrine of justification is true, then people will do whatever they want," meaning of course that they will choose to follow their sinful passions and desires. This poor, wretched soul exposed his own heart to Luther in a sorry way, showing that he had never personally experienced a heart change, otherwise he would have never concluded such a thing. For what person, who knows the power of the gospel in their own life, would ever think that Christians will ever enjoy sinning against their Redeemer? Friend, if when you hear the gospel freely presented to believer and unbeliever alike, you come to the same conclusion as this man, and find yourself always having to add back in legal obedience, then you need to have your own heart changed by trusting in the free grace of Jesus Christ alone. Then you know the power of the gospel to give you the very thing you are looking for everyone else to have by way of imposition to the law. Likewise, if you hear the gospel and conclude that you should want to sin all the time, then you need to have your heart changed by trusting in the free grace of Jesus Christ alone. I leave you with Luther's quick witted reply to the point "they will do whatever they want." "Sir what you say is absolutely true [this is the legal point of the gospel]. Now, what do you want?"

and/or if they are imposing their upon everyone else in the name of sanctification or righteousness or holiness. The later refuses to admit that we are righteous in Christ already, that nothing can make our righteousness any better or worse, and also that in Christ we want to be like him without any law telling us to be so. For, the law has no power to give what it commands.

But personal consciences are troubled very much by their own inability to partake in the good things of God. They are consumed with themselves, not others. They know that the gospel is free, but it just seems too unbelievable to be true, and they often find themselves doing nothing without doubting. And it is in part for the sake of their conscience that this discussion finds its purpose.

That Paul does not have in mind the Lord's Day seems clear, since Christians never regarded this day as anything other than the upmost of holiness. It's not like you could just forsake the public assembly. But personal, private holy days, that's another matter. Thus, Paul does not say (as he does with the moral law),

It seems that people, especially Jews, were not coming to understand that the legal holy days (sabbaths, purification days, feast days, etc.) had passed away with the coming of Christ. Some still regarded all of them as holy and important, though their meaning had terminus in Christ's death and resurrection.

But notice, Paul does not say, "How pitiful for some of you to keep in the shadows" (even though that would have been his position). Instead he includes this in a discussion about disputable matters, not that they are in dispute, but again that individuals consciences had not yet come into the freedom of the Christian.

Note how even Christians do not worship on the seventh day, but now worship on the eighth, in celebration of the risen Lord, realizing that what the seventh day pointed to is even now dawning in our hearts in Christ. Our Lord's Day is filled with the requirements of Sabbath (that is, rest from our labor), because it is a creation ordinance, and the old creation has not yet been put aside. But the other Sabbaths are

(Worried about what it means that they are doubtful.... It isn't that God doubts them, or that these issues are grey in and of themselves. No. Paul was perfectly convinced that these things were absolutely fine in the sight of God. What makes them doubtful is not that we cannot know the truth about how God feels about the use of such things, but rather that an individual's conscience may not allow him or her to partake in them without destroying their own faith).

Weak, not to partake themselves. A weak brother is not one who will not allow others to partake. No, this is the Pharisee.

Strong, those who judge the weak brother's conscience or who intentionally try to destroy his conscience in his presence to lord his freedom over another. This is about attitudes, not actions per se. And isn't that exactly what we have come to expect from God? He is concerned with each and every person's heart. In disputable matters, one can abstain in sin and partake in sin, one can abstain in faith and partake in faith. We are not talking here about the moral law (though shalt have no other gods before me). One cannot have another god before Christ in faith (though, Christians who have faith do very often put other gods before Christ)!

In other words, they are applications of the ceremonial and civil law of God in the life of the church.

The *adiaphora* are morally acceptable or unacceptable by God based upon the motive and end of the doer. In this sense there are no *indifferent* things.

This is the issue, how we treat one another with our freedom in Christ. There are two and only two types of people in this regard. These classifications are not absolute, for you can be a weaker brother with respect to one opinion, and a stronger brother with respect to another.

Therefore **let no one pass judgment on you** in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.

¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

¹⁸ **Let no one disqualify you**, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,

¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

²⁰ If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations--

²¹ "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch"

²² (referring to things that all perish as they are used)--according to human precepts and teachings?

²³ These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

(Col 2:16-23 ESV)

Confusion and disdain over this doctrine knows no denominational boundaries. This is because there are legalistic hypocrites and antinomians in every group that calls itself Christian. Hypocrites are those who say one thing but act contrary to it. They are legalistic, focusing all their efforts on getting people to obey law *as they understand their application personally* (i.e. the teaching and commandments of men). Antinomians are those who are literally "without law." The antinomian only knows how to sin because he only wants to sin. His desire is to be free of law *in every sense*. Neither of these groups cherish Christian liberty, because by its definition, Christian liberty understands that matters of indifference are for one person, sin, and for another person, not sin. These two groups love black and white, but in this area, black and white becomes quite grey indeed.

Martin Luther looked upon his nearing death and the deaths of the other early Reformers with sadness for the church of whom he wrote,

Up to this time you have heard the real, true word; now beware of your own thoughts and wisdom. The devil will kindle the light of reason and lead you away from the faith, as he did the Anabaptists and Sacramentarians³... I see clearly that, if God does not give us faithful preachers and ministers, the devil will tear our church to pieces by the *fanatics*, and will not cease until he has finished. ... If he cannot accomplish it through the Pope and the Emperor, he will do it through those who are now in doctrinal agreement with us (1546 Sermon, Wittenberg).

For the Reformers, fanatics were schismatics and sectarians. They were those who refused to hold to creeds and confessions rooted deeply in Scripture and the early church. Over the course of five centuries, their lack of doctrine and love of law has seen them splice into smaller and smaller groups over ever increasingly minor issues. Today, there are over 40,000 Protestant groups that prove the legitimacy of Luther's prophecy.

³ For Luther, a Sacramentarian was someone who denied the real presence of Christ in the Supper.

The chief reason for Luther's worry was that when the glue of the Reformation passed into death, those who presently held to the central articles of the faith would abandon them in favor of more practical matters. And nobody is ever able to agree on practical matters. Practical matters always relate to legal (legalistic) matters. And people always have different opinions about legal applications. It may surprise you to learn that in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin treated the doctrine of Christian Liberty immediately after his discussion of justification by faith. He did this for the same reason that Luther gave his warning to the church at Wittenberg. Listen carefully and introspectively to Calvin who is chiefly concerned with the pastoral implications of this doctrine,

We must now discuss Christian freedom... [This] is a thing of prime necessity, and apart from a knowledge of it *consciences* dare undertake almost nothing without *doubting*; they *hesitate* and recoil from many things; they constantly *waver* and are *afraid*. But freedom is especially an appendage of justification and it is of no little avail in understanding its power. Indeed, those who seriously fear God will enjoy the incomparable benefit of this doctrine.

Notice the concern with the consciences of those who are burdened by their personal obedience to the law. Notice also that Calvin believes, not in the law to be powerful in a Christians' life, but in justification to be so.

But Calvin was concerned about this discussion, because he knew far too well, "As soon as [it] is mentioned, either passions boil or wild tumults rise... Some, on the pretext of freedom, shake off all obedience toward God and break out into unbridled license (antinomians). Others disdain it, thinking that it takes away all moderation, order, and choice of things (legalists). What should we do? Shall we say good-bye to Christian freedom, thus cutting off occasion for such dangers? No. But as we have said, unless this freedom be comprehended, neither Christ nor gospel truth, nor inner peace of soul, can be rightly known" (*Institutes* 3.19.1). This last bit is especially important to hear, for our teacher says that unless you understand Christian liberty, you do not understand inner peace, nor gospel truth, nor Christ himself! Calvin understands that those who do not like the doctrine will always give verbal assent to it, but will immediately add on the "but" at the end. Yes, we have Christian Liberty, BUT, I can do whatever I want. Yes, we have Christian liberty, BUT, if we focus on that people will just want to sin. Antinomian. Legalist. Neither comprehends the power of God in Jesus Christ.

In Romans, we have seen Paul respond in exasperation several times to the same lack of understanding of the gospel. Over and over he rhetorically asks, "shall we sin so that grace will increase?" But why does he ask this? He knows it is because some who hear the absolute freedom of the Christian in the gospel will not understand its power to restrain sin. NOW LAW?GRACE

But its not like Paul is now writing to a different group of people. In fact, he knows the situation going on in Rome, that weak brothers are judging stronger brothers and imposing

Pharisaical legalism upon their freedom while at the same time strong brothers are intentionally harming their weaker brothers by using their Christian freedom to spite them. These same groups are certainly those who have not understood the gospel earlier in this letter. So let us get a closer look at these two groups of Christians and try to understand what Christ, through the Apostle, is telling them about Christian Liberty.

I have a very pastoral concern here for both of these groups that are in our own congregation (everyone falls into one category or another, and sometimes we cross over categories depending upon the particular issue in view. That is, one person can be strong with regard to drinks, but weak with regard to holy days.

I am concerned for you weaker brothers, that you are pleased to remain in your weakness, never growing into the maturity of Christ on these matters. I am also concerned for you that your consciences constantly torment you, and you do not come to realize the existential peace that God gives you through the gospel.

I am concerned for you stronger brothers, that you want to lord it over your weaker brothers, and always exercise freedom and never restraint. But freedom is free, precisely because sometimes you can indulge and other times you can restrain. But if you never restrain, then you are not free! Calvin said... provided they use it indifferently... and . But if you never restrain, or if you never show concern for weaker brothers, then you are given no concern to them as persons or to the gospel which gives you the freedom in the first place.

The chief

What this poor, sorry soul had not experienced himself is a change of heart, otherwise he would not have said