

Romans 14:1-4

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/rom/rom-14/romans-141-4/>

God is our master and king. We should not look to judge one another for differences in religious practices or impose our habits on each other. God is the judge, not us.

The book of Romans is about living righteously (in harmony with God's design) by faith. Throughout Romans, Paul deals with slander from competing Jewish "authorities" in Rome who were pushing believers back to the Jewish Law in order to gain righteousness (Romans 3:8). Paul has asserted that finding righteousness through the Law simply does not work (Romans 9:31-32).

At this point in his letter, Paul has comprehensively refuted the slander of his message of grace from the competing Jewish "authorities." He has defended his message of living by faith as the means to be justified in God's sight to receive the gift of eternal life (Romans 4:1-3, 5:15). And Paul has defended his good news message (gospel) that believers gain the experience and reward of eternal life through walking by faith (Romans 1:16-17, 2:6-7, 8:3-4),

In chapters 12-13, Paul began to provide examples and illustrations of what a walk of faith looks like. To follow in this path requires adopting a new perspective, a transformed mind (Romans 12:2). In Chapter 14, Paul continues to explain what righteous living by faith looks like. Here, he draws a distinction between a believer who is strong in faith and one who is weak in faith.

Again, he does not want believers, even by faith, to assert power over each other based on rules. The believer with strong faith should bear and *accept the one who is weak in faith* (v 1), instead of pushing the weak believer into violating his conscience, *but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions* (v 1).

By instructing these faithful Roman believers to avoid judging others, Paul is echoing Jesus's teaching from the Sermon on the Mount. There Jesus taught that judgment should be left to God. That when we judge others we are creating a standard for ourselves by which God will judge us (Matthew 7:1-2). Further, Jesus taught that when we see someone sinning our first action should be to examine ourselves, for when we can see sin it likely means we have it in ourselves (Matthew 7:3-5),

This instruction is appropriate for this audience because the faith of these Roman believers is sufficiently strong to have become world famous (Romans 1:8). Rather than dispute the weak believer's weakness by *passing judgment on his opinions*, the strong believer should encourage and lift up this person in their walk with God.

The example Paul uses is specific to 1st century Rome: *One person has faith that he may eat all things* (through freedom in Christ, Acts 10:15), *but he who is weak eats vegetables only* (perhaps because they are afraid the local meat has been blessed by pagan priests—1 Corinthians 8:7) (v 2).

Instead of coercing the weak believer to eat meat, *the one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat* the meat sacrificed to an idol (v 3). Paul is saying we should

be sensitive to the lack of understanding of others and not consume meat sacrificed to idols if they are present. To do so will tempt them to violate their conscience.

Imposing our freedom onto someone else's conscience is divisive and pointless, and it wounds the weak believer's faith. When someone violates their conscience it leads to sin, and can lead to their life becoming shipwrecked (Romans 14:23; 1 Timothy 1:19). Paul mentions the word "conscience" three times in Romans:

- In Romans 2:15, he said Gentiles show that they are made in God's image and therefore reflect God's law "in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness."
- In Romans 9:1, Paul appeals to his own conscience as a witness that what he is saying is true.
- In Romans 13:5, Paul asserts that believers should obey governing authorities not only because of the negative consequences that can stem from breaking the law, but also "for conscience' sake." This is because our consciences will judge us when we stand before Jesus at the judgement (Romans 2:16).

It is important to note that the one with weak faith is the one whose conscience will be violated if he eats the meat. Strong faith allows freedom to say, "Hey, food is food, that pagan priest doesn't mean anything to me." But perhaps the brother with the weak faith has just come out of paganism, and for him to eat the meat would trigger all sorts of habit patterns he is trying to break away from. Therefore, for that person eating the meat would be sinful, and perhaps lead to even more sin.

So someone that has strong faith should be sensitive to not create a stumbling block or temptation for someone with weak faith. On the other hand, *the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him* (v 3).

God's acceptance of His children is a gift that is given unconditionally. There is no action from any child of His that can cause God's rejection (Romans 8:37-39; 2 Timothy 2:13). All that is required to be born again (John 3:3) is to have sufficient faith to receive the gift of eternal life by looking at Jesus's work on the cross done for us (John 3:14-15).

But once we have been born, and received this gift, it is up to us to decide how to live. Each day we have the choice whether to live by faith, believing that God's ways are for our best, or to think our own way is superior. To walk in the flesh or the Spirit (Galatians 5:16). Each has substantial consequences in this life as well as the next (Galatians 6:8).

In order to walk in faith and sow to the Spirit, strong believers need to be mindful of tempering their actions to accommodate those with weak faith, so as to avoid tempting their weaker brother to violate his conscience.

To attempt to bring this to modern times, one brother might enjoy playing the game of pool, but forgo the sport when with a brother who is an alcoholic and associates playing pool with drinking alcohol. To take that brother to a pool hall would put him in harm's way to relapse into alcoholism; in the best interest of the alcoholic brother, pool can wait until another day.

This passage specifically applies to “opinions” (v 1). That would infer we are talking about things the Bible does not directly address. However, that is most of life. The Bible says little about what we spend most of our time doing, whether eating, dressing, working, traveling, etc.

The Bible gives us principles to apply to all those areas. Each person will apply those principles based on their conscience, experience, and level of faith. The stronger in faith must be more on the lookout for how to bless others of weaker faith.

It is important to reiterate what faith is. Hebrews gives the Biblical definition of faith:

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”
(Hebrews 11:1)

If you hope for something, you do not have it. If you already have it, you cannot hope for it. Faith is fundamentally believing things that are true, but that we do not have and cannot see. Someone who is strong in faith acts on the belief (faith) that those things which are not seen are true and tangible.

So, when we *accept* someone who is weak in the faith, it means that person has trouble making things he cannot see tangible. He has difficulty treating things he does not have as though he does. Those are hard things to do.

All of us are going to have weak faith or have had weak faith at some point in time, because faith is difficult and often requires maturity to gain. So, we should encourage one another, rather than judge each other. We should put ourselves in the shoes of others and seek their best interest.

Paul concludes his reasoning by pointing out that it is God who judges: *Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand* (v 4).

While our consciences will apparently testify at our judgement (Romans 2:16), it seems clear that God will do the judging, not us. So when we *judge* others it is like we are judging *the servant of another*. Bringing to modern times, we might state this as, “It is not your business to fire someone else’s employee; that is the decision of that business owner or their manager.” To try to fire someone else’s employee would just be meddling.

When we *judge* other believers we are judging God’s servant, because all believers in Jesus belong to God. Therefore, to *judge* another believer is to judge God’s “employee.” It is meddling. God is the *master* of all. And *to his own master* each believer *stands or falls* at their judgment.

Paul makes this same point in his first letter to the believers at Corinth, chastising them for picking sides as “I am of Paul” or “I am of Apollos” (1 Corinthians 3:4). He asserts that each believer will stand or fall before their *master* who is Jesus. At His judgement, all our deeds will be evaluated with fire, and if anything remains we will gain a reward, but if not, we will suffer loss (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

Therefore, it behooves each believer to maintain focus on having our thoughts and actions please God, rather than being presumptuous and sitting in Jesus's seat by judging His people.

Biblical Text

¹ Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but not for the purpose of* passing judgment on his opinions. ² One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only*. ³ The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. ⁴ Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.