



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 43



TRANSLATION LEGEND: ASV=American Standard Version, BBE=Bible in Basic English, DRA=Douay-Rheims KJV=King James Version, NKJV=New King James Version; NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible, NAU=New American Standard Bible 1995, NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version, NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version, RSV=Revised Standard Version, YLT=Young's Literal Translation.

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

LIBERTY and JUDGMENT

14:1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. ² For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. ³ Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. 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.^{NKJV} (Romans 14:1-13)

INTRODUCTION

With great care, the Holy Spirit has undergirded our faith with the fact of our salvation. We were not saved by our own works, or because we managed to measure up to the requirements of the Law. Salvation has come to us by God's grace and through our faith – neither of which can be a source of fleshly boasting. Of ourselves, we could not lay hold of God's grace, nor could we bring ourselves to

believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is an important truth to be seen here. Sin has utterly corrupted everything about us. As individuals, "there is none righteous," and as doers, "there is none that doeth good" (3:10,12). Those are absolute and unwavering realities. Confined to the realm of nature, whether in ourselves, or those about us,

we are described as "having no hope" (Eph 2:12). It is only as Christ Jesus enters the picture that hope begins to rise. It is only when God begins to work that anything of substance begins to happen. Apart from that, we are impotent to help ourselves, or deliver ourselves from sin and its alienating effects. This is fundamental to sound doctrine, and cannot be effectively contradicted. It is a

OUTLINE

- < RECEIVED, BUT NOT IN DISPUTATION (14:1)
- < BELIEVING and WEAKNESS (14:2-3)
- < YOU ARE NOT THE JUDGE (14:4)
- < DIFFERING VIEWS, YET BOTH ARE RECEIVED (14:5-6)
- < WE ARE NOT ISLANDS UNTO OURSELVES (14:7-8)
- < LORD OF ALL (14:9)
- < WHO DO YOU JUDGE YOUR BROTHER? (14:10-12)
- < NO MORE! (14:13)

postulate that is found throughout Scripture. It is what necessitated the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is why the remission of sins is required, and is the reason for the conferment of righteousness upon the basis of faith. **If there was any vestige of moral ability retained in fallen man, none of these things would be required.**

With unusual power, the book of Romans underscores these things.

- ' Salvation requires Divine "power" (1:16).
- ' A righteousness for man is revealed through the Gospel (1:17-18).
- ' We are justified freely by God's grace and through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (3:24).
- ' God justifies the ungodly, counting their faith to them as righteousness (4:5).
- ' We are "justified by faith," and have peace with God only "through our

Lord Jesus Christ" (5:1).

- ' We have been "made righteous" (5:19).
- ' Our spiritual life is traced to being raised with Christ, after having died with Him (6:1-6).
- ' Eternal life is "the gift of God" (6:23).
- ' We have been "delivered" from the condemning Law (7:6).
- ' We have been "made free" from the law of sin and of death" (8:2).

All of this may appear to have little to do with our text. However, we must be diligent to avoid such an erroneous conclusion. The reasoning of the fourteen chapter is based upon the factual presentation of the first eight chapters.

If we have been accepted by God upon the basis of grace and through faith, we can in no wise become harsh judges of our brethren! That is the reasoning of this marvelous chapter. It is not intended to be a proclamation of what qualifies or disqualifies the child of God. Rather, it affirms that those whom God has accepted cannot be excluded by others who have been received by Him.

The judgment of our peers is not the basis for Divine acceptance. We were not received by God upon the basis of their assessment, and we cannot be excluded from Him because of it.

Our text will show us that a thorough understanding of all things is not required for God to receive us. For that very reason, it cannot be the basis for our acceptance of one another. This does not imply that what men know and acknowledge is totally unimportant. Those who deny Jesus is the Christ, are not accepted by God, and cannot be

accepted by His people (1 John 2:22). The person who does not "confess" that Jesus Christ "is come in the flesh," has not been received by God, and is not to be received by His people (1 John 4:3).

There are, however, areas of knowledge in which considerable variance can exist among believers. The variance itself is not honorable, and is not to be treated as though it was. There is a level of spiritual understanding that is juvenile, and out of which men must eventually grow. That level is associated with time, which means properly nourished spiritual life will grow and advance. The Spirit rebuked certain Hebrew believers because "when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat" (Heb 5:12).

While the faith of the child of God is being developed, Divine acceptance is still realized. As we will see, care must be taken not to alienate people whose faith is weak. Instead, care must be taken to see to it that their faith grows and becomes strong, thereby giving glory to God. The manner in which this is done may very well involve "speaking the truth in love" (Eph 4:15). That is not, however, the approach of our text. Here we will see the advancement of a weaker brother hinges upon our acceptance of him, and consideration of him in our conduct.

We will also see that the weaker brother is more prone to harsh judgment. **In Christ juvenility does not make us more gentle.** Instead, it promotes judgmental attitudes that are strictly forbidden by both the Word of the King and the nature of His Kingdom.

RECEIVED, BUT NOT IN DISPUTATION

"^{14:1} Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things." At once we see that certain differences exist among the people of God, even though they have all been received by Christ to the glory of God. While it is the fervent desire of godly men

and women that we be of one mind in everything, the stark reality of the case is that this condition does not exist. Some people neutralize this reality by simply ignoring the differences. Still others remove the challenge by viewing their own particular group as the only one

received by God. These are not acceptable approaches, for our text will call for the consistent and loving consideration of Christ's own brethren.

RECEIVING BRETHREN

"Receive one . . ." Other versions

read, “welcome him,”^{RSV} “accept him,”^{NIV} “take unto you.”^{DRA} The point here is not simply seeing a person as harmless, or not causing trouble for him. **To receive someone is to acknowledge God has received him.** It is to consider him one of “us,” so to speak. Those who are “received,” and the ones who “receive” them, belong to the same group, or body. It is to take one as a companion, receiving into friendship and personal involvement.

It will become apparent to you that this is a scathing condemnation of all forms of denominationalism, or sectarianism. While men have grown accustomed to this ungodly phenomenon, God has not. There are, to be sure, valid reasons for separating from others. Some of the reasons include immortality (1 Cor 5:11), men of perverse disputings, who teach that gain is godliness (1 Tim 6:5), and those who have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof (2 Tim 3:5). Another reason for withdrawal is the refusal to work (2 Thess 3:6-10).

These are quite different from the considerations of our text. They all postulate people with corrupt hearts, a disdain for the truth of God, and involvement in iniquity. This text deals with a different kind of condition.

WEAK IN THE FAITH

“ . . . who is weak in the faith.” Here is a person whose faith is weak. It is not an enviable position, yet one that can be corrected. **A person with weak faith cannot see the whole picture.** There are areas where his understanding is flawed. Yet, he is not a rebel, nor is he fighting against the Lord or resisting His Spirit. This is the person who does not have a grasp of the truth itself, but sees eternal realities like the partially-healed blind men – “men as trees walking”(Mark 8:24). **Things regarding practical conduct are not clear to such a person. They do not doubt the fact of God or Christ, but do not see the implications of the truth.**

The Conscience

Yet, we will find this individual has a good conscience, and refuses to contradict it. He is devoted to God, and seeks to

please him, even though his understanding is deficient. **We are dealing here with the area of the conscience, which is a sentinel with some jurisdiction over the mind.** The conscience is not infallible, and can even be technically wrong. Yet, God has made no provision for it to be violated. The conscience can be brought into a fuller conformity to the mind of the Lord. However, whatever its present degree of abidance, it is to be honored.

One of the commendable things about Paul, even before he was called into the Apostleship, was that he lived “in all good conscience” continually (Acts 23:1). Even though he was formerly wrong in his perception of Christ, he did live in a conscientious effort to please God. It was

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that very posture of soul that contributed to his recovery, and the more precise instruction of his conscience.

While a “good conscience” is not the basis for Divine acceptance, it is an appointed means of arriving at the truth of God, and is thus to be maintained.

A person who is “weak in the faith” has an untrained, but sincere, conscience. This is one whose “senses” have not yet been “exercised to discern good and evil” (Heb 5:14). Our text now addresses how such a person is to be regarded, and how he is to be treated. It will greatly assist us to remember that we were all in this category at one time. **No person begins life in Christ in a mature state.** Yet

all begin in a state of Divine approval, being “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 12:6).

Receiving a person with “weak faith” does not constitute an approval of what that person conceives to be right and wrong. Nor, indeed, does it mean such an individual is to set the tone for the rest of the assembly, or the body of people with whom he is associated. The instruction that follows will make that quite clear.

DISPUTING OVER DOUBTFUL THINGS

“ . . . but not to disputes over doubtful thing.” Other versions read, “but not to doubtful disputations,”^{KJV} “but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions,”^{NASB} “but not for disputes over opinions,”^{RSV} and “without passing judgment on disputable matters.”^{NIV}

“Doubtful disputations” refer to matters of reasoning, or opinion. They have to do with perception, not the love and embrace of the truth itself. The idea is that we are not to attempt to press our view of the truth upon a believer who does not perceive the reasoning that conflicts with his own. This is a transgression that is so common in the contemporary church that nothing is thought about strong and extended disputations over human reasonings. One person has well said, “If a statement of

the will of Christ from the Scriptures has not the effect of producing conviction, lengthened discussions are more likely to increase prejudice than to resolve doubts.”
Robert Haldane, 1816

At once this will be seen as a weakness, particularly to the maintenance of an institutional structure and the vaunting of human opinion. However, it must be remembered that this is an observation inspired by the Holy Spirit. The protection of a new child of God, or one who has not yet perceived the scope and implications of the truth, is to be regarded as more important than the justification of our view of the truth.

Reasonings, Views, and Opinions

Care must be taken not to assume reasoning upon the truth, having a view of it, or entertaining an opinion, is wrong. If that was the case, receiving a brother with different persuasions would not be the point. Instead, entertaining a personal view of the truth would be soundly condemned. But it is not. It is what we do with our views, and how tightly we hold to them, that becomes the issue.

If our view of HOW the truth is to be applied makes us judgmental of those whom Christ has received, we have stepped over the lines of both propriety and charity. If the *“end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned”* (1 Tim 1:5), we can ill afford to entertain views that drive wedges between the people of God.

The Fourth Chapter of Ephesians

An outline of proper agreement is found in the fourth chapter of Ephesians. This is an exposition of *“the unity of the Spirit.”* It outlines for us things on which we must strive for agreement. It also provides a considerable latitude for growth in our understanding. *“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the*

Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph 4:1-6).

Notice the pivotal issues with which we are confronted. (1) Walking worthy of the calling to which we have been called.

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(2) Maintaining a lowly, meek, longsuffering, and forbearing spirit. (3) Making every effort to keep the unity created by the Holy Spirit. (4) Keeping the unity of the Spirit within the framework of peace. (5) Key realities include Christ’s *“body,”* the Holy Spirit, the hope to which we have been called, the Lord Himself, our baptism into Christ, and our God and Father who is at work in every aspect of the Kingdom.

While there may be varying perceptions of these realities, the realities

themselves are not questioned by those who live by faith.

“Doubtful disputations” pertain to man’s reasoning upon these, and lesser, matters. Men are not to avoid such reasonings as though they were unlawful. They are, however, to zealously avoid them becoming the basis for the fellowship of other members of Christ’s

body, or their approval or disapproval of fellow believers.

This will become more apparent as we walk through this remarkable text. The mandate for those who are strong in Christ is **not** prove their position, or argue their perceptions with those who cannot presently see them. They are called to support the weak, and to be mindful of their conscience before the Lord. They are to be helpers of their joy, not those who have dominion over their faith (2 Cor 1:24).

BELIEVING AND WEAKNESS

“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.”

The Spirit now provides us with two concrete examples of the principle before us. He will put the truth squarely before us, calling upon us to adapt it to our own situation. **It should be apparent that the points of variance are not central in the matter of being accepted by God.** Nor, indeed, are they inconsequential. Views are held as before the Lord, and few things can be of any greater importance. What is now discussed are not matters of

right or wrong, but matters about which endless disputation and division are unwarranted. As might be expected, this will contradict much of what goes on in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

EATING ALL THINGS

“For one believes he may eat all things . . .” Other versions read, *“One believes he may eat anything,”* ^{RSV} *“One man’s faith allows him to eat everything,”* ^{NIV} *“One man has faith that he may eat all things,”* ^{NAS} and *“One man is assured that he may eat all things.”* ^{DARBY}

This is a personal persuasion – a matter of the conscience. This individual

is **not** compelled to maintain a certain diet. His conscience allows him to eat all foods. He might reason much like the Apostle Paul. *“I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself”* (Rom 14:14). Such a person could eat meat of all kinds, even though prohibited by the Law of Moses. He could also eat meat that was offered to an idol, knowing that an idol was really nothing, and thus could not defile the meat offered to it. It was with this in mind that Paul directed those who could purchase meat at the market that had been offered to idols, *“Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience’ sake; for the*

earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness. If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake" (1 Cor 10:25-27.

However, as we will see, freedom to do a thing does not mean we are under compulsion to do it. Nor, indeed, are we at liberty to drive a wedge between our brethren and ourselves over such freedoms.

HE WHO IS WEAK

" . . . another, who is weak, eateth herbs." Other versions read, "but he who is weak eats only vegetables,"^{NKJV} "while the weak man eats only vegetables,"^{RSV} and "but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables,"^{NIV}

It is vital that we see the person with view is "weak." His grasp of the truth is not firm, and his faith is weak – not in the sense of being sinful, but in the sense of not seeing clearly.

It is vital that we understand the person whose view is "weak." His grasp of the truth is not firm, and his faith is weak – not in the sense of being sinful, but in the sense of not seeing clearly. Notwithstanding, this person's convictions are just as strong as the one who can eat "all things."

The person with understanding might wonder how a person could possibly be driven to such a conclusion – namely that meat could not be eaten. After all, Jesus "purged all meats," thereby sanctifying them as food. His words on the subject are clear. "Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?" (Mark 7:18-19). The NIV reads, "(In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.""). Thus,

Jesus set aside all of the dietary prohibitions of the Law with a single word!

Heaven confirmed the same to Peter as he was instructed concerning the acceptance of the Gentiles. The Apostle was confronted with a large sheet held by the four corners, "Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air." When commanded, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat," he responded, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean." Three times the sheet was lowered to him, and three times Peter responded with those words. Additionally, three times the voice spoke to him, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" (Acts 10:13-17). Eventually, Peter was shown that just as surely as God had lifted the ban on

eating certain foods, so the ban on the Gentiles hearing the Gospel had been lifted (Matt 10:5-6; Matt 15:24).

Now, in Christ, commanding that people "abstain from meats [foods]" was a sign that one had been overcome by the doctrine of demons. As it is written, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the

latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (1 Tim 4:1-5).

Now, in the fuller light of the Gospel, food can be seen from an entirely different perspective than that of the Law. "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them" (1 Cor

6:12-13).

Still, the person "who is weak" is not able to perceive this, and continues to reason that it is wrong to eat certain foods. Such a person is to be "received" without engaging in endless disputes concerning the matter. The reason for this reception, as we will see, is the tender conscience of the weaker brother. His conscience is not yet fully formed, nor has his senses been "exercised" to discern both good and evil.

DO NOT DESPISE THE WEAKER

"Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not." Other versions read, "Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat,"^{NASB} and "The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not."^{NIV}

The individual enjoying greater liberty, and freed from the prohibitions of ceremonial Law, will tend to look down on "the weaker," viewing him as disobedient to words of Jesus Himself. However, such a response is strictly forbidden. The weaker brother is not to be set at nought as though he was foolish. He is not to be attacked with Scripture, as though he was the enemy. Just because the weaker brother cannot take hold of the teachings of Christ, he is not to be treated with contempt, or hounded with arguments.

DO NOT JUDGE THE STRONGER

" . . . and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him." Other versions read, "and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats; for God has welcomed him,"^{RSV} and "and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him."^{NIV}

There is a critical distinction to be seen in the responses of these two individuals. The first is tempted to look down on, or hold in contempt, the brother who is persuaded he cannot properly eat all foods. The second brother, who "is weak," tends to be judgmental, even condemning the person whose conscience allows him to eat all things, while he himself is convinced that is improper.

It is the weaker brother who continues to be dominated by the spirit of Law, and is harsh toward

his brethren. It will only require a small amount of thought for experienced believers to see the truth of this. Those who major on things that are unlawful do have a tendency to condemn. Those who major on liberty have a tendency to despise. Neither attitude is correct.

GOD HAS RECEIVED HIM

Solemnly, the “weaker” brother is admonished to recognize that God has “received,” or “accepted,” the stronger one. For years, I had considered God’s acceptance to refer to the weaker brother. But this is not at all the case. This is a word for the brother who is “weak in faith,” the one whose conscience and understanding is not yet mature. Such an one is not to be allowed to direct the assembly of the saints, or bind his views upon them. He is not to condemn a fellow believer simply because he eats meats, or is at liberty to eat all foods.

God “receives” those who believe on

His Son and conduct themselves in all good conscience. Peter said it this way in his confession to Cornelius, “*But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him*” (Acts 10:35). That word certainly does not rule out faith in Christ, for Peter was sent to Cornelius that he might hear the Gospel, believe, and be saved. It does, however, confirm the nature of our God to look upon men’s hearts.

The person who eats meats is thus seen as one who is standing in the **liberty** wherewith Christ has made him free (Gal 5:1). Perceiving both the manner and the privileges of the covenant, he has not sinned before God by eating all manner of foods. God has received him, and therefore no man can sit in judgment upon him.

APPLYING THE TEXT

It is the business of every believer to apply this text to himself. There are those

who major on what they CAN do, while others emphasize what they CANNOT do. Our text assumes that both are motivated by their conscience, and are earnestly seeking to please the Lord. God does not condemn either party, but receives them both. The person enjoying liberty must not look down upon those who remain in the “I-cannot-do-that” stage. Nor, indeed, is the person who is held in by prohibition free to sit in judgment upon those who do not abide by their rules or perceptions.

The truth of the matter is that no person can bind his conscience upon another, regardless of the weightiness of their consideration. Nor, indeed, is their conscience to be the subject matter of their discussion, if it erupts in disputation. This may appear to be compromising at the first. However, our text will so elaborate upon this matter as to remove all doubt concerning its truthfulness. The hub upon which fellowship turns is not human opinion.

YOU ARE NOT THE JUDGE

“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.”

The words before us apply to both the stronger and the weaker brother – but particularly to the weaker. Contrary to the opinion of some, the weaker brother tends to be the most disruptive, because he lacks a working knowledge of the liberty that is in Christ Jesus. However, the stronger brother is not excluded from this word. He is not at liberty to despise the weaker brother, which despite will eventually lead to a judgmental attitude also.

JUDGING ANOTHER’S SERVANT

“Who are you to judge another’s servant?” These are unusually strong words, and are designed to convict the person who is loose in their attitude toward fellow believers. This passage is generally thought to apply to the stronger brethren, who are thought to condemn

the weaker ones. But this is not at all the case. Strength does not lead to a condemning attitude, which observation

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ought to be apparent. If being “strong” makes one condemning, in what sense is the individual said to be “strong.” The strong are **not** admonished not to condemn, but **not to despise**, and to be mindful of the tenderness of the weak. Thus chapter fifteen begins, “*We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves*” (15:1).

This word, then, is particularly addressed to the “weak,” who tended to judge those who were “strong.” Thus, we see that “the weaker brother” is not ignored, or treated with soft gloves, as though he were fragile. Instead, the Spirit speaks with great strength in dealing with the weaker one. **Since the one who is weak thinks about what cannot be done, the Spirit gives him something from which he is to refrain – judging another man’s servant!**

To “judge,” in this case, is to condemn as a breaker of the Law. In a secondary sense, it can also refer to despising a weaker brother, although that is not the thrust of this word. Both attitudes fail to take into account that the other person is serving the Lord in what he does. The stronger brother, in despising the weaker, fails to see that he is really attempting to serve God in all good conscience. Thus he is viewed with contempt, as though he was

simple and unworthy of fellowship.

The emphasis here, however, is on the weaker brother, who feels he cannot eat meat. Not willing to keep his view to himself, the “weaker” cannot conceive of the stronger one serving God in his attitude, but sees him as a breaker of the Law. Thus he condemns him, judging him as outside of the will of God.

God has not given His children the right to sit in judgment upon one another, even though this exercise is widely practiced. This is particularly true of those whose conscience and faith are weak. Such individuals are not suitable judges of who is accepted or not accepted by God.

It is a particularly reprehensible thing when a person who is “weak in the faith” takes it upon himself to judge, or condemn, one of God’s servants. Such an one is not compelled by the truth itself, but by his own meager comprehension of the truth. He has not taken the “lowest room,” as Jesus said (Luke 14:10).

TO HIS OWN MASTER

“... To his own master he stands or falls.” Other versions read, “It is before his own master that he stands or falls,”^{RSV} “They are responsible to the Lord, so let him tell them whether they are right or wrong,”^{NLT} and “Whether he deserves to be upheld or to fall is for his own master to decide.”^{NJB}

In the last analysis, it is God “with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13). We will give an account to Him, not our brethren. Nor, indeed, are we to expect our brethren to give an account to us for what they do. The meaning is that God alone will determine whether a person stands or falls. Our judgment will have nothing whatsoever to do with it. We are not capable of making our brethren stand, and thus are not allowed to sit in judgment upon them.

MADE TO STAND

“... Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.” Other versions read, “and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand,”^{NASB} “And he will be upheld, for the Master is able to make him stand,”^{RSV} and “Yes, his place will be safe, because the Lord is able

to keep him from falling.”^{BBE}

Remember, this is God’s word to the “weaker” brother, who has dared to judge the stronger for his failure to abide by the prohibitions by which he lives. There is no doubt that the Lord is also able to make the “weaker” brother stand, in spite of his weak conscience and faith. But that is not the point of this text, for the stronger brother has not consigned the weaker one to failure, or judged him to be outside of Divine favor.

Scriptural examples of “weaker” brothers imposing their views upon others are found several places in Scripture. Some Jewish brethren, for example, sought to impose circumcision upon

were summarized in the words “touch not, taste not, handle not.” The saints were told such approaches were entirely improper. “Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations; ‘Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,’ which all concern things which perish with the using; according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh” (Col 2:20-23).

The Point
The point of the text is that

God has not given His children the right to sit in judgment upon one another, even though this practice is widely practiced. This is particularly true of those whose conscience and faith are weak. Such individuals are not suitable judges of who is accepted or not accepted by God.

others as a necessity to salvation (Acts 15:1). On one occasion, Paul had Timothy circumcised because of Jews who held to this position, yet were not judgmental of others who did not (Acts 16:3). On the other hand, he refused to circumcise Titus because of Jews who insisted that it was necessary (Gal 2:3-4). Although their conscience may have compelled them to think circumcision was necessary, Paul would not allow them to bind their conscience upon himself and Titus.

Other weaker brethren sought to impose rules concerning eating, drinking, holy days, new moons, and sabbath days, on the Colossian brethren. God’s word to the church there was this: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ” (Col 2:16-17).

Still other “weaker brethren” sought to enforce rules of life upon believers that

standing is not dependent upon rule-keeping. The individual is sustained by living within the dictates of a “good conscience.” All efforts to impose a private conscience upon another brother are vain, and must be avoided. God does not sustain our brethren when they subscribe to our convictions. He sustains each individual through their faith and perception. It is our business to honor that arrangement.

Spiritual life is not maintained by eating or not eating foods, “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom 14:17). Therefore, we are neither the better nor the worse because of what we do in those areas. Knowing that in our hearts will assist us in not despising weaker brethren who have strong, but immature, persuasions in those matters. It will also cause us to refrain from judging those whose conscience allows eating.

Whatever our convictions in matters

of this kind, we must be willing to leave our brethren in the hands of the Lord. Our remarkable propensity to judgment must be mortified, and the mantle of love cast over the lives of our brethren. They may have differing views from you in

music preference, clothing, medication, domestic procedures, and times of devotion and prayer. They may not see eye to eye with you on dietary practices, education, or owning modern conveniences. Yet, you have no right to

judge them, or to impose your conscience upon them. You can require no more from them in order for you to receive them, that God requires of them for Him to accept them. You simply are not allowed to be more demanding than your God.

DIFFERING VIEWS, YET BOTH ARE RECEIVED

“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.” In bringing the matter of particular days into the discussion, it becomes apparent that a variance between converted Jews and believing Gentiles is being accentuated. This is also confirmed by the instruction of the Spirit to the church at Colossae (Col 2:16). The mere whims of men are not the consideration in the word concerning either meats or days. Some believers still had a conscience molded by the Law, and did not see the full implications of being freed from Jewish obligations.

Having made those introductory remarks, there are principles here that may very well be applied to situations where individuals hold to traditions they have borrowed from mere men – like the “*tradition of the elders*” of Jesus’ day (Matt 15:2). The point being developed, however, is that **men cannot view with disregard or contempt those whom God has received**. Nor, indeed, can they sit in judgment upon those who are His conscientious and willing servants.

ESTEEMING DAYS

“⁵ One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike.” One must approach this text with great care, else he will drop into the chasm of confusion. There have been days

that God has blessed more than other

The fact that the Apostles did not bind Jewish days upon Gentile converts says more than all of the fanciful arguments that can be adduced by Sabbath keepers and the likes.

days, such as the day Israel was delivered from Egypt, the day Christ arose from the dead, and the day of Pentecost. Under the Law, the seventh day was particularly blessed by God (Ex 20:10). This day, together with various Jewish feasts, are no doubt the focus of this word.

I cannot conceive of the Spirit addressing the separation of days apart from the Law, which did distinguish between foods to be eaten and days to be observed. Notwithstanding, there is a principle here that can be of benefit even to those unacquainted with the special days outlined by the Law.

The point is that within the body of Christ, there **can be** a difference of opinion – a differing manner in which men reason. These are thoughtful individuals who are honoring their conscience. One regards one day to be more significant than another. Others take every day to be dedicated to the Lord. The fact that the Apostles did not bind Jewish days upon Gentile converts says more than all of the fanciful arguments that can be adduced by Sabbath keepers and the likes. When instructing converted Gentiles concerning foundational laws to

be kept, the Apostles and elders outlined the following: “*abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood*” (Acts 15:20). Their reasoning on the matter is found in the 29th verse of the fifteenth chapter of Acts. “*That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well.*” There is no mention of the Sabbath day, or the various feast days, so highly regarded by the Jews. It is my judgement that Jewish days are the point in question.

What About the First Day of the Week

Some contend this verse confirms the relative unimportance of “*the first day of the week.*” They argue that no single day is actually greater than another, and that every day is “*alike.*” First, the intent of this passage is not to confirm that all days are really identical. The person regarding “*every day alike*” does not consider every day without significance. Rather, he regards every day as **consecrated to the Lord**. Under the Law, the Sabbath day was related to the Lord Himself. It was “*the Sabbath of the Lord thy God,*” being “*blessed*” and “*hallowed*” by Him (Ex 20:10-11). Also, the day of Atonement, various feast days (*Passover*--Ex 12:6; Lev 23:5-6; Num 28:16-25; Deut 16:1-8), *Pentecost*--Ex 34:26; Lev 23:10-14; Num 18:16-25), and *Tabernacles*--Ex 23:16; Lev 23:33; Deut 16:13-15), were high days, regarded much like the Sabbath, in that no servile work occurred during them. These were days of forced remembrance and dedication to God. They were designed for people whose hearts were prone to forget the Lord, yet who wore His name.

The “*Lord’s day*” (Rev 1:10), or “*the first day of the week*,” has been consistently honored by the people of God, but not as a mere ceremony, as were the feast days. The “*first day of the week*” simply does not fit into the category of meats and holy days, which were Jewish distinctions outlined in the Law. The Spirit has made a point of telling us that believers met on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2). The reason for meeting, however, was quite different than the inculcation of a Law. This was the day Jesus rose from the dead (Mark 16:9), and the day on which He twice appeared to His disciples following His resurrection (John 20:19,26). It was also the day on which Pentecost occurred, which was fifty days following the Passover (Lev 23:16). The association of the first day of the week with these events gives it a signification that cannot be easily forgotten.

The reason for the individual not regarding one day above another also confirms this cannot be referring to the first day of the week: “*and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it*” (verse 6). This can only refer to Jewish feast days, which were not honored in deference to the Lord Jesus Christ. I would think it difficult, indeed, to conceive of a follower of Christ **not** having a regard to “*the first day of the week*,” in order to display his devotion to Christ.

BE FULLY CONVINCED

“*Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.*” Other versions read, “*Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind,*”^{KJV} “*Let each man be fully assured in his own mind,*”^{ASV} “*Let every man be certain in his mind,*”^{BBE} and “*Each person should have a personal conviction about this matter.*”^{NLT}

Here the personal nature of faith is brought to the forefront of our thinking. It is out of order for one believer to attempt to bind his personal persuasions upon another. **The faith of one person cannot sustain another.** Nor, indeed, is it right to attempt to please God by measuring up to the convictions of another individual.

While it is not common to think in this manner, here is what the Apostle is saying. **Every child of God is to be so serious about and devoted to the Lord, that he will do nothing except what he is persuaded pleases the Lord.** This is involved in living “*in all good conscience before God*” (Acts 23:1). Life is thus lived “*from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith*”^{NKJV} (1 Tim 1:5). This is “*holding faith and a good conscience*” (1 Tim 1:19). It is having “*a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly*” (Heb 13:18). It is living by faith.

Every believer is to live within the light they have received. That is in walking “in the light as He is in the light” (1 John 1:7). One brother or sister cannot walk, or live, in the light another person has received. In fact, we are bound to live within the light we have received, else we have sinned against the Lord.

The person who is “*fully convinced*,” or “*fully persuaded*,” is constrained by his faith, not the requirements of men, to live for God. **There is no provision in Christ Jesus to live in a doubting and vacillating manner.** Later, the Spirit will say of this very subject, “*But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin*” (verse 23). To be “*fully persuaded*,” therefore, is the opposite of doubting whether the matter is right or not.

All believer are to live within the light they have received. That is in walking “*in the light as He is in the light*” (1 John 1:7). One brother or sister cannot walk, or live, in the light another person has received. In fact, we are bound to live within the light **we** have received, else we have sinned against the Lord.

This is an area of conscience, where the individual must be directed from within, not by the preferences, or even insight, of other members of the

household of faith. There are matters that are not left to the area of conscience, such as living in fornication, idolatry, adultery, sodomy, thievery, covetousness, drunkenness, reviling, and extortion (1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21). On such matters, persons “*fully persuaded*” they can indulge in such things have been deceived, for such cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. There is no room for growth in these areas. They are to be forthrightly eliminated from our lives.

Matters of conscience, however, are not so. They are areas in which further insight can be granted without the individual living in sin, though in lesser light.

Following Humanly Devised Routines

A word should be said here about a current phenomenon that is sweeping the Western Christian world. All manner of workshops and seminars are regularly offered to the people of God regarding disciplines of life. People are being directed to live in an artificial manner, without being “*fully persuaded*” in their own mind. Those who have attempted to live in such a manner find it most difficult. They are led to live independently of faith and understanding, actually depending upon the wisdom of someone else.

All of these areas deal with matters of conscience. They include family life, financial stability, and even the winning of souls. But all of them have this in common: they make no place for the conscience of the believer, or being “*fully persuaded*” in one’s “*own mind*.” Believers are admonished, “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*” (Phil 2:12). That involves the area presently considered: being “*fully convinced in his own mind*.”

There is, therefore, a sense in which the believer stands alone, sustaining an individual relationship to the Lord. There is another sense in which he is not alone, and is thus to be mindful of his brethren.

UNTO THE LORD

“*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.” Other versions read, “. . . observes it for the Lord . . . does so for the Lord . . . for the Lord he does not eat,”^{NASB} and “observes it in honor of the Lord . . . eats in honor of the Lord . . . abstains in honor of the Lord.”^{RSV}

This is living by faith, walking in the Spirit, and walking in the light (Heb 10:39; Gal 5:25; 1 John 1:7). Such life allows for advancement in the Lord, and direction by Him. **It should be clear that no other person has dominion**

over your faith (2 Cor 1:24). The persuasions of one believer cannot be bound upon another, for we belong to the Lord. The presence of this condition requires that we be forbearing of one another in love (Eph 4:2; Col 3:13).

In Christ, we will fellowship with individuals who do not see things exactly as we do. While there is nothing wrong with sharing our perceptions, those perceptions must not allow us to despise or judge brethren who do not see things as we do. God has “called us to peace” (1 Cor 7:15). That “peace” involves allowing our brethren to be “fully convinced” in their own minds, in a way that does may agree with our own persuasions. Brother love,

however, can overcome this circumstance.

Before God it is honorable to live “unto the Lord,” whether we eat meat or do not! This is because the individual is living by faith, even if it is “weak.” The pledge of the Lord is, “the just shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17). Even if that faith is “weak,” or in a beginning state, the believer will be sustained. For this reason, there is no point at which we can cease to live to please the Lord, or “by faith.” We may never back away from the Lord, living only within the light of human reasoning and personal preference. This is not simply living in the persuasion that we are right. Rather, it is offering our life as a deliberate sacrifice to God.

WE ARE NOT ISLANDS UNTO OURSELVES

“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.”

The Spirit now places before us a Kingdom principle that will help us *abound in love toward one another*. Here is one of the pillars of “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” This principle allows us to have differing persuasions in smaller and inconsequential matters. While we are “the body of Christ,” we are also “members in particular” (1 Cor 12:27). Each one sustains a vital union with the Lord in both life and death. That union allows for personal persuasion: yes, even demands full persuasion. **None of us are at liberty to be carried along by the faith of one of our peers, however valid that faith may be.** Each believer is personally responsible for the light he has received. He is responsible to live within the confines of that illumination, all the while expecting the light to shine “ever brighter unto the perfect day.”^{NKJV} (Prov 4:18).

There is no such thing as spiritual life that does not grow.

Where growth in Christ is absent, “newness of life” has been stifled. In accordance with our text, that life can be

or when we die.”^{NLT}

Life is lived is toward the Lord: that is, within a personal consciousness, or awareness of the Person and will of God. Faith does not allow the individual to live solely for the gratification of personal desires.

Here the Spirit emphasizes the direction of true spiritual life. **Life is lived toward the Lord: that is, within a personal consciousness, or awareness of the Person and will of God.** Faith does not allow the individual to live solely for the gratification of personal desires. The believer is not the center of his own universe. A selfish person is a godless person, living without regard to the will of God, or the welfare of those who are in Christ Jesus.

Whether in life or in death, we are not the heart of things. Our life is not for self, nor is our death. If we live only for self gratification, we have missed the purpose for life. If we die only to escape the hardships of life, taking our own life, we have also failed to glorify God in our death.

LIVING UNTO THE LORD

“For if we live, we live to the Lord.” Another version reads, “for if we live, we live **for** the Lord.”^{NASB} The direction, or focus, of spiritual life is “**to** the Lord.” The reason for life, in all of its facets, is “**for** the Lord.” Thus life is lived with an acute awareness of the Person, Presence, and will of the Lord. The purpose for life

suppressed by attempting to live within the framework of someone else’s persuasions. This verse reveals why all such attempts are absurd.

TO HIMSELF

“For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.” Other versions read, “For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself;”^{NASB} “For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone,”^{NIV} and “For we are not our own masters when we live

is to be pleasing to God, and to acquire His “Well done!”

That kind of life cannot be accomplished if I attempt to live with the persuasions of someone else – persuasions I do not understand. **Even though my brethren’s convictions are sound,**

we confess with David, “*My times are in Thy hand*” (Psa 31:15). Thus we can devote ourselves to living for the Lord, without being distracted by morose thoughts of dying. In dying, we will move higher, not lower. We will advance, not retrogress. If we live by faith, God will not let us die without finishing our course. He

account of himself to God” (14:12).

Both life and death are a stewardship given to us by the Lord. By virtue of that circumstance, they “belong” to us. Again, it is written, “*For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s*” (1 Cor 3:21-23). God sustains t h e believer in handling this stewardship.

Our persuasions determine how we live and how we die. If we borrow the persuasions of others, we will not be able to live or die to the glory of God. We dare not eat meat or refrain from eating meat simply because our brethren think it best.

The relevance of this situation is this. Our persuasions determine how we live and how we die. If we borrow the persuasions of others, we will not be able to live or die to the glory of God. We dare not eat meat or refrain from eating meat simply because our brethren think it best. Nor, indeed, are we allowed the luxury of esteeming certain days or regarding them all alike because that is the conviction of those with whom we fellowship. Our persuasions must be our own, driven by our own faith, and carried along by our personal convictions. We do not come into this world in crowds, live our life in gatherings, or die in groups. Faith is not dispatched from God in batches, nor does it consist of a body of well thought out doctrines, as some surmise.

yet if I cannot comprehend them, I cannot live by them. That would involve living in doubt, which is never appropriate (Rom 14:23).

One of the curses of sectarianism is that it compels people to live by convictions that are not their own. Thus, they do not live for the Lord, but for the institution. Their trust is in the explanations and convictions of others. Although this is quite common, it is altogether unacceptable. We will further see that living “to the Lord” and “for the Lord” is in no way a liability. Nor, indeed does it place the believer in danger.

will allot us sufficient time to complete the work He has given us to do.

Thus, when our time to die comes, we will be able to say, “*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing*” (2 Tim 4:7-8).

The persuasion of these realities will move us to be considerate of our brethren, allowing them to live within the boundaries of their own faith.

A WORD OF CAUTION

Some might be tempted to become more independent than our text suggests. While we cannot be carried to the Lord in the basket of borrowed thought, neither are we to consider our brethren’s thoughts useless and without personal value to us. The strong can gain from the weak, and vice versa.

DYING UNTO THE LORD

“ . . . and if we die, we die to the Lord.” Thus, because life is lived for the Lord, death becomes “gain” for us (Phil 1:21). It only serves to move us from the war zone to the place of ultimate peace and rest. Death is a transition point, not a termination point. It moves us into another type of activity, it does not end all activity.

WE ARE THE LORD’S

“*Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.*” Other versions read, “*So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord,*”^{NIV} and “*So in life and in death, we belong to the Lord.*”^{NLT}

Because we “belong to the Lord,” we are accountable for our own faith, and the development of our own convictions. We will give an account of ourselves to the Lord. As it is written in this very passage, “*So then every one of us shall give*

Because we love the brethren, and because we are members of one another, due consideration should be given to one another’s persuasions. Often that consideration will be the very means the Lord uses to bring us higher, broadening our spiritual perspective.

In dying to the Lord, we commit our death as well as our life to Him. Thereby

LORD OF ALL

“*For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.*” This is the Spirit’s exposition of

why we neither live nor die to ourselves. Here He expounds why faith is personal,

and why we are individually accountable to the Lord for how we live – even for the preferences and perceptions we embrace.

TO THIS END

resurrection and exaltation, the Spirit will not allow such reasoning.

LORD OF THE DEAD AND THE LIVING

“ . . . that He might be Lord of both

Jesus has “*the keys of death and of hell (Hades).*” That is another way of saying He is Lord over those areas. No believer is put to a disadvantage by being among “*the dead.*” The Lord is over that domain. If Abraham could comfort Lazarus, how much more can He who is Lord “*of the dead*” bring solace to those who “*die in the Lord?*”

Is There A Conflict?

How does this harmonize with Christ’s statement, “*God is not the God of the dead, but of the living*” (Matt 22:32)? Jesus was affirming that those who had died were, in the ultimate sense, still alive, for God is the God of living people, not those who are nonexistent. He further meant that those who are not in some sense existing and alive cannot be raised from the dead. In the resurrection, spirits are reunited with their bodies. Because Christ Jesus is Lord “*of the dead,*” He will be able to accomplish this union. In the meantime, He is able to console and comfort the saints who have passed on, and await that union (Rev 6:9-11).

The Living

These are **believers** remaining in the body. Although Jesus is Lord over all spirits, yet He is so in a particular way for those who have been joined to Him. He is over them to bless and sustain them, protect and direct them. He is Lord of their enemies, and the One who dispatches angels to aid them. He distributes spiritual graces to them, directs them, and “*ever lives to make intercession for them*” (Heb 7:15). They are also answerable to Him.

Notice how the question is asked. The Spirit does not ask why the critical individual judges another person, but why he judges his “brother.” Connection with the Lord Jesus necessarily implies connection with one another.

“*For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again . . .*” Other versions read, “*For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life,*”^{NIV} “*For this is why Christ died and came to life,*”^{NLT} and “*For this is why Christ died and came to life.*”^{NAB}

This is spiritual reasoning at its highest level. It bears no resemblance whatsoever to the manner in which “*the natural man*” thinks. There is a revealed purpose for which Jesus died, rose, and lived again. The phrase “*lived again*” refers to Christ’s intercessory “*life*” at the right hand of God, by which we are saved (Rom 5:10). Here, then, is the grand purpose for all that is associated with Christ’s Manhood – His death, resurrection, and enthronement in heaven. While religious men are prone to view Christ’s death in isolation of His

the dead and the living.” Here is the common purpose that demanded Christ’s death, resurrection, and present intercession. Here is the fruitage of those grand events. **Christ’s vicarious death, triumphant resurrection, and effective intercession qualify Him to be the reigning King over the domain of the dead and the living.**

The Dead

“*The dead*” has specific reference to those who have died **in the Lord**. These are not, however, slumbering spirits who will remain unconscious until the morning of the resurrection. As it is written, “*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them*” (Rev 14:13).

WHY DO YOU JUDGE YOUR BROTHER?

“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.***”

with us on this matter. Where this is

being addressed. To put it another way,

This is spiritual reasoning at its highest level. It bears no resemblance whatsoever to the manner in which “the natural man” thinks.” There is a revealed purpose for which Jesus died, rose, and lived again.

The Spirit will reason extensively

done, an area of special culpability is

this is an aspect of religious life in which

the Devil is particularly active. We are not to be “ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor 2:11), and therefore the Spirit opens one of them to us. He does not do this on a philosophical level, or merely as a matter of information. If we will hear his reasoning with understanding, he will allow us to ourselves answer any questions about whether or not it is proper to sit in judgment upon the people of God, or to despise them as if they were unworthy of our love and attention. It is the manner of the Spirit to teach us in this way, involving us in the teaching, calling for us to respond to His interrogations.

WHY DO YOU JUDGE?

“But why do you judge your brother?” The RSV reads, “Why do you pass judgment on your brother?” The first reference to judging viewed the one being judged as a “servant” belonging to someone else (verse 4). Now that same is viewed in regard to his relationship to the one doing the judging. He is a family member – **a brother**.

This is addressed to the one who is “weak in faith,” for he is the one prone to judge his brother, seeking to impose his limited views upon him (verse 3). Notice how the question is asked. The Spirit does not ask why the critical individual judges **another person**, but why he judges his “**brother**.” Connection with the Lord Jesus necessarily implies connection with one another. Further, our association with Jesus is upon the basis of “*grace through faith*” (Eph 2:8). **How is it, therefore, that one brother would require more of another than the Lord Himself requires?** Judging, in this sense, comes down to requiring something of an individual that they are judged to be lacking? Let the person who does not think he can eat meat explain WHY he sits in judgment upon his brother for eating meat. Let the person who exalts one day above another provide an explanation for why he judges his brother for not entertaining the same view as himself.

Both are areas that have been mentioned, together with a host of others,

as areas of opinion, or reasoning. They are not the response of the soul to a Divine demand. Rather, they represent the interpretation of Scripture – conclusions that have been reached through the process of reasoning. Although the person doing the judging deems himself worthy of such an activity, the Spirit says his conclusions are evidence of a faith that is “weak.”

To “judge” means to condemn as the worst, and call his profession into question at the best. The acceptability of the person being judged is thus questioned. His sonship is brought into doubt, and his heart assessed as faulty, and his motives impure. Ignorance is imputed to the individual, and he is viewed as living in contradiction of the Living God. Now, why would any one view his brother in such a manner? What would provoke such an assessment? It is certainly not love, which “*seeketh not her own*,” and “*is not easily provoked*” (1 Cor

This does not mean foods and days themselves are to be regarded with contempt. It does mean they are not to be points of emphasis. It also means our decisions concerning them, and other like matters, are driven by faith and conscience, not Divine law.

13:5). While the weak person may affirm they are seeking the welfare of the individual, that is not the truth, for judgment, in the sense of our text, does not seek to do good. It rather seeks to disqualify someone God has “*received*.”

You will note that the Spirit demands an answer from the one who dares to judge those to whom he is related by grace. It is not that He is seeking an answer. The very question He asks dries up the answers of those “*weak in faith*.” **Their judgment, while issued under**

the guise of spiritual strength, is actually an expression of weakness. It is not a sign of wisdom, but a display of spiritual juvenility.

WHY DO YOU SHOW CONTEMPT

“Or why do you show contempt for your brother?” Other versions read, “*why dost thou set at nought thy brother?*”^{KJV} “*why do you despise your brother?*”^{NASB} “*why do you look down on your brother?*”^{NIV} and “*why dost thou make little of thy brother?*”^{DARBY} The first reference to despising the one with weak faith viewed that individual in regard to his relationship to God: God had “*received him*.” Now, that same person is viewed as part of the same body as the one who despises him – **a brother**.

This is addressed to the individual who looks down upon the brother that has not yet attained to a mature view of things. Such restrict their lives because they do not see the scope of their freedom in Christ. Yet they are doing so in all good conscience, seeking to please the Lord in their abstinence from meat, or the observance of an holy day. Now, what would provoke any follower of Christ to show contempt for, or despise, a person who was living with an aim to please God?

In this case, the stronger brother does not condemn the weaker one, but despises him. He does not think him worthy of high regard, even though he is living as best as he can within the boundaries of his conscience. It is not enough to simply refrain from judging our brethren. We must not allow ourselves to lightly regard them, despise them, or look down upon them as inferior. They are still begotten of God, are living by faith (weak though it may be), and have an inheritance in heaven. What would move a soul to despise such a person? Certainly not love! When the love of God is “*shed abroad in our hearts*” by the Holy Spirit, it will never move us to look accommodatingly upon those who have also been given the Holy Spirit.

Do Not Take It Too Far!

This does not mean foods and days themselves are to be regarded with contempt. It does mean they are not to be points of emphasis. It also means our decisions concerning them, and other like matters, are driven by faith and conscience, not Divine law. They represent areas that do not immediately impact upon our relationship to God. They are to be viewed as “unto the Lord,” or within the greater framework of our identity with Him through Jesus Christ.

WE WILL ALL STAND BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

“For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.” A day has been appointed when the whole body of Christ will stand before the real judgment seat – “the judgment seat of Christ.” Jesus alone will judge His people! As it is written, “The Lord shall judge His people” (Heb 10:30). The saints will judge the world and angels (1 Cor 6:1-3), but the Lord Himself will judge them! His judgment will be the last word, and it will not go well with those whose judgment has been in sharp conflict with His!

This same “judgment seat” is also mentioned in the book of Second Corinthians. In that text, the emphasis is placed upon being ready to appear before Christ. “Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor 5:9-10). Notice the additional words, “that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”^{NIV}

Why Bring Up The Judgment Seat?

It may appear strange that the Spirit would introduce the judgment seat of Christ in treating the subject before us. It may even appear to be a brief diversion from the matter of loving one another. But that is only a fleshly view. The relevance of these words is confirmed by the fact that God inspired them to be said in precisely this manner. There is a practical side also.

The knowledge of this awesome occasion is, among other things, designed to keep us from judging or despising our brethren. It will require all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength to prepare for that appointed confrontation. While we desire to do everything within our power to assist our brethren to be ready for “the day of the Lord,” there is a place and time when we must allow them to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). Further, they must be allowed to do this without being intimidated by the persuasions of their brethren, or inhibited by their attitudes toward them.

Do not imagine that the key issues of the day of judgment will center around food and days! Whatever importance you may assign to those things now, they will appear quite small compared to knowing God and being persuaded of His exceeding great and precious promises. While this should be

There is an appointed day when we will stand before God without regard to whether others have been accepted or not. Together we will bow the knee to the Lord, and together we will confess to God, or “give praise to God.” We will not praise one another, but the Lord who purchased us with His blood, and brought us to glory.

exceedingly apparent, many have not taken hold of its truth. A few statements pertaining to Divine acceptance will serve to accentuate the thrust of the time when we all stand before “the judgment seat of Christ.” Note the general tone of these statements. That tone allows for growth, and thus for forbearance among believers.

“And by him **all that believe** are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.” (Acts 13:39)

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God

unto salvation to **every one that believeth**; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” (Rom 1:16)

“He that **loveth his brother** abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.” (1 John 2:10)

“And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that **doeth the will of God** abideth for ever.” (1 John 2:17).

“Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that **acknowledgeth the Son** hath the Father also.” (1 John 2:23).

“And he that **keepeth his commandments** dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.” (1 John 3:24)

“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and **he that dwelleth in love** dwelleth in God, and God in him.” (1 John 4:16)

“He that **hath the Son** hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” (1 John 5:12)

When reading statements of this magnitude, some immediately begin to consider what requirements are **missing** in them. They cannot conceive of them being thorough chronicles, but view them as partial statements. They imagine that they are a piece of a much larger puzzle.

This, however, is not a proper assessment of these texts. **They are summary statements that are of themselves complete.** When, for example, I view the city of New York from an aircraft that is 30,000 feet in the air, I have seen the entire city, not merely a portion of it. In fact, the summary view is the most complete view, taking in all of the details that can only be viewed at the ground level. The higher and summary view of New York does not contradict the view from one of its streets. Rather, it adds perspective, revealing that what I saw in the street was only a part of a vast city I could not comprehend from that level.

Thus it is with these statements. They are a higher view that shows the

total reason for Divine acceptance. Having faith is a large view, not a detailed one. Recognizing believers as our brethren is a summary view, not a specific one. Doing the will of God is a summarization, not a particularization. Acknowledging the Son is a global view, not a regional one. Keeping His commandments is a summary view, not a detailed one. Having the Son is an overall view, not an aspect of a larger view.

The Point

All of this bears upon the subject before us. **We are to receive our brethren from the higher point of view – as those who have faith, are brethren, and are doing the will of God from the heart.** They are to be perceived as those who acknowledge the Son, keep His commandments in their hearts, and have the Son. We dare not look at them from the “street level” of applying the truth, or the still lower level of conforming to things as we have seen them – even if our view is precisely correct. **God accepts us upon the basis of the higher view.** Because we are His children, and are the products of His work, we are obliged to view our brethren in the same manner.

A Brief Explanation

Time does not allow me to go into an extensive commentary on this subject at this time. Nor, indeed, would it be proper, for it would detract from the teaching of the present Spirit. Suffice it to say, there are a great number of things that fall into this category: i.e., **matters of conscience.** These are not things concerning which there is no word from God., Rather, they are matters that do not impact directly upon our acceptance with God. They are areas in which growth can be realized from one position to another. While the individual may have strong convictions on these things, he is not allowed to impose those convictions upon others souls. Neither, indeed, can they become the basis for despising, or looking down upon other brethren, or even taking it upon oneself to sit in judgment upon them. If this passage was strictly honored among believers, a significant number of sectarian walls would fall down

immediately.

WE WILL ALL ACKNOWLEDGE HIM

“For it is written: *‘As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.’*” This is a reference to Isaiah 45:23. *“I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.”* It is utterly impossible for this not to take place. God has said it in righteousness and

We will acknowledge our salvation is owing to Him, not to the fact that we did or did not eat meat. We will publically recognize that He is why we have been accepted, not that we have or have not kept certain days.

will not retract it. **Every created personality will bow the knee before Him, and every created tongue will declare that He is surely and unquestionably the Lord.**

There is an appointed day when we will stand before God without regard to whether others have been accepted or not. Together we will bow the knee to the Lord, and together we will confess to God, or *“give praise to God.”*^{NASB,NRSV} We will not praise one another, but the Lord who purchased us with His blood, and brought us to glory.

We will acknowledge our salvation is owing to Him, not to the fact that we did, or did not, eat meat. We will publically recognize that our faith in Him is why we have been accepted, not that we have, or have not, kept certain days. Salvation is infinitely larger than diets and the keeping of days. Surely there is no doubt about these things.

WE WILL GIVE ACCOUNT FOR OURSELVES

“So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.” The words “So then” express that the conclusion that follows is required by the statement of verse eleven: i.e., *“As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.”* Examining this inspired conclusion confirms that bowing the knee and confessing with the tongue will not be mere routines, or technicalities. The Spirit reveals that confessing He is Lord is not simply saying “You are the Lord!” While that will no doubt be involved, there is much more to it than that.

The Judge is Jesus

Even though our text declares we will give an account of ourselves *“to God,”* it is to be understood that it will be immediately to Jesus Christ. He is the One God appointed to execute the judgment. As it is written, *“Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness **by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead**”* (Acts 17:31). Peter also drew attention to this point. *“And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that **it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead**”* (Acts 10:42).

Jesus Himself affirmed, *“For the Father judgeth no man, **but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent Him**”* (John 5:22-23). Again He said, *“And hath **given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man**”* (John 5:27). Therefore, our regard for His *“brethren”* (Matt 12:49-50; 25:40; Heb 2:12) will be revealed in the day we *“all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”*

Bowing the knee to God, and confessing He is Lord, involves giving an account of ourselves to God. It includes explaining why we handled our

stewardship the way we did. It takes in an accounting for how we regarded the brethren of Jesus. If men took it upon themselves to judge their brethren, they will have to account to God for why they chose to do so. If they looked down upon Christ's brethren because of their imperfect views, they will have to explain to the Lord their reason for doing so.

It only requires a modicum of thought to perceive that giving explanations to God are quite different from giving them to one another. We may very well become adept at giving an

for how they treated other believers. If they condemned those whom God accepted, they will be required to account for it. If they passed over deeds God disapproved, they will have to account for it. If they looked down upon those who were precious to the Lord because of their sensitivity, an assembled universe will hear their attempt to explain such conduct.

I do not believe it is possible to ponder this appointed circumstance and be inconsiderate in our treatment of fellow believers. As soon as we hear

therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Lk 6:36-38).

Christ's Word's Confirmed

The Psalmist put it in these words, *"With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful; with an upright man thou wilt show thyself upright; with the pure thou wilt show thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward"* (Psa 18:25,26). James said it this way: *"For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment"* (James 2:13).

It simply is not possible to be inconsiderate of the people of God with impunity. The eye of the Lord is ever *"upon the righteous,"* not only to hear their cries, but to defend them (Psa 33:18,19).

Jesus taught us there is a direct correlation between our eternal destiny and how we regard His brethren. Our reaction to them directly relates to our relationship to Him (Matt 25:31-46). **It will not go well for those who take it upon themselves to despise those who are living by faith, or those who are bold enough to sit in judgment upon them.** It is to our eternal advantage to remember His words now. They will assist us in having proper regard for His people. A simple, yet convicting, awareness of this will keep us humble, and remove a judgmental spirit from us.

Since we will ultimately appear before the same judgment seat, and all appear on an equal level, we must dispense with judging one another here. To judge another in the sense of our text assumes one is superior to another, else how could judgment be passed.

account for our persuasions and actions to men. It will be quite a different story, however, when we give an account of ourselves to the Living God.

There is an aphorism that is common among the Jews. "When a man removes out of this world, he gives an account to his Lord, of all that he has done in this world." Zohar in Genesis, fol. 49.3

Giving an account of ourselves to God involves persona as well as behavior, words as well as deeds, determinations as well as objectives. Believers will account

statements of this kind, the spotlight is immediately thrown upon our own persons. It is our persuasions and manners that then become the focus of our attention. We want to bring advantages to our brethren, making every possible allowance for their acceptance.

The Words of Jesus

We will joyfully do this when we recall the words of our Savior: *"For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you"*^{NASB} (Matt 7:2). Through the Holy Spirit, Luke gave this account. *"Be ye*

NO MORE!

"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." Here is the only valid conclusion to the words of the Spirit. It is the only appropriate response to the

sobering words we have heard. **It is the Divine manner to demand an answer from us.** We cannot simply listen to Him, then walk away as though His words had no impact upon us. We see this "way" of the Lord in His response to the patriarch Job. *"Gird up now thy loins like a man;*

for I will demand of thee, and answer thou Me" (Job 38:3).

In our text, as in several other places, the Lord does not leave it to us to come up with a response on our own. Rather, He declares what we are to do,

taking away every opportunity for the flesh to insert itself. He will leave us with no alternative, for no other response is acceptable. This is the only conclusion God will receive from us.

yourself the evil person"^{NKJV} (1 Cor 6:11-13).

We will not be able to look to the linguist to resolve the seeming difficulty

God received both because of this, which made it totally wrong for either to be judged as disobedient, or despised as though involved in wilful sin.

Where this type of judgment, forbidden by the Lord, is found, the word of exhortation is strong and without question. "Let us **not** judge one another anymore." There is to be an immediate cessation of such judgment because it contradicts both the nature and the purpose of the Living God.

RESOLVE THIS

"... but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way." Other versions read, "but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way,"^{KJV} "but rather determine this-- not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way,"^{NASB} "but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another,"^{NRSV} "Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not put an obstacle in another Christian's path,"^{NLT} and "but keep this in mind, that no man is to make it hard for his brother, or give him cause for doubting."^{BBE}

Here is an area where determination is required. A conscious decision is to be made, and a resolution to follow through with it. In fact, this is a form of judgment, flowing from discernment. Instead of judging our brethren, we are to "judge this rather."^{KJV} I prefer the King James Version here. The same root Greek word is used. The Spirit is making a play on words, showing that judgment itself is not wrong, but the manner in which it is used.

This is a judgment that **is** in order: a firm determination **not** to make it more difficult for any of our brethren to go to heaven. This will not happen apart from a deliberate judgment – a spiritual determination that leads to a firm resolution to be nothing but an advantage and a help to our brethren. Sound preaching and teaching will lead the people of God into this determination. However, where a sectarian approach is taken, the very judgment that is forbidden will actually become more prominent.

This word is particularly addressed to the strong brethren, who are to live

This is a judgment that is in order: a firm determination not to make it more difficult for any of our brethren to go to heaven. This will not happen apart from a deliberate judgment – a spiritual determination that leads to a firm resolution to be nothing but an advantage and a help to our brethren.

JUDGING ONE ANOTHER NO MORE

"Therefore let us not judge one another anymore." Other versions read, "Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another,"^{NIV} "Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another,"^{NRSV} "Then let us not be judges of one another any longer,"^{BBE} and "So don't condemn each other anymore."^{NLT}

Since we will ultimately appear before the same judgment seat, and all appear on an equal level, we must dispense with judging one another here. To judge another in the sense of our text assumes one is superior to another, else how could judgment be passed. Yet, one believer is not above another, for all have been accepted by grace through faith, and neither grace nor faith is meritorious, for they both come from God.

The fact that this admonition is given confirms that a propensity to judge is found within us. It is part of the remnant of the flesh that is to be subdued.

What About Judging Those Within?

Elsewhere we are instructed to judge those who are within the fold of Christ, but not those without. On the surface, this appears to contradict our text. It is written, "But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore put away from

related to these texts. The Romans text admonishes us to judge one another no longer. The Corinthians text demands that certain within the body of Christ **be** judged by us, and done so with determination. The same root Greek word is used in both texts (6D\T). It is a strong word denoting evaluation, and even condemnation. On the one hand, judgment is strictly forbidden. On the other hand, it is strongly urged.

The difference in the texts is found in the surrounding circumstances. In the Corinthian text, the issue was a fornicator within the church. This was not a matter of conscience, but one in which strictly forbidden sin was preferred and being committed by one who wore the name of Christ. The church could not allow this to continue in their fellowship, for it was not allowed by God Himself. God is pledged to condemn those who live in fornication, and that without a single exception. The guilty party was not living "unto the Lord," but unto self, and thus was to be judged. Even then, the intent was not to condemn, but to provoke a return to the Lord. Thus, the Corinthians were admonished, "To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor 5:50).

In the Roman text, all parties were living unto the Lord. There was no desire to break the law of the Lord, or to indulge the appetites of the flesh. In fact, both parties were maintaining a good conscience before the Lord. Both were living by faith, even though the faith of one was "weak," or in an immature state.

with a godly regard for those who are weak in the faith. Their strength is to be channeled into godly determination not to cause the weaker brethren to stumble. It is not likely that a weaker brother could cast a stumblingblock in the path of the stronger, unless it was to provoke a fleshly response by harsh judgment. The weaker brother is not the focus here.

The idea here is that the stronger can relinquish personal liberties in order to protect the weak.

This will be particularly expounded in verses fourteen through sixteen. I will therefore forgo any further comments on this matter until we cover those verses.

The point here is that a determination

must be made by the stronger not to make it more difficult for the weaker brother by insisting on exercising all personal liberties. Those liberties can be waived for the sake of another. The grace of God will both provoke and enable its recipients to be willing to forfeit activities their conscience allows, in deference to those who do not yet realize those liberties.

CONCLUSION

We have been introduced to the type of freedom for which Christ has made us free. As it is written, *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free”* (Gal 5:1). An essential aspect of this marvelous liberty is being able to refrain from doing lawful things, but not compulsory, things.

This is not a self-centered freedom, but one that takes into account the sincerity and spiritual condition of our brethren. We have been freed from sin, and liberated to be righteous. We have been freed from the dominion of Satan, and liberated to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. We are free to do what the Lord requires of us. We are free to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. We are no longer slaves to sin, self, or the traditions of men. We are free to relinquish personal preferences in order to assist our brethren to advance in the faith.

Freedom in Christ does not equal release from compulsion. It does provide for compulsion on a higher level: *“The love of Christ constraineth us”* (2 Cor 5:14). There is a principle of motivation that is more lofty than personal pleasure, and self-satisfaction. Jesus lived this principle out for us. As it is written, *“For even Christ pleased not Himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on Me”* (Rom 15:3).

If Jesus did not seek His own satisfaction, but allowed the *“reproaches”* of a fallen race to fall upon Him, will He not strengthen us to bear the infirmities of the weak? When we all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, how will anyone be able to explain a refusal to forbear conscientious brethren, when Jesus *“bore*

our sins in His body on the tree” (1 Pet 2:24)?

The Bane of Institutionalism

Within an institutional setting, an acute consciousness of the faith of others is rarely noted. There is a sense in which lifeless religion promotes intensely personal, and even carnal, interests. Life is thus lived in glaring contradiction of our text: *“For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone”*^{NIV} (v 7). The organization is thus allowed to overshadow all other relationships. If the organization is flourishing in the eyes of men, nothing else really matters. If the institutional wheels are well oiled, that is really all that matters. Somehow, in strict accordance with the *“mind of the flesh,”* a *“church* that is flourishing in the eyes of the world is thought to compensate for inferior spiritual conditions. Little thought is given to individuals within the group being spiritually unstable or weak. Living within the confines of a *“good conscience”* and *“faith unfeigned”* is rarely considered, much less emphasized. No small number of us have been caught in this maelstrom of the flesh, and have paid dearly for it.

The average spiritual fare that is being served up to the people of God is a reproach to the Lord of heaven and earth. It rarely produces the thought of salvation being *“great”* (Heb 2:3), or God being able to *“do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think”* (Eph 3:20). Consequently, the brethren of Christ are viewed according to the flesh, instead of according to the Spirit. This is a gigantic spiritual liability within the Western world. One can scarcely find an assembly in which this circumstance is not in pandemic proportions. Appearance has been given greater weight than

substance, a most serious condition.

The Reasoning of the Spirit

The reasoning of the Spirit is in stark contrast to this way of thinking. We do not live to ourselves alone, but *“to the Lord.”* And, if we do not live unto ourselves, much less can we live unto the institution! The institution did not die for us, reconcile us to God, or transform us. Our aim is not to see the institution flourish, but individuals mature in the faith!

I realize this has a strange sound to it, and can be considered in a negative and condemning sense, as though we were to have no regard for the church of our Lord. But this is not the case. By *“institution,”* I mean a religious body that is governed by the principles of this world. It is not driven by the Spirit of God, but by human wisdom and influence. It can function without the *“communion of the Holy Spirit”* (2 Cor 13:14), the tutelage of Jesus (Eph 4:20-21), or fellowship with both the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3).

Turning Away from Lifeless Religion

This is what the Spirit calls a *“form of godliness that denies the power thereof”* (2 Tim 3:5). It is a religious body in which the flesh is not subdued, and the *“new man”* is not nourished and given the preeminence. In such a powerless environ, vice can flourish, and sin erupt to the consternation of those dwelling there. God’s people are admonished to have nothing to do with such environments. In the words of the Spirit, *“from such, turn away”* (2 Tim 3:5b).

Such an aggressive action might very well be interpreted as a violation of our

text. There is, however, a most critical factor that is to be taken into consideration. Our text presumes a godly environment in which individuals are living in all good conscience before the Lord. When this is taking place, godly tolerance and forbearance are to be exercised. Where this is not happening, there is no need to consider this text. There are other matters that must first be addressed. If life is not being lived "unto the Lord," there is no such thing as "weaker" and "stronger" brethren. Both of those words presume living "unto the Lord." But where such a life is not found, there is only carnality and Divine

rejection. **God does not receive a person whose life fails to take Him into account. There is no Divine acceptance where life is not devoted to God.** The pledge of Jesus is, "Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it" (Luke 17:33). To live in strictly self interests is to be on the broad road that leads to destruction.

When we were baptized into Christ, we were ushered into a spiritual realm where death to sin was experienced, and life toward God (Rom 6:11). Our members, or means of expression, are now to be yielded unto God as those who are

alive from the dead (Rom 6:13). I do not believe it is possible to support the supposition that God will receive anyone who fails to do this.

Having said that, it is possible to live unto the Lord, heartily and conscientiously, while having a deficient spiritual perspective. It is also possible to so live and not have sufficient regard for less-advanced brethren. This passage has alerted us to these conditions, moving us to be considerate of our brethren. Personal care is to be taken not to cause personal offences, whether in inconsideration or in harsh judgment.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 9/21/2001. Continuing in our overview of the book of Romans, we will be covering verses 14-23 of the fourteenth chapter. The theme will be, "THE LAW OF LOVE." Here IS The answer to the complexities of different members in the same body, some advanced and some yet infants: some strong in faith, and others weak in faith. Love not only tolerates those whose conscience is yet weak, but comes to their aid. The law of love supercedes a moral code, accomplishing the will of the Lord. Our meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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