



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 44



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* -----

THE LAW OF LOVE

14:14 I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. ¹⁵ Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; ¹⁷ for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. ²⁰ Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. ²¹ It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. ²² Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. ²³ But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin. ^{NKJV} (Romans 14:14-23)

INTRODUCTION

The Spirit has reminded us that we all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. He alone, therefore, is the Lord of the conscience – the One toward whom our lives are to be directed. Through the Apostle, the Holy Spirit will now show us that knowing the truth intellectually is not enough. Further, the acme of knowledge is not knowing “the will of God for my life,” as many imagine.

Being able to distinguish right and wrong is not an end of itself. That is, one has not reached maturity in Jesus simply because good and evil can be accurately identified and distinguished from one another. Spiritual life demands that we handle the truth – that we know how to use it. While it is imperative that our senses be “*exercised to discern both good and evil*” (Heb 5:14), this text will

confirm we are stewards of that discernment – to use it for the glory of God and the edification of our brethren.

However, the Spirit will not leave the subject of right and wrong up in the air, as though every person had a right to a private opinion of the matters under consideration. He is not defending the rights of the individual, but the sanctity of

OUTLINE

- < NOTHING IS UNCLEAN OF ITSELF (14:14)
- < CONSIDERING YOUR BROTHER (14:15)
- < THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM (14:16-17)
- < ACCEPTABLE AND APPROVED (14:18)
- < THINGS TO PURSUE (14:19)
- < DESTROYING THE WORKS OF GOD (14:20a)
- < EVERYTHING IS PURE . . . BUT (14:20b)
- < SOMETHING GOOD THAT IS OFTEN NEGLECTED (14:21)
- < HAVE IT TO YOURSELF! (14:22)
- < DOUBTING AND CONDEMNATION (14:23)

the conscience. He will show us that there is a solid and reasonable view of things that are clean and unclean. These are issues that have to do with the ceremonial law, not the Law as inscribed on the tables of stone. At this point, some discussion should be given to the ceremonial law, as distinguished from the Ten Commandments, and the Divine elaboration upon them.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The Ten Commandments are referred to as *"the words of the covenant"* which God made with Israel. They were written on the tables of stone (Ex 34:28). These commandments were a moral image of God, providing an index to His nature, particularly as compared with those to whom the Law was given. This Law was given *"that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God"* (Rom 3:19). It precisely defined sin, showing its moral essence, or the kernel of its substance. As it is written, *"for by the law is the knowledge of sin"* (Rom 3:20).

While, in Christ, we are not under this Law as a covenant, we are given no liberty to break it. Conscience or not, no believer in Christ is allowed to live in violation of these commandments. Disobedience consistently constitutes sin, whether the individual thinks he is right

or not.

What About the Sabbath Day? An extended commentary

In the discussion of "days," some attention should be given to the Sabbath day. There is considerable confusion on this subject. It is good that we have an understanding that will assist us in living with a pure conscience before the Lord. Among the Christian community, there is no question about the applicability of nine of the ten commandments.

- ' *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me."*
- ' *"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them."*
- ' *"Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain."*
- ' *"Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee."*
- ' *"Thou shalt not kill."*
- ' *"Thou shalt not commit adultery."*
- ' *"Thou shalt not steal."*
- ' *"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."*
- ' *"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's."* (Ex 20:3-17)

On these, there is general unanimity among professed believers. They remain in effect, with no license being given for them to be broken.

It is the fourth commandment that has produced much controversy among men. *"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."* The Divine elaboration is, *"Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it"* (Ex 20:8-11).

Sabbatarians, or those who feel this commandment is still binding upon men, charge there is no provision for failing to keep the Sabbath, or seventh day, holy. This day – the seventh day – they affirm, is not to be viewed as food and days are considered in our text.

First, note the distinctiveness of the fourth commandment. All other commandments, with the exception of the fifth one, are prohibitions. They outline things that are NOT to be done. Only the fifth commandment also deals with something that is to be done. That commandment is also the only one that is attended with a promise. Special reference is made to it in an Apostolic admonition to children (Eph 6:1-3).

The Scriptures particularly tell us we are to allow no man to bind Sabbath days upon us (Col 2:16). The fourth chapter of Hebrews speaks of a higher and more glorious Sabbath into which believers now enter. The text reads, *"For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: 'So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest,' although the works were finished from the foundation of the world'"* (Heb 4:3). The remainder of that chapter elaborates on the subject, associating these words with the day on which God "rested" after creation (4:4-6).

What it boils down to is this. The Jews kept the seventh day, and that with a great deal of reluctance, for their hearts were far from God. Those in Christ, on the other hand, enter into a perpetual Sabbath that greatly delights the Lord, and them as well. They have entered into the real Sabbath (and the word "rest" in Hebrews 4:3 is the word for Sabbath). Their rest consists of ceasing to depend on their own works for their salvation (Heb 4:10).

We are under no obligation to keep the seventh day holy. By virtue of our faith, we have entered into God's own "rest," which the Jews were forbidden to enter (Psa 95:11; Heb 3:11; 4:3,5). By trusting in Christ, we are keeping the Sabbath in the highest and most holy sense.

The Ten Commandments are a reflection of the image of God. They are good, and holy, and just, as Romans 7 declares (verses 12-14). But they are NOT the basis for determining whether a person is righteous or not. That is determined by personal faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 4:13; Phil 3:9). And remember, being righteous or holy before the Lord is everything. If we are not righteous, there is no hope of being forever with the Lord. The Gospel announces that God's own righteousness is available to men through faith and in Christ Jesus (Rom 1:16-17; 3:21-22).

As for the Sabbath day, Israel, who received the commandment, never really entered into God's rest, or Sabbath—even though they kept the Sabbath day. That is precisely the point of Hebrews 4:1-11. God did not merely intend for men to set aside a day to rest from their labors. His intention was for them to "enter" into His rest. By that, the Spirit means God's desire is for men to enter into His joy and satisfaction in what He has achieved. His accomplishments reach their apex in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. That is where God

Himself finds the greatest satisfaction (Isa 53:11-12). It is, in the truest sense of the word, where He "rests."

There is a greater rest that was typified by the Law's Sabbath day, but never fulfilled by it. That is the rest of faith, and is discussed at length in the fourth chapter of Hebrews. A parallel is made between the fourth commandment Sabbath and the rest of faith. The Sabbath day was bound upon Israel because their hearts were hard. They would have forgotten God altogether if He did not demand they remember Him on that day, dedicating it exclusively to Him. In Christ, however, our nature is changed, so that we actually know and delight in knowing the Lord. Now every day becomes a Sabbath so far as sanctifying the Lord in our memory.

This does not mean keeping the Sabbath is wrong. We are not better for keeping it, either. You have not sinned in attending church Saturday evening. That, of course, is not to be equated with keeping the Sabbath day holy.

It is never right to demand that everyone keep the Sabbath day—even though no individual is condemned for choosing to do so. Colossians 2:16 forbids us to judge one another on this matter. The recollection of God as the Creator of the universe is wonderful—but it is certainly not the highest or most glorifying view of our God. Intimate fellowship with Him by faith is more wonderful. That is why Scripture affirms, "We which believe do enter into rest" (Heb 4:3). The word used in that text is "sabbaton," or Sabbath. It is a higher and more extensive rest which overshadows, but does not obliterate, the former Sabbath. The Sabbath day commandment has not been obviated by a different commandment, but by a greater rest. It is something like the light of the sun removing the light of the moon. That rest is nothing less than satisfaction with the atoning death of Christ. When we enter into that rest, we cease depending on our own accomplishments, resting, as it were, from them.

When comparing the New and Old covenants, our approach must be correct. The New Covenant is a different kind of covenant, not at all like the Old Covenant. God said it this way, "I will make a new covenant. . . It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt" (Heb 8:8-9, NIV). The latter part of that chapter confirms this is the covenant Jesus is presently mediating. It is not a covenant of DOING, like the Old Covenant was. In fact, the Spirit makes this parallel in commenting on the nature of the New Covenant. "Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: The man who does these things will live by them. But the righteousness that is by faith says: Do not say in your heart, Who will ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down) or Who will descend into the deep? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? The word is

near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Rom 10:5-10).

This is a foundational teaching. The Old Covenant put the entire responsibility in the hands of man. Believing, or faith, are not mentioned a single time in all of the Law—including all of the commandments, all of the directions, and all of the Levitical law. It was a system of doing. In the New Covenant, God does the foundational work, then calls upon us to believe it. He then accepts us upon the basis of our faith, and works with us to fulfill His will (Phil 2:12-13). The entire New Covenant is summarized in a few words. Jeremiah foretold it in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The Spirit later gave it again in Hebrews 8:8-13. It is again summarized in Hebrews 10:16-17. In all of these references what the Lord does is the total emphasis. There are no "ifs," and there are no commands. If you will read those texts, you will find the following affirmations. (1) God will put His laws into the mind. (2) He will write his laws on the heart. (3) He will be God to the people. (4) The people will be His people. (5) Every one in the covenant will know Him, or be familiar and in love with Him. (6) He will not remember their sins any more. All of those things are promises—promises to be believed. They can only be possessed in Christ. Further, our faith will compel us to do anything and everything He commands us. Other scriptures that affirm the nature of the New Covenant, and how radically it differs from the Old Covenant are as follows. Jeremiah 32:39-40; Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:26-27; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Ephesians 2:10.

The "First day of the week" is frequently mentioned in Scripture, and always with a note of approval. This is specifically said to be the time when Jesus rose from the dead. "Now when He rose early on the first day of the week . . ." (Mark 16:9). This is also the day on which Jesus, following His resurrection, first appeared to His disciples. "Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you'" (John 20:19). It is also the day on which He appeared the second time to His disciples. John refers to it as eight days following the first appearance, which would put it on the first day of the week. "And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, 'Peace to you!'" (John 20:26).

In addition, the day of Pentecost occurred on the first day of the week. This feast took place 50 days after the high Sabbath of the paschal week (Lev 23:15-16). The Sabbath from which the count was made

occurred the day after Jesus was crucified, and was the reason why His body was taken down from the cross (John 19:31; Mark 15:42). It was also the Sabbath honored by the women who came to anoint Jesus' body (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:54-56). Fifty days from that Sabbath day was the first day of the week—the Day of Pentecost, on which the Spirit was poured forth.

We are categorically told that the early disciples came together to break bread "on the first day of the week" (Acts 20:7). When instructing the Corinthians on setting aside special monies for the poor saints in Jerusalem, Paul specified that it be done on "the first day of the week" (1 Cor 16:2). As the church progressed, from Ignatius (A.D. 30-107) onwards, we "have a complete chain of evidence that The Lord's Day became the regular Christian name for the first day of the week."

Suffice it to say, there is solid ground for perceiving as "the Lord's Day" the first day of the week. This was the day on which natural light was created (Gen 1:3-5). It was the day on which Christ Jesus arose from the dead (Mark 16:9). His two recorded appearances to His disciples occurred on this day (John 20:19,26). The day of Pentecost took place on this day (Lev 23:15-16), and the early church is said to have gathered together on the "first day of the week" (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2). This is not simply another day! The events that took place on the first day of the week are conducive to godly recollections that sanctify the soul.

THE CEREMONIAL LAW

The ceremonial law is distinguished from the moral law, or ten commandments. This law consisted of certain types and shadows of the salvation that would be effected by the Lord Jesus Christ. At the heart of the ceremonial law were the various sacrifices. Seven types of sacrifices were offered under the Law. (1) Sin—Lev 4, (2) guilt (or "trespass"^{KJV})—Lev 5, (3) burnt—Deut 33, (4) peace—Ex 24; Lev 7, (5) grain (or meat^{KJV})—Lev 2 and 6, (6) heave and wave—Ex 25, 30,35, and (7) the red heifer—Num 19.

In association with these sacrifices, the ceremonial law also distinguished between clean and unclean animals (Lev 11:1-47; Deut 14:3-21). These distinctions were not intended to be permanent, but served to train the conscience of the people to make distinctions regarding what was to be offered unto the Lord. The distinctions themselves were shadows and types, and did not reflect the inherent quality of the

various forms of life.

In a sterling example of the incompatibility of the ceremonies of the Law with new life in Christ Jesus, the Spirit forbids believers to alter their lives because of the pressure of those who still honor the ceremonial law. *“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.”* These are all perfunctory distinctions – things having to do with the ceremonial law. The reason for this prohibition is quite clear. *“These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ”* Col 2:16-17. ^{NIV} **Since the Object, Jesus Christ, toward which these ceremonies and conventions pointed**

has come, they are no longer binding upon the people of God. Types, however valid and meaningful they may be, must give way to the Person of Jesus Christ. There is a superiority in the Lord Jesus Christ that does not require continued allegiance to the introductory types and shadows of the Old Covenant – distinctions in meats, drinks, and days.

All of this provides a background for our text. **The Spirit is not referring to varied human opinions that are driven by mere social custom, and have nothing to do with living unto the Lord.** This teaching is not dealing with nominal opinionated views, but with issues of faith: i.e., with how a person lives unto the Lord. Nothing must be allowed to constrain the individual to live

in contradiction of his conscience. No laws can be imposed upon believers that are not integral to the New Covenant itself.

Unlike the Old Covenant, the New Covenant is not a system in which the regulation of human conduct is preeminent. Having been reconciled to God, and given the Spirit of adoption, believers operate according to a higher principle. They have received a new heart and a new spirit, and are no longer hostile toward the Living God (Ezek 36:25). Their life tends toward God, not away from Him. They have a preference for the Lord, not the world. His law is written upon their hearts and put into their minds (Heb 10:16). Now we are *“taught”* within the context of Divine fellowship, not in shadows and types (Eph 4:20-21; 1 John 2:27).

NOTHING IS UNCLEAN OF ITSELF

^{14:14} ***I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.*** Now, Paul rises above the controversy itself. As with the wings of an eagle, he soars into the domain of the heavenlies, showing us a higher view of the subject. He will confirm why the one who cannot eat all meats is actually the weaker brother, although he is unreservedly accepted by God in Christ Jesus. The persuasion Paul now embraces is the result of a change of mind. Once a Pharisee, and the son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6; Phil 3:5), he had lived within *“the strictest sect”* of the Jews (Acts 26:5). If there were Jews who still had scruples about the distinction of meats under the Law, Paul would have them know he was more than casually acquainted with such a persuasion. Convictions, however, can be changed, and more precise and accurate views can be embraced in all good conscience. The strength of his argument will assist brethren in being forbearing of one another until a greater degree of spiritual maturity is realized.

KNOWING AND BEING CONVINCED

“I know and am convinced . . .

” Other versions read, *“I know and am persuaded,”* ^{KJV} *“I am fully convinced,”* ^{NIV} *“I know and am confident,”* ^{DRA} *“I have known, and am persuaded,”* ^{YLT} and *“I know and am perfectly sure.”* ^{NLT} **Knowing has to do with the mind. Being convinced, or persuaded, has to do with the heart.** Knowing takes hold of the fact. Persuasion sees the relevancy of the fact. Knowing is the realization of the truth. Persuasion is understanding what

Many of the religious views of our day have neither knowledge nor conviction in them. They are not the result of apprehending the truth, and have little to do with a compelling conviction. Nevertheless, these two qualities are the only valid reasons for embracing a particular view of Kingdom behavior. The traditions of men, however valid they may appear, cannot produce these essential lineaments

Knowing takes hold of the fact. Persuasion sees the relevancy of the fact. Knowing is the realization of the truth. Persuasion is understanding what to do with it. Knowledge and conviction are the products of faith. They are the result of believing the Lord, and they impact upon human conduct.

to do with it. **Knowledge and conviction are the products of faith.** They are the result of believing the Lord, and they impact upon human conduct. They exert great power upon us.

BY THE LORD JESUS

“ . . . by the Lord Jesus . . . ” In this case, knowledge and conviction, or persuasion, are not the mere products of thought. They are not the result of an

independent reasoning process, or logical approach to the truth of God. **They are the result of exposure to “the Lord Jesus.”** It is not that the Savior specifically declared what Paul has embraced. Rather, it is that the Gospel that was revealed to Him, together with the exposition of Divine intent, led him to this conclusion. **Faith will bring us to certain conclusions.**

It is quite possible that Jesus told

with the Gospel of Christ.

To summarize the meaning of these words, because of Paul’s fellowship with Christ, he has been brought to the following persuasion. Jesus sanctions what he is saying, and it is in full accord with the life that is in Him.

NOTHING UNCLEAN OF ITSELF
“ . . . that there is nothing unclean of itself . . . ” Other versions

It is not that Jesus teaches us the necessity of putting off the old man and putting on the new man. Rather, His matchless teaching empowers us to get the work done. It produces a knowledge and persuasion that moves us to bring our lives into accord with the Gospel of Christ.

Paul what had also been revealed to Peter (Acts 10:15). However, even then, Peter was brought to the conclusion that *“I should not call any man common or unclean”* (Acts 10:28). Yet, I do not understand this revelation to be of the same detailed sort as that Paul received concerning the Lord’s table (1 Cor 11:23-30). Also, Jesus no doubt taught Paul what He had taught the twelve concerning the inability of what enters into a man to defile him (Mark 7:18-19).

I gather, therefore, that the teaching of Jesus had shed light on matters regarding the ceremonial law. Such teaching is spoken of in this way: *“But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness”* (Eph 4:20-24). It is not that Jesus teaches us the necessity of putting off the old man and putting on the new man. **Rather, His matchless teaching empowers us to get the work done.** It produces a knowledge and persuasion that moves us to bring our lives into accord

read, *“that no food is unclean in itself,”*^{NIV} and *“that no food, in and of itself, is wrong to eat.”*^{NLT}

No food, whether it be meat or herbs, is inherently unclean or unholy. Some men, however, are fond of leading us to believe this is not so. Particularly in our day, when men are bowing down to “science,” and to those of corrupted religious persuasions, views are being embraced that sharply clash with this text. Under the Law, certain meats were said to be “unclean” (Lev 11:4-8). One might conclude that Divine prohibition suggested that a certain inferiority or contamination existed in those foods – that His direction was given in the interest of maintaining good health. In fact, some do teach this is the case. Our text, however, affirms that nothing could be further from the truth. No food is of itself impure and unsuitable for consumption: i.e., *“there is nothing unclean of itself.”*

Here, the word “nothing” refers to foods, not to sinful acts, such as fornication or idolatry.

The Eating of Blood

Immediately, the issue of eating blood might come to mind. This was

forbidden before the Law, by the Law, and after the Law. **Before the Law,** God said to Noah, *“But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat”* (Gen 9:4). **By the Law,** God said through Moses, *“For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul. Therefore I said unto the children of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourneth among you eat blood”* (Lev 11:11-21). **After the Law** the Apostles declared, *“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”* (Acts 15:29).

Blood was never intended to be a “food.” It is not in that classification. There is a sanctity associated with blood because it is the Divinely appointed means of sustaining life. It also points to the means by which we were reconciled to God, and put at peace with Him – the blood of Christ (Eph 2:13; Col 1:14; 1 Pet 1:18-19). The point of this prohibition is that men must never come to a point where life itself is despised.

As to meats that have been offered to idols being forbidden, **it is the awareness of that association that prohibits their consumption.** That is why those who purchased meats were not to ask about the meat they procured. *“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”* (1 Cor 10:25-26).

Food Is Sanctified

Having said all of that, the cleansing of all meats (Mark 7:19), does not mean they are consumed without some regard for their origin. We do not eat like animals, but as those who know it is God who *“giveth us richly all things to enjoy”* (1 Tim 6:17). Even though nothing is “unclean of itself,” yet it is to be received with thanksgiving, and sanctified by prayer. Thus it is written, *“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 4:4-5). Other versions read, *“because it is consecrated by the word of God and*

prayer,"^{NIV} "it is made holy by the word of God and by prayer,"^{BEB} and "the word of God and prayer make it holy."^{NJB}

Thanksgiving and Sanctification

Even though "there is nothing unclean of itself," it is not automatically holy. Rather, it is made holy, or made suitable for consumption, when it is "received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth" (1 Tim 4:3). It is "sanctified by the Word of God," which has affirmed "there is nothing unclean of itself." It is also "sanctified by the Word" that was spoken by Jesus Himself. "... 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). Additionally, it is "sanctified by the Word of God," which affirms, "Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats" (1 Cor 6:13).

Even the common activity of eating is thus related to the Living God. No aspect of life is to be lived independently of Him.

Sanctified By Prayer

Even though God has formally sanctioned the consumption of all foods, yet the element of prayer is to be remembered. While men may be quite casual about this matter, God is not. Food is made acceptable by "prayer" as well as the "Word of God." Even the Israelites were reminded to relate their food to the blessing of the Lord. "When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee" (Deut 8:10). Our matchless Lord did not distribute food to the multitude until He had looked up into heaven and blessed and broke the bread (Matt 14:19). He did the same when He broke the seven loaves and the fishes (Matt 15:36). Even when He instituted the Lord's supper, He blessed the bread before giving it to His disciples (Matt 26:26). When Paul took food in the

presence of those with whom he was sailing, "he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all" (Acts 27:35).

Thus, the acceptance of all foods is to be seen as more than a mere legal provision. There is the matter of it being

corrupted conscience! The just "shall live by faith," and the conscience is an aspect of that faith. Even though the conscience is technically incorrect, it may not be violated. An inaccurate conscience causes faith to be "weak," or juvenile. Yet, even though the individual is "weak in the faith," he cannot eat without regard to that

Thus, if the weaker brother is convinced God does not allow him to eat meat, his persuasion makes the meat unlawful for him. It does not constitute the meat itself unclean, for others can eat of it without sinning against God. But he cannot, and must not, do so.

sanctified by our thankful reception of it and prayers. I have frequently seen believers who thought themselves so free that they could eat food without giving thanks to God. Such food is not sanctified for human consumption, even though it has been cleansed by the word of Jesus.

BUT TO HIM . . .

"... but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean." Other versions read, "but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean,"^{KJV} "but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean,"^{NASB} "But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean,"^{NIV} and "but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean."^{NRSV}

Here we come to grips with the extreme sensitivity that is related to spiritual life. **While nothing is of itself unclean, it can become unclean because of the condition and the perception of the individual.** Nothing is so pure that it cannot be defiled by a

faith. No believer is free to violate their conscience. Such violation drives a wedge between the individual and God, causing them to live without regard to Him.

The rule of the Kingdom is, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31). Again it is written, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him" (Col 3:17). This cannot be done if the weaker brother conducts himself contrary to his conscience. If a person does what he is convinced God has forbidden, he has, in a very real sense, sinned against God. He has refused to live by faith, and has allowed himself to live independently of his personal convictions Godward.

Thus, if the weaker brother is convinced God does not allow him to eat meat, his persuasion makes the meat unlawful for him. It does not constitute the meat itself unclean, for others can eat of it without sinning against God. But he cannot, and must not, do so.

CONSIDERING OUR BROTHER

"¹⁵ Yet if your brother is || grieved because of your food, you || are no longer walking in love. Do not

The Law of Love provides a spiritual environment in which progress can be made toward glory--by Given O. Blakely

destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.” Here the Spirit elaborates on a former word: *“For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself”* (verse 7). We have been “added” to Christ’s church (Acts 2:47), placed in Christ’s body (1 Cor 12:18), and are “are members one of another” (Eph 4:25). Although we are individuals, with individual faith and life, we are not independent of the other members of Christ’s body. The liberty that we enjoy in Christ Jesus is personal and extensive. Yet, it is to be tempered with loving consideration for our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.

Something to Remember

It must be remembered that this passage is dealing with those who are conscientiously living for and unto the Lord. Regardless of the strength of their faith, or the breadth of their spiritual understanding, the purpose of their lives is to please the Lord.

It must be remembered that this passage is dealing with those who are conscientiously living for and unto the Lord. Regardless of the strength of their faith, or the breadth of their spiritual understanding, the purpose of their lives is to please the Lord. If they do not eat meat, or if they observe certain days, they do so *“to the Lord”* (verse 6).

This text has nothing whatsoever to do with carnal scruples or fleshly opinions and preferences. I say this because of the relative rarity of finding individuals in our society whose sole purpose is to please the Lord. Individuals who do not live for the Lord are characterized as *“those who are defiled and unbelieving,”* to whom *“nothing is pure,”* whose *“mind and conscience are defiled”* (1:15). Our text does not suggest we alter our conduct because of the persuasions of such people. Even if they are religious people, if they are factious and condemning, we will not shape our lives to please them. Thus Paul writes,

“And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you” (Gal 2:4-5). His consideration was for the genuinely sincere believers at Galatia, not factious *“false brethren”* who were imported to cause trouble and dissension am the saints.

Our text will focus on those who are actually living by faith, for no other individuals are acceptable to God. If it is argued that we cannot misrepresent God before the heathen, it must be

remembered that those who are living by faith have no mind to do such a thing. **If living wholeheartedly for the Lord causes offense among the ungodly and profane, we are not to be concerned about it.** Of course, such living is not to be taken for granted.

A GRIEVED BROTHER

“Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food.” Other versions read, *“For if because of food your brother is hurt,”*^{NASB} *“If your brother is distressed because of what you eat,”*^{NIV} *“If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat,”*^{NRSV} *“And indeed, if through any kind of food you are causing offense to a brother,”*^{NJB} and *“And if because of food your brother is troubled.”*^{BBE}

Care must be taken to view this text in the Spirit, and not in the flesh. Two things may be seen here. **First**, the weaker brother is made to view the stronger one as a transgressor, for he is doing something his weakened conscience

is persuaded is wrong. **Second**, the weaker brother senses that he is being despised rather than loved. This is what causes the grief or injury. The offending party is thus **perceived** as having no regard for either God or man.

The word *“grieved”* is an especially strong expression. It means to cause distress, pain, and sorrow. This is more than a mere emotion, or fleshly reaction. It is pain in the heart, caused by what is perceived as disobedience and a lack of concern. This verse postulates that great sorrow is caused to the believer when those who profess Christ’s name live in a manner that chaffs against the other believer’s conscience.

But there is another sense in which the weaker brother is grieved. The grief involves more than an attitude toward the offending brother. **The idea is that the weaker one, seeing his brother do what he conceives to be wrong, would himself engage in the same deed, thereby violating his conscience and bringing condemning sorrow upon himself.** This, we will find, is the primary sense of the text. The weaker brother is made to alter his conduct because of what he sees his brother do, even though it violates his conscience to do so.

A Scriptural Example

An example of this type of conduct is mentioned by Paul. It regards the demeanor of Peter. The occasion was a gathering in Antioch. When first coming there, Peter had eaten with the Gentiles with no reservations whatsoever. Yet, when certain people came from James, he separated himself from the Gentiles, fearing those who practiced circumcision. As a result of his conduct, other Jews joined him in withdrawing from the Gentiles. Barnabas himself was even carried away by the hypocrisy. The record reads like this. *“Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy”* (Gal 2:11-13).

Peter's conduct suggested the Gospel was more for the Jews than for the Gentiles, and that circumcision was of great significance in Christ Jesus. Subtle pressure would be put upon the Gentiles to be circumcised, even though the Gospel of Christ had no such requirement, nor gave any hint of necessity. Paul therefore sharply rebuked Peter, saying, "*You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?*"^{NIV} (Gal; 2:14). Thus, although the Gentiles were serving God with a pure conscience, without being circumcised, they would be forced to subscribe to requirements their conscience did not allow. Thus, they would cease to live by faith, and begin to live according to lifeless tradition – a manner of life that God does not receive.

By the same token, the Jewish believers, who were actually the weaker ones, would be led to believe their penchant for circumcision was acceptable. They would also tend to believe they were superior, and had advanced far beyond their Gentile brethren.

WALKING IN LOVE

"...you are no longer walking in love." Other versions read, "*now walkest thou not charitably,*"^{KJV} "*you are no longer walking according to love,*"^{NASB} "*you are no longer acting in love,*"^{NIV} and "*you are no longer being guided by love.*"^{NJB}

Under the Law, the "second" commandment was, "*thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*" (Lev 19:18; Mark 12:31; Rom 13:9). In Christ Jesus, the matter of brotherly love, or love for the household of faith, takes the precedence. "*For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another*" (1 John 3:11). This love is not a second requirement, but is merged together with the faith that saves the soul. "*And this is His command: to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as He commanded us*"^{NIV} (1 John 3:23).

This love is not an emotion, but a frame of mind and heart. It constrains one to consider others who are in Christ,

producing a determination to cast no stumbling block in their path, or make it more difficult for them to live unto the Lord.

The individual who has no regard for the people of God, who are living solely for the Lord, has abruptly ceased to live in love. That is a polite way of saying they no longer love the brethren, for they have disregarded them in a determination to do what they have been freed to do – regardless of the impact it has upon those whose faith is weak. It simply is not possible to love the people of God while trampling upon the convictions to which their faith has brought them.

DESTROYING SOMEONE

"... Do not destroy with your

It simply is not possible to love the people of God while trampling upon the convictions to which their faith has brought them.

food the one for whom Christ died."

Other versions read, "*Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died,*"^{NIV} "*Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died,*"^{NRSV} and "*Do not let your food be destruction to him for whom Christ went into death.*"^{BBE}

The very idea of destroying someone for whom Christ died is most arresting! To "destroy" means to put out of the way altogether – to thrust out of the way that leads to life. It means to bring them to nothing, and cause them to cease to exist. That is the meaning of the word "destroy."

There are theologies that deny such a thing is possible. Those embracing such doctrines would point to the promise

that nothing is able to separate us from the love of God (Rom 8:38-39). They would remind us that God is able to keep us from falling (Jude 24-25), and make us to stand (Rom 14:4). No one, they would declare, is able to pluck us out of Jesus' hand, much less the hand of His Father (John 10:28-29). And, indeed, these statements are all true. However, all of them deal with influences external to our own persons – to opposing forces that seek to wrest us from the hands of our Lord.

Our text deals with quite another matter. Here, the conscience of the weakened believer is thrust into the background, and the individual ceases to live by faith – an absolute requisite for justification. At the precise point a person ceases to live by faith, salvation is no longer effective, and grace is no longer available. Is it not written, "*for by grace are you saved THROUGH FAITH*" (Eph 5:8). **If it is true that we hold all spiritual benefits by faith, then it is also true that they are forfeited when faith no longer dictates our walk.** Thus, the person is "destroyed," for they are attempting to live in the energy of the natural man. In violation of their own conscience, they have altered their conduct because of the persuasions of someone else. Even if those persuasions were technically correct, and did not condemn the person holding them, yet it was altogether improper for them to be applied to a person who did not discern them. **Spiritual life must be maintained by personal identity with God through faith, NOT persuasions of others.**

This Must Be Seen

The teaching of this section must be properly seen. This is not an appeal to fleshly sentimentality that seeks to cater to the carnal opinions of our brethren. The point that has been made throughout this Epistle is that spiritual life is maintained by personal faith. The righteousness of God is received and maintained by faith (1:17). **At no point can spiritual life be sustained independently of faith.** What is more, if we shape our lives in violation of our own conscience, we have actually ceased to live by faith, for faith

works hand-in-hand with our conscience. **When the conscience is violated,**

destruction begins to occur within the human spirit. In all of its greatness,

salvation makes no provision to ignore the conscience.

THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

“¹⁶ Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil;¹⁷ for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” It is possible to do something good, or acceptable, yet have it yield bad results. This condition is owing to the complex moral arena that we occupy. The Spirit will now elevate our thinking in order that we may be encouraged to live toward the Lord in godly consideration of our brethren.

DO NOT LET IS HAPPEN

“Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil.” We neither live nor die *“to ourselves.”* We are a spectacle to heavenly hosts (1 Cor 4:9), perceived by peers (Matt 5:16), and the target of a host of dark and wicked spirits (Eph 6:12). These are all active personalities, registering an impact upon the sons of men. It is this circumstance that allows for good to be evil spoken of.

This is not the *“good works”* to which we have been ordained, that we should walk in them (Eph 2:10). God has made no provision for the cessation of such activity. This *“good”* is an aspect of our liberty. It refers to conduct that is offered conscientiously to the Lord, yet is not compulsory. It is involved in the saying, *“Unto the pure all things are pure”* (Tit 1:15).

Elsewhere the Spirit speaks of these *“good,”* but optional matters. *“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”* (1 Cor 6:12). This context also has to do with meats, and the liberty to eat all manner of food. **However, being free to eat foods, does not mean we are obligated to do so.** It is not proper to allow our fleshly appetites to become our lords, to the disregard of our brethren. Some things are not *“expedient,”* ^{KJV} *“profitable,”* ^{NASB}

“helpful,” ^{NKJV} or *“beneficial.”* ^{NIV} Personal advantage is not always the best advantage. This is confirmed by our blessed Lord, who sheathed His own advantage, that He might bring eternal benefit to us.

Again it is written, *“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not”* (1 Cor 10:23). One of the primary purposes of spiritual life is to bring edification and strength to our brethren – to give them the advantage

faith of the stronger brother is thus perceived as a deliberate ignoring of the Law of God.

Something to Consider

Although I have touched upon this already, it will bear some repetition. Should the weaker brother demand that the stronger adhere to his diminished vision, adherence to such a demand cannot be justified. In such a case, the stronger should give place *“by subjection, no, not for an hour”* (Gal 2:5). Thus Paul refused to circumcise Titus (Gal 2:3).

Our text is dealing with sensitive, yet uninformed brethren, who alter their conduct because of what they behold. It is not speaking of those who demand that men alter their conduct to suit their own unenlightened demands.

in life. This is a fundamental consideration. As a group we are admonished, *“Let all things be done unto edifying”* (1 Cor 14:26). As individuals we are exhorted, *“Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification”* (Rom 15:2).

In this text, *“good”* is *“spoken of as evil”* when it is perceived as a transgression of the Law, even though freedom has been granted to do it. If the *“good,”* or acceptable thing, that we do moves us to despise our weaker brethren, it becomes *“evil,”* for it no longer has the power to edify.

For the person who perceives that God no longer distinguishes between foods, the consequent liberty experienced is also *“good.”* Yet, if that liberty becomes a snare to weaker brethren, it will be spoken of as *“evil.”* What is allowed by the

He would not allow weaker brethren to make harsh demands upon them, and neither should we.

Our text is dealing with sensitive, yet uninformed brethren, who alter their conduct because of what they behold. It is not speaking of those who demand that men alter their conduct to suit their own unenlightened demands.

WHAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NOT

“... for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking.” Other versions read, *“for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking,”* ^{NASB} *“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking,”* ^{NIV} and *“For the kingdom of God is not food and drink”* ^{NRSV} This is a fundamental Kingdom distinction.

This is the first, and only,

time the word “Kingdom” appears in the book of Romans. It is found nowhere else in this book, in any translation, or in the Greek text. Objectively, the word itself means a domain or rule. “*The Kingdom of God*” refers to the domain where God is working – fulfilling His purpose. It is a realm where His will is being done, and His “*eternal purpose*” is being brought to culmination. Here, in His Kingdom, is where Divine attributes are brought to bear upon a specific objective – one determined by God Himself.

Righteousness from God. The Gospel reveals a righteousness that comes from God, and is appropriated by faith (1:17).

Power and Godhead revealed. Through creation, God has revealed His own power and Divinity, or Godhead (1:19-20).

Judgment of the Gentile world. Because of their thanklessness, and refusal to retain Him in their knowledge, God delivered the Gentiles over to corrupt living and a reprobate mind (1:24,26,28).

Coming judgment. God will judge

The Law. Having died to the Law, God has delivered us from its condemning power in order that we might be married to Christ (7:4-6).

Freed from condemnation. God does not condemn those who are in Christ Jesus (8:1).

Good is being worked. God is working all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (8:28).

All of God. From beginning to end, salvation is of the Lord. Foreknowledge, determination, calling, justification, and glorification, are all His work, and His alone (8:29-30).

Security. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (8:35-39).

Divine choice. Divine choice is the dominant choice in the execution of His will (9:7-13).

Divine will. The experience of both mercy and hardening are traceable to the will of God (9:15-33).

Revelation. God revealed Himself to those who were not seeking for Him (10:20).

A remnant. There yet remains a remnant according to the election of grace (11:6).

Grafting. God is able to graft Israel into their own tree once again (11:23). God grafted believing Gentiles into a tree from which they did not come (11:24).

Turning ungodliness. The Deliverer will yet turn away ungodliness from Jacob (11:26-27).

Power. There is no power that does not come from God (13:1).

Standing. God is able to make a believer stand (14:4).

“The Kingdom of God” refers to the domain where God is working – fulfilling His purpose. It is a realm where His will is being done, and His “eternal purpose” is being brought to culmination. Here, in His Kingdom, is where Divine attributes are brought to bear upon a specific objective – one determined by God Himself.

Subjectively, “*the Kingdom of God*” refers to the manner in which God is being served. It describes a domain where the constituents are in willing subjection to the Lord, and in whom He is working.

Until this verse, the reign of the Almighty – His Kingdom – has been referred to in various ways.

The Apostleship. Paul credits His Apostleship to His own call and separation to the Gospel (1:1).

The Gospel of Christ. The Gospel is declared to be what God promised through the prophets, and fulfilled in the person of Christ (1:2-3).

The resurrection of Christ. In His resurrection, God declared Jesus to be His Son with power (1:4).

Divine resources. Grace and peace are said to be from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:7).

The powerful Gospel. The Gospel of Christ is God’s own power, in order to effect salvation (1:16).

the secrets of men through Jesus Christ (2:16).

Divine assessment. God has assessed the entire world as unrighteous and without any goodness (3:10-18).

Justification. God justifies men freely by His grace, and through Jesus Christ (3:24).

Propitiation. God has placed Jesus before the world as a covering for sin, and a means of deliverance from condemnation (3:25-26).

Righteousness. God accounts men to be righteous upon the basis of their faith in Christ (4:4-7,24-25).

Peace. We now have peace with God because He has justified us through faith (5:1).

A new Man. Through one Man, Jesus Christ, God has delivered men from the curse incurred from Adam (5:12-19).

Eternal life. The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (6:23).

While the words “*Kingdom of God*” have not appeared prior to this verse, we have read of its meticulous execution among the sons of men. **The cause of all things has been traced back to God Himself.** As it is written, “*For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen*” (11:36). Ultimately, all will stand before Him to give an account of themselves, “*for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ*” (14:10). It is God’s Kingdom! He is the Ruler in both heaven and earth, and His rule cannot be successfully contested. **If men do not receive His beneficent rule, they will receive His**

unrelenting judgment.

THE POINT

“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink.” The Divine rule is not evidenced in dietary restrictions or indulgences. Such things do not require faith, grace, or the strengthening of the Holy Spirit. While God does have a right to tell us what to eat and what to drink, that is not what He does. That did not require the death and resurrection of His Son. It does not require His enthronement or the return of Jesus to receive us to Himself.

If the kingdom of God consisted of eating and drinking, it would be a sin to fast. But it does not consist of such things, for they are all transitory. They do not blend with the eternal order, and thus cannot be the basis of God’s fellowship with us or support of us.

It is what we ARE that is the issue with God, and meats and drinks cannot change or improve what we are. As it is written, “But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse” (1 Cor 8:8). God’s people should be wise enough to apply this principle to a host of things that have been the cause of division among those professing the name of Christ Jesus.

WHAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS

“ . . . but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Other versions read, “For the kingdom of God is . . . a matter . . . of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”^{NIV} Here are the essential elements of the Kingdom of God – and they are all gifts from Him. Where these are present, the God of heaven is at work, blessing, upholding, and strengthening. Where these are not found, God is not working all things together for the good of the individual or people.

“The Kingdom of God” is not a synonym for the church, as some suppose. It is larger than the church, and is not dependent upon the church. God’s Kingdom is the domain in which He executes His will, and fulfills His determined purpose. Unlike the kingdoms

of this world, it is a dominion that cannot be shaken or moved. As it is written, “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:28-29). Rather than the church being the Kingdom, it is comprised of individuals who have “received” the Kingdom. They are the ones who are being profited and helped by the reign and working of the Almighty God.

Now, what may we expect to find

“righteousness” of our text is “imputed” righteousness (4:11,22-24; James 2:23). It takes place when we are “made the righteousness of God in Him (Christ)” (2 Cor 5:21). This is “the gift of righteousness” that is realized through faith (5:17; Phil 3:9).

When men are brought into Divine favor, and “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6), it does impact upon their demeanor. From an experiential point of view, this is being born again, or made a partaker of the Divine nature. There are acts of obedience related to this experience, such as

Now, what may we expect to find where the Lord is working among people? What qualities or traits will be found in those who have received this Kingdom? Will they be noted for their diet? Will participation in or abstinence from meats and drinks be the telling mark found upon them?

where the Lord is working among people? What qualities or traits will be found in those who have received this Kingdom? Will they be noted for their diet? Will participation in or abstinence from meats and drinks be the telling mark found upon them? What will evidence that God is among them, working in them “both to will and to do of His own good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). That is the issue before us.

Righteousness

While “righteousness” certainly involves behavior, it is much larger than behavior. Right conduct springs from righteousness, it is not the origin of it. As it is written, “every one that doeth righteousness IS born of Him” (1 John 2:29). And again, “he that doeth righteousness IS righteous, even as He is righteous” (1 John 3:7). **Doing righteousness, therefore, is the evidence of Divine acceptance, not the cause of it.**

God has “MADE” us righteous, “For as by one man’s (Adam) disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One (Jesus) shall many be made righteous” (5:19). The

repentance, the confession of Christ, and baptism (Acts 2:38; 8:37; Rom 6:3-4). There are also certain evidences of this righteousness that faith will produce, like the love of the brethren, living by every word of God, and abstaining from fleshly lusts that war against the soul (1 John 3:14; Matt 4:4; 1 Pet 2:11). However, it is the experience of being made righteous that is the point of our text. God’s righteousness imputed to us is the fountain from which the “fruits of righteousness” are generated in us (Phil 1:11).

Where a “righteous man” is found (James 5:16), the Kingdom of God is being made known. There is a place where God is “working . . . that which is well pleasing in His sight” (Heb 13:21). The Kingdom of God “is a matter of righteousness!”

Peace

As with righteousness, “peace” comes from God. It is not the product of human activity. It cannot be produced by man, or be generated by nature. Jesus declared He would give His own peace to His disciples. “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart

be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). Not only does the believer receive "the righteousness of God," he also receives the peace of Jesus. **This is a peace that settles the heart, enabling the believer to live in a hostile realm without being shaken and distraught.** Even though troublesome times may be around the trusting ones, yet peace keeps their "hearts and minds" (Phil 4:7).

A person without "the peace of God" (Col 3:15) will not himself be peaceable. Those who "make peace," or are "peacemakers" (James 3:18; Matt 5:9) are those who have received "peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:21; Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4; Phile 3; 2 John 3; Rev 1:4). **The presence of that peace is evidence of the Kingdom of God.** It is another proof that He is "above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph 4:6).

Joy in the Holy Spirit

This is a rational joy – one that proceeds from spiritual insight and understanding. It is called "joy in the Holy Spirit" because it is the result of His marvelous work. Thus we read of "joy" being part of "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22). It is precisely called "the joy of the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess 1:6). God Himself "fills" us with "all joy... through the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:13).

In the world, joy is often the result of being forced out of one's right mind: i.e., through drunkenness, pleasure, or some other unnatural means of exhilaration. Within the Christian community, there are even some who see the joy of our text as something forcibly brought upon believers, so that they are pushed from rationality into a state of ecstasy. Thus, in recent years, we have heard of "laughing in the Holy Ghost."

God's people must come away from such crude and carnal views. The "joy" of our text has an object. It is not a mere fleshly experience. We "joy in God" (Rom 5:11), "joy in the God of our salvation" (Hab 3:18), and "joy in the strength" of the Almighty (Psa 21:1). We "rejoice in the Lord" (Phil 4:4), "rejoice in God's salvation" (1 Sam 2:1), and "rejoice in

Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:3). We "rejoice in hope" (Rom 5:2; 12:12), "rejoice in light," or spiritual illumination (John 5:35), and "rejoice in the truth" (1 Cor 13:6).

This joy, which is an essential aspect of the Kingdom of God, is related to thought, not surface or fleshly feelings. **The Holy Spirit shows us the truth, opening it like a flowering blossom to our hearts, and it causes joy.** The Holy Spirit does not bring us joy by throwing it upon us like a mantel. Rather, He effectively teaches us of "all things,"

in themselves" (John 17:13). **Anything related to the Kingdom of God finds its apex in the Person of Jesus Christ.** He, then, becomes the Means through which the benefit is received.

Who would dare to say Jesus had a surface or giddy joy that was wholly unrelated to thought, sobriety, and understanding?

How Does this Compare?

And, how do these wonderful benefits compare with "works of

Who would dare to say Jesus had a surface or giddy joy that was wholly unrelated to thought, sobriety, and understanding?

thereby enabling us to "abide" in Christ (1 John 2:27). He also "beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God," thereby producing great joy (Rom 8:16). He leads us forth in the mortification of the deeds of the body (Rom 13-14), thereby bringing great joy to us. He plays a vital role in our washing, justification, and sanctification (1 Cor 6:11), which are also causes of great joy. What marvelous joy is related to the experience of being changed "from glory unto glory, even as by the Spirit of our God" (2 Cor 3:18).

See, this is spiritually intelligent joy. It is related to thought, perception, insight, and understanding. It is a supernatural joy because it requires Divine activity. Wherever this joy is found, the Kingdom of God is found.

Christ's Own Joy

Jesus told His disciples the joy they would receive was actually His own. "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11). In His intercessory prayer for those who would believe on Him, He prayed, "And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have My joy fulfilled

righteousness which we have done" (Tit 3:5). How do they compare with the visible church, which some insist is the Kingdom of God? How do they compare with an earthly government in the flesh, over which Jesus will supposedly preside?

In keeping with our text, how does eating or not eating meat compare with "righteous, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit?" Eating or not eating meat is something men do. Righteous, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit are unfading realities that God gives. How does haggling over days compare with the possession of this holy triad?

If men seek to make an issue of something, let it be over whether or not righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit are possessed. If the Kingdom of God is a matter of these things, then we must not rest until we possess them! No person who is deficient in these things is where he can be in Christ Jesus. Salvation provides for all of these, and that in abundance. Furthermore, the recognized possession of them assists the believer in bringing other things into proper perspective. Such a person will not be hasty to judge or despise his brethren. He will value them too highly to do that.

ACCEPTABLE AND APPROVED

“¹⁸ For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.” Remember, the issue of this text has been Divine acceptance, and the acceptance of one another. God does not receive us because of what we have done, but because of our faith in Christ. Thus, we are to receive one another upon the same basis, even if, for a time, we have differing views of such things as meat, drink, and days.

SERVING CHRIST IN THESE THINGS

Here is a most arresting expression. Not only are righteousness,

the servants of righteousness . . . yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness . . . But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God” (6:6; 7:6,25; 6:18,19,22).

Newness of life ushers us into Divine employment. Salvation is not only deliverance from something, it is translation into something. As it is written, *“Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated (Conveyed ^{NKJV}, or transferred ^{NASB}) us into the kingdom of His dear Son”* (Col 1:13). Our presence in *“the Kingdom”* is

judgment, this perception is an area of great deficiency in the professing church. There is a reason for this. **God’s people need to be reminded of what they have received in Christ Jesus.** They need to be told they have received the righteousness of God – yea, have been made the righteousness of God in Christ. The joyful sound of being given peace and joy in Christ should frequently fall upon their ears. If believers do not hear much of these things, it will be unusually difficult to comprehend them, for *“faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ”^{NASB}* (10:17).

Serving Christ

We are said to *“serve Christ”* because we have been *“joined”* to Him, and have thus become members of His body. The church, or the redeemed of the Lord, is called *“His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all”^{NKJV}* (Eph 1:23). The *“redeemed of the Lord”* (Psa 107:2) are the ones through whom Jesus expresses Himself. They are the actual extension of His Person, being made *“partakers of Christ”* (Heb 3:14). His Spirit dwells within them, constituting them legitimate sons and workers (Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6). He is their reason for living, and they have entered into His labors. They not only *“suffer with Him”* (Rom 8:17), they also *“live with Him”* (Rom 6:8) and are *“joint heirs”* with Him (Rom 8:17). Their life is no longer their own, for they have been brought into a fuller and more profitable existence. With Paul they confess from the heart, *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”^{NKJV}* (Gal 2:20). **That is serving Christ!**

Productivity

Spiritual productivity is directly related to *“these things:”* righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. In is *“in”* them that Christ is served. If these are not found in the individual, Christ is not being served.

ACCEPTABLE TO GOD

It is imperative that the individual be accepted by God. Nothing is of any

When serving God becomes a burden, and allegiance is given to His will in a begrudging manner, the work becomes unacceptable.

peace, and joy, within us, we serve Christ *“IN these things.”* **Because they are all perceived to some degree by faith, they also become an environment in which spiritual life is expressed.**

There is a spiritual surrounding, or environment, in which Christ is to be served. That environ is *“righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.”* These are not simply possessions, they are resources. The strong implication of this verse is that those who judge or despise their brethren are not living within the influence of these gifts. They are, in fact, living in the flesh, which type of living is soundly condemned by the Lord (8:5-13).

Serving Christ

One of the objectives of our salvation is service, or being used by God. This has already been declared in Romans. *“ . . . henceforth we should not serve sin . . . that we should serve in newness of spirit . . . So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God . . . Being then made free from sin, ye became*

one of activity. Here, we become *“laborers together with God”* (1 Cor 3:9).

This service is not simply doing things. It is not mindless activity, or zealously fulfilling an institutional agenda. **It is more than simply doing what we are told to do.** Valid service takes place *“in these things: righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.”* **The more dominant they are, the more pleasing the service is to God.** When serving God becomes a burden, and allegiance is given to His will in a begrudging manner, the work becomes unacceptable. But where these glorious possessions are found and flourishing, the individual will confess with the Psalmist and the Lord Jesus Himself, *“I delight to do thy will, O my God”* (Psa 40:8; Heb 10:6-9).

By saying *“in these things,”* at least two things are meant. **First**, the individual actually possesses righteousness, peace, and joy. **Second**, there is a perception of them that fuels the service of the believer. In my

favorable consequence if God does not receive us. Here, Divine acceptance is viewed from a different perspective. Elsewhere we are reminded God has *“made us accepted in the Beloved”* (Eph 1:6). Too, God is declared to be unashamed to be called the God of those who are **strangers and pilgrims in the earth** (Heb 11:16). He also affirms He will receive those who **come out from among the devil’s crowd, and touch not the unclean thing** (2 Cor 6:14-18). He will honor those who serve His Son (John 12:26).

Another Dimension

Here we see another dimension of Divine acceptance. It is not disassociated from the activity of the saved ones. Serving Christ is not simply an organizational activity. It is not uncommon for people to equate church or institutional activity with serving Jesus. Thus, everyone from those who sweep floors to those who preach the Gospel in foreign fields are said to “serve the Lord.” And, indeed, this may very well be the case.

Our text affirms that the acceptance of the PERSON is based upon serving Christ IN righteousness, peace, and the joy of the Holy Spirit. It is the acceptance of the person that validates the work, and the acceptance of the person hinges upon his acceptance of the gifts of God!

The word *“accepted”* includes the idea of being well pleasing to God, a circumstance for which the people of God are to earnestly strive (Col 1:10; Phil 4:18; Thess 4:1; 2 Tim 2:4; Heb 13:16). Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit are to serving Christ, what salt was to the sacrifices of old (Lev 2:13). They are spiritual condiments, given to us by God

Himself, that make us acceptable to Him.

Sin has so contaminated the human race that Divine graces must be given to us before we can be received by God and bring satisfaction and joy to Him.

Sin has so contaminated the human race that Divine graces must be given to us before we can be received by God and bring satisfaction and joy to Him. Nature cannot yield such benefits

Nature cannot yield such benefits. Further, our attitude towards meats and days does not make us acceptable to God. The gifts must come from God. This is a difficult, but necessary, lesson to be learned by all believers. Christ cannot be served apart from righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Nor, indeed, can men be accepted by God apart from them. God is greatly to be praised for granting these graces to us!

APPROVED OF MEN

This is a general observation, and is not intended to leave us with the impression that the world will love us. Jesus affirmed the world hates the people of God. *“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you”* (John 15:19).

Our text does not say that men will love and prefer us, but that they will *“approve”* of us. There are at least four valid views of this challenging expression.

First, redeemed men will *“approve”*

of us, acknowledging these qualities have brought comfort and encouragement to them.

Second, even those who do not themselves possess righteous, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, approve of

others who do possess them. They know very well that such people bring advantages to every aspect of legitimate society.

Third, those who outwardly oppose the truth, choosing to wallow in iniquity and alienation, know in their conscience that these are comely qualities. Thus, they can be reduced to shame, having nothing evil to say of the people of God.

Fourth, kings, governors, and political officials, powers that have been ordained by God, approve of those who serve Christ in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. They know that such individuals pose no threat to society, but are rather a good and wholesome influence among men. Within the context of the thirteenth chapter, this has particular relevance.

It should be obvious that spiritual life is not simplistic. There is a certain complexity about it that demands Divine involvement. Without this involvement, we cannot serve Christ, be accepted by God, or approved by men.

THINGS TO PURSUE

“⁴⁹ Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.” There are implications in the truth of God that require action on our part. Nothing about salvation lends itself

to being passive and indifferent. Wherever these dreadful characteristics are found among professing believers, the Spirit has been quenched, the gifts of God rejected, and the Son of God spurned. Much of the religious counseling and professional

diagnosis of our day could be eliminated by simply acknowledging this truth. That acknowledgment would provoke an earnest effort to do what our text exhorts.

THEREFORE

The Law of Love provides a spiritual environment in which progress can be made toward glory--by Given O. Blakely

This word is based upon the declaration of verses seventeen and eighteen. Because the Kingdom of God consists of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, and because only the person who serves God *“in these things is accepted by God and approved of men,”* the following admonition is required. It is the only acceptable conclusion to what has been affirmed. Truth does have a compelling quality about it – a sort of moral force that pressures one to either yield to the Lord or become obstinate against Him. There will be no neutral ground. As Jesus said, *“He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad”* (Matt 12:30). And again, *“For he that is*

PURSUE CERTAIN THINGS

In Christ, there are things from which we must flee, or take swift flight. Among them are fornication (1 Cor 6:18), idolatry (1 Cor 10:14), the love of money (1 Tim 6:10-11), and youthful lusts (2 Tim 2:22). Not only are we to deny, or reject, such things, we are to aggressively run from them as Joseph did from Potiphar’s wife (Gen 39:12), and Lot did from Sodom (Gen 19:20).

There are other things that are to be pursued, or *“followed after.”*^{KJV} These are things that require us to *“make every effort to do.”*^{NIV} It is as though they were moving things. **They have been given by God, and they are, as it were, gradually**

Things Which Make for Peace

Just as surely as there are things that tend to agitate and cause disruption, there are things that contribute to peace. Other versions render this expression *“leads to peace,”*^{NIV} and *“tend to peace.”*^{DARBY} If there are those among us who have weak faith, and are unable to see with spiritual clarity, we are admonished to receive such without subjecting them to *“doubtful disputations.”* Their deficiencies can be resolved within a spiritually peaceful climate. They can best grow and *“go on unto perfection”* where the winds of controversy are not blowing.

If the weaker among us are tempted to stir up controversy with their juvenile questions, let them also pursue things that *“make for peace.”* Let them consider that those who do not see things their way are not necessarily the worse for it. More mature views will be cultured if the smoke of argument does not fill our assemblies. Let us follow hard after things that encourage and promote peace, for *“the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace”* (James 3:18). Many a soul has been beat down by the hammer of debate, and swept off their feet by the current of contention. Let us engage in a fervent quest for things that cause peace to dominate, ruling both the heart and the mind.

Things That Make for Edification

In this world, there are influences and approaches that tear down, as well as those that build up. A conscious choice must be made by all believers to pursue things that make for *“the building up of one another.”*^{NASB} There is no position that is worth tearing down a tender spirit, breaking a bruised reed, or quenching a smoking flax.

There are things that tend to edify. It simply is their nature to build up faith, encourage struggling hearts, and promote hearty spiritual growth. After all, edification is one of the fundamental activities in which we are to be engaged. We are to speak in order *“that the church may receive edifying”* (1 Cor 14:5). We are even admonished to *“seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.”* In fact, this is the very way in which we are to be *“zealous of spiritual gifts”* (1 Cor 14:12). In our assemblies, *“Let all things be done unto edifying”* (1 Cor 14:26). All

It is as though they were moving things. They have been given by God, and they are, as it were, gradually returning to Him. If we desire to have them, we must run quickly after them, ourselves intent upon obtaining the promised land. They are moving at such a pace that unless we run after them, they will elude us, or drift from us.

not against us is on our part” (Mark 9:40).

The remarkable level of indifference that exists in the nominal church is staggering. It is not from God, and nothing God has given in Christ Jesus contributes to such a state. The presence of this condition confirms that the truth of the Gospel has not registered upon the heart and conscience of multitudes that profess faith. That circumstance, however, is not an innocent one. Beneath it lies a fundamental attachment to this present evil world. That is what has yielded spiritual ignorance and indifference. Even the spiritual novice is deeply devoted to God, even though the breadth of understanding is very small. Where such devotion is lacking, there is much digging and dunging that is to be done – an abundance of convicting and encouraging ministry. Unless this is done, and a favorable response is produced, there is no hope of the person being saved (Luke 13:7-9). While that may appear to be inordinately strong, it is well to hear it with faith, and proceed accordingly.

returning to Him. If we desire to have them, we must run quickly after them, ourselves intent upon obtaining the promised land. They are moving at such a pace that unless we run after them, they will elude us, or drift from us.

From another perspective, we are in a world that is drifting away from glory. The current of time and circumstance pull away from the Lord, not toward Him. If we do not eagerly pursue the things of the Kingdom, a vast chasm will form between us and them. It is possible for that chasm to become so broad, it simply cannot be crossed. Thus we are warned, *“Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away”* (Heb 2:1).

The failure of professed *Christians* to engage in the pursuit of proper things accounts for the weakened condition of the church – particularly that of the Western world. It is a most serious circumstance that requires diligence and boldness among all who proclaim the Word of the Lord.

of Christ's gifts to the church have been given *"For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ"* (Eph 4:11-12). No corrupt, or defiled, speech is to erupt from our mouths. Rather, we are to communicate with *"that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers"* (Eph 4:29). Believers are not to allow themselves to be pulled into *"fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith"* (1 Tim 1:4). The lack of profitability is like a pool of poison.

We do not come together to merely be distracted from the challenges of life. We are not seeking to be entertained, or to find solace in light-hearted laughter and humor. Edification is what we need. We come to receive things that contribute to spiritual growth, maturity of understanding, and stability of character. Faith requires these things.

It Is Personal

Notice the personal nature of this text. While edification is surely takes place when the church comes together, our text says, *"things wherewith **one may edify***

another." Other versions read *"building up of one another,"*^{NASB} *"mutual edification,"*^{NIV} and *"mutual upbuilding,"*^{NRSV}

Every believer has the capacity to contribute to the spiritual growth of another believer. Oit is inherent in the new man. They also have the fleshly capacity to make it more difficult for their brethren to *"grow up into Christ in all things"* (Eph 4:15). Each one is to engage in the eager pursuit of things that leave the people of God stronger, more encouraged, and more determined to dwell forever in the courts of the Lord.

DESTROYING THE WORKS OF GOD

^{20a} ***Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food.*** Other versions read, *"For meat destroy not the work of God,"*^{KJV} *"Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food,"*^{NASB} *"Overthrow not for meat's sake the work of God,"*^{ASV} *"Do not let the work of God come to nothing on account of food,"*^{BBE} *"for the sake of victuals cast not down the work of God,"*^{YLT} *"Don't tear apart the work of God over what you eat,"*^{NLT} and *"Do not wreck God's work for the sake of food."*^{NJB} The seriousness of the text is so apparent it takes a calloused spirit and a hard heart to fail to see it!

THE WORK OF GOD

In our text, *"the work of God"* is the believer himself. We are, after all, *"His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works"* (Eph 2:10). In this case, *"the work of God"* is in a tender and fragile state. It is like a bruised reed or a smoking flax that can easily be broken or quenched. This is a young life that requires tender and loving care, not harsh demands and a diet of controversy and argumentation.

Here is a text that contrasts sharply with certain strains of theology. Some would strongly object to the very notion that the work of God could be destroyed. To them, such a thought is a reproach to God. However, it is God who said this, so He cannot be reproached for saying it. It is man's view that is flawed,

not the Word of the King!

How do you suppose it will go on the day of judgment for those who destroyed the work of God?

What of those who tore down what God worked, or overthrew Divine workings? What will be the lot of those who caused the work of God to come to nothing, tearing apart what He started, and wrecking what God has done?

ADVERSE AFFECTATION

and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom 16:18). There is the possibility of God's people being *"deceived with vain words"* (Eph 5:6).

Jesus spoke of those who *"take away the key of knowledge,"* who did not enter the Kingdom themselves, and *"hindered"* those who wanted to enter (Luke 11:52). He also declared a dreadful judgment upon those who caused even the least of those believing in Him to stumble (Matt 18:6).

How do you suppose it will go on the day of judgment for those who destroyed the work of God? What of those who tore down what God worked, or overthrew Divine workings? What will be the lot of those who caused the work of God to come to nothing, tearing apart what He started, and wrecking what God has done?

Do you imagine that such a thing is not possible? Is your theology so stilted that it moves you to oppose the word of the Lord – words that have come from His own mouth? There are teachers who *"overthrow the faith of some"* (2 Tim 2:16). There are words that are successful in *"subverting the hearers"* (2 Tim 2:14). There are also those who *"by good words*

The church at Galatia began in the faith and in the Spirit, yet were *"bewitched"* by professed believers into *"not obeying the truth"* (Gal 3:1). There was a false prophetess in Thyatira that seduced Christ's servants *"to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols"* (Rev 2:20).

LIABILITY IN JUVENILITY

There is a certain liability in spiritual juvenility. The Divine workings that have begun in believers can be abruptly terminated by the inappropriate influence of professing Christians. If this were not the case, there would be no warnings against deception, and no exhortations to go on to perfection. Those who are infant-like in the faith are like “children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph 4:14). Care must be taken not to suffocate them with opinion, or stifle their life with inconsideration.

The Corinthians

There is a similar case in the book of First Corinthians that will serve to clarify this matter. Within the church at Corinth there were legitimate believers who did not know there was only one God. Having come from an idolatrous background, they were still convinced a very real god was related to the idols they formerly worshiped. If they ate meat that was offered to this idol, they thought of it as meat offered to that idol, and thus their conscience became defiled with the notions of a competing god. Here is what the Spirit says. “For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’), yet for us there is but

to the weak. For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, won’t he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols. **So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ**”^{NIV} (1 Cor 8:9-12). It is scarcely possible for something to be more serious. Destroying a brother, sinning against a brother, wounding the weak conscience of a brother, and sinning against Christ! **Do not think for a moment that your actions are inconsequential!**

THE SENSE OF DESTRUCTION

The destruction of reference does not mean the offender has actually taken the life from the weaker brother. Rather, he has set in motion a process that will eventually thrust the person from God. When the conscience is defiled, the person cannot approach to God, which approach is imperative to the sustaining of spiritual life. You cannot “obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need” if you do not come to the Lord (Heb 4:16).

To eat with a consciousness of an idol, or thinking about the idol, is giving homage to it. It is a form of worship that results from thinking the idol is a legitimate God.

DESTROYING FOR MEAT

A legitimate liberty of one can become the occasion of destruction of another. Here is a person who knows nothing is unclean of itself. He has been brought to see that all food can be thankfully and lawfully eaten. He can do it “unto the Lord,” knowing that he, and his eating, are accepted by God.

However, there is this weaker brother, who is convinced God still does not allow all meats to be eaten. His view is technically wrong, yet he is zealously seeking to serve God by refraining from eating meats. Out of a good, yet immature, conscience, he eats only “herbs,” or vegetables. How should the one that eats meat conduct himself before this person? Should he insist upon his own way, claiming he is free to do what he knows is of itself proper and right?

one God, the Father, from Whom all things came and for Whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. **But not everyone knows this.** Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled”^{NIV} (1 Cor 8:5-8).

To eat with a consciousness of an idol, or thinking about the idol, is giving homage to it. It is a form of worship that results from thinking the idol is a legitimate God. Only growth in Christ will destroy this erroneous view.

How, then, is the stronger brother to conduct himself before such an one? “Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block

A “defiled conscience” is the result of going against what faith has led you to embrace. When that faith is “weak,” or in its incipient phase, it will not allow the believer to engage in uncertain things, or issues that are not clear to the understanding. If men do not honor that conscience, the working of God will be destroyed, for a defiled conscience will drive them out from the sustaining presence of the Lord.

A weaker brother, then, is “destroyed” when he is led by a stronger brother to do things his weaker faith does not allow. Thus, he ceases to live by his own faith (Hab 2:4), feeble though it may be. However, life cannot be sustained independently of faith, for “the just shall live BY faith.” Although rarely declared, among the churches, this is an extremely important facet of truth.

EVERYTHING IS PURE . . . BUT

“^{20b} **All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.**” Other versions

The Law of Love provides a spiritual environment in which progress can be made toward glory--by Given O. Blakely

read, *“All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense,”*^{NASB} *“All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble,”*^{NIV} *“Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat,”*^{NRSV} and *“Remember, there is nothing wrong with these things in themselves. But it is wrong to eat anything if it makes another person stumble.”*^{NLT}

Here is a word addressed to the stronger brother – the one who knows no food is inherently unclean. By faith – mature faith – he knows he is at liberty to eat *“all things.”* Yet, what is of itself right becomes wrong if it yields effects that contradict God’s purpose. Remember, *“the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith”*^{NKJV} (1 Tim 1:5). Our love for God, the truth of God, and the people of God, is not a mere emotion. It flows out from a three-fold well. (1) A pure heart, (2) a good conscience, and (3) sincere, or unfeigned, faith. Precious are the benefits of this well!

While the conduct of the stronger brother does not erode his own faith, corrupt his own conscience, or defile his own heart, it does have an adverse impact upon the weaker brother. All three areas become corrupted when the weaker brother sees the stronger one eating, for example, meat offered to idols. The weaker is thus emboldened to do what his heart does not allow. His conscience, although it cries out to abstain, is ignored. His faith, already weak, is thrown down to the ground, as he is moved to act in compliance with another brother’s views, and not his own.

These results make the otherwise allowed eating of meat *“evil.”* It is *“wrong”* because of what it produced, not because of the nature of eating meat, or because of the meat itself. If what I do causes wrong results in others, it is *“evil”* for me to do it. This is not something for discussion, but something to be embraced on an intensely personal level.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

It is man’s tendency do make laws for his brethren, seeking to impose rules

that God has not imposed upon them. So it is with this very text. It is not intended to make us hyper sensitive about what others think. This is not speaking of people who hold private opinions, but do not do so unto the Lord. There are people who may have a personal dislike for the way you do things. While you should not go out of your way to offend them, you are not obliged to change your conduct to suite their fleshly fancies. This is a word concerning conscientious worshipers of God, whose senses have not yet been exercised to discern good and evil (Heb 5:14). There is a great difference between altering your conduct because of what a hypocritical Pharisee thinks, and doing so because of the thoughts of a tender Mary Magdelene.

It is possible to greatly displease God by seeking to please men. As it is written, *“For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ”*^{NKJV} (Gal 1:10). Our text is not urging us to be *“men pleasers,”* something strictly forbidden by God (Eph 6:6; Col 3:22). Rather, it is urging us to be considerate of sensitive, yet undiscerning brethren.

SOMETHING GOOD THAT IS OFTEN NEGLECTED

“²¹ It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.” Having identified conduct that is *“evil,”* the Spirit now points us to what is *“good.”* In both cases, the determination depends not upon the substance ingested, or the propriety of the deed itself. It is the effect of the activity, or lack of the activity, that makes it *“good.”* It is good that believers consider the effects of what do. What kind of fruit grows on the tree of their words and deeds?

IT IS GOOD

“It is good neither to eat meat (“flesh” KJV) nor drink wine . . .” Just as there are no foods that are inherently evil, and thus to be avoided, so there are none that are constitutionally good, and thus to be ingested. Also, indulging in eating and drinking is not of itself good or evil.

However, what comes from it can surely establish whether it is good or evil.

bind upon him! God does not obligate us to do everything that is of itself right.

Just as there are no foods that are inherently evil, and thus to be avoided, so there are none that are constitutionally good, and thus to be ingested. Also, indulging in eating and drinking is not of itself good or evil.

Again, this is word addressed to the stronger brother. The Spirit does **not** say to the weaker brother, *“It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine ,”* for he is not yet able to receive that word. What his conscience forbids, God does not

A Word About Meat

The word rendered *“meat”* is a more precise word than used in verses 15,17, and 20. There, the word can translated *“food,”* for it stands for the

foods in general, including all manner of meats as distinguished by the Law. Certain meats, termed “*unclean*,” were forbidden to all Israelites. Certain fruits, such as the grape, and raisins derived from it, were forbidden to the Nazarites, whose sole purpose was to serve the Lord (Num 6:3). They could eat “*nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk*” (Num 6:4). Thus, prior to this verse, the word “*meat*,” or “*food*,” referred primarily to the distinctions of food outlined in the Law of Moses, and secondarily to meats related to idols.

Here, the word focuses on flesh in particular, which appears to take idolatry into primary consideration, as in the eighth chapter of First Corinthians.

A Word About Wine

I am quite sure you have heard younger disciples boldly proclaim there is nothing wrong with occasionally imbibing strong drink. And, indeed, the Word of God does not declare such a thing is sinful – **unless** you are speaking to a Nazarite (Num 6:2-3), or a priest that is going into

been established that such can be indulged without sin, yet another matter is to be considered. Even though my freedom in Christ allows such things, here is a case where it is “*good*” **not** to indulge in them. **There is, then, a higher principle than law. All things cannot be determined as good and evil simply by viewing them as lawful or unlawful.** As we will see, we do not live by a lifeless code. There are times when judgment is required. In this case, that judgment relates to the effect of our indulgence upon a weaker brother.

ANYTHING BY WHICH . . .

“ . . . *nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.*” Other versions read, “*or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall,*”^{NIV} “*any other activity which might cause a brother to fall away, or to be scandalised, or to weaken,*”^{NJB} and “*or to do anything which might be a cause of trouble to your brother.*”^{BBE}

Now we make a quantum leap from the consideration of food and drink

Earlier (Acts 18:18), Paul had shaved his head after taking a vow. But this time it was different. He took four Jewish men who were reaching the culmination of their vow. They were required to spend seven days in the Temple. Paul paid the Temple fee for them, and waited until a sacrifice had been offered for each one of them (Acts 21:24-26). This is something that would have altogether unacceptable to many.

In this case, the activity would have been ignoring the Jewish ritual, and going on with life in the freedom that is in Christ Jesus. Paul had been formally released from the necessity of Jewish vows, shaving his head, paying Temple fees, and subscribing to a sacrifice for the ones making a vow. He was under no obligation to do such things. Yet, he did them in the interest of showing young Jewish converts that he was not a mere reactionary against Jewish tradition. He refused to do anything that would cause them to stumble, be offended, or made weak.

Jesus Pays the Temple Tax

A similar occasion arose when those who received the temple tax said to Peter, “*Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?*”^{NKJV} This tribute money was established under the Law as a means of supporting the upkeep of the tabernacle, and later, the temple (Ex 30:13; 38:26). Without any hesitation, Peter answered that Jesus did, in fact, pay such taxes. Later, when he came into the house, Jesus spoke first to him saying, “*What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers.*” When Peter answered, “*From strangers.*” Jesus said to him, “*Then the sons are free. Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you*”^{NKJV} (Matt 17:24-27).

Jesus had pointed out to Peter that, being the Son of God, and The disciples being His followers, they were exempt from the Temple tax, even as the Levites. Yet, because not paying the tax would “*offend*” the collectors, He miraculously supplied the tax for Himself and Peter. Thus, He lived out the principle that is taught in our text.

Now we make a quantum leap from the consideration of food and drink to “anything,” or “any other activity,” that could possibly cause our brother to stumble, be offended in his conscience, or become weaker still in his faith.

the tabernacle (Lev 10:9). Samson’s parents were warned not to allow him to drink any strong drink (Judges 13:4-7). The angel of the Lord even forbade the soon-to-be-mother of Samson to drink any strong drink (Judges 13:14). Solomon said it was out of order for kings and princes to drink strong drink (Prov 31:4). The parents of John the Baptist were forbidden to allow him to drink any strong drink (Luke 1:15).

After every view of “*meat*” and “*wine*” has been heard, and even if it has

to “**anything**,” or “*any other activity*,” that could possibly cause our brother to stumble, be offended in his conscience, or become weaker still in his faith. It is “*good*” to refrain from any activity that would lead a weaker brother to a wrong conclusion, therefore defiling his conscience, and moving him to live other than by faith.

The Case of Paul

Here is the principle that constrained Paul to shave his head and observe the Jewish custom of taking a temple vow, in order that Jewish believers not be offended.

A SELFLESS SPIRIT

In Christ, we receive new hearts and a new spirit that constrains us to live

above purely self interest. It seems to me that enough cannot be said on this subject in a day when self and rights have been

exalted above the Author of life. A society bent upon pleasure knows little of the things affirmed in this text.

HAVE IT TO YOURSELF!

“²² Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.” Now the Spirit enunciates a principle of life that will bring great advantage to the whole body of Christ. He will show there is room for private persuasions. Yet, those persuasions can be kept to ourselves without making any effort to bind them upon those who cannot perceive their validity. I will tell you that very few have seen this truth. It is like a precious golden nugget that is hidden deep in the earth. It requires considerable faith and effort to take hold of it.

DO YOU HAVE FAITH?

“Do you have faith?” Other versions read, *“So whatever you believe about these things,”*^{NIV} and *“You may have the faith to believe that there is nothing wrong with what you are doing.”*^{NLT}

This does not refer to the faith that is common among all of God’s children – the *“one faith”* (Eph 4:5), or *“common faith”* (Tit 1:4). That faith is certainly not to be kept within ones own self, for it is *“the word of faith”* that we preach, or declare (Rom 10:8). Paul was noted for *“preaching the faith”* that he once sought to destroy (Gal 1:23). Jude urged that we *“earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints”* (Jude 3). Such faith centers in Jesus Christ and what He has done in our behalf and for us. It is the faith that comes from hearing the word of Christ (Rom 10:17). This is not the faith that is to be kept to ourselves.

The *“faith”* that is mentioned here refers to personal persuasions that relate to our liberty in Christ Jesus. It is the same thing mentioned in verse 5: *“One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be **fully persuaded** in his own mind.”* Faith is a persuasion, and can apply to personal insights and convictions that are not common among believers. The heart can be convinced of

the acceptability of our actions.

In Christ, you have firm persuasions that are of great assistance to you – valid persuasions that are given and honored by the Living God. Do you have such convictions? Here is the Word of the Lord for you.

HAVE IT TO YOURSELF

When given the opportunity to represent the King before the sons of men – and particularly those who are in Christ Jesus – why should we parade before them our own private conclusions about life in Christ Jesus.

“Have it to yourself before God!” Other versions read, *“have as your own conviction before God,”*^{NASB} and *“keep between yourself and God.”*^{NIV} Is it not enough to hold such matters in confidence before the Lord, with whom you have to do? Are we so presumptuous as to think our persuasions are intended to be for everyone or that they are the standard of the Kingdom of God?

When it comes to putting persuasions before men, why not confine ourselves to what was preached and written by the Apostles and Prophets, whom God appointed as the foundations of the church (Eph 2:20). When given the opportunity to represent the King before the sons of men – and particularly those who are in Christ Jesus – why should we parade before them our own private conclusions about life in Christ Jesus. Where in all of Scripture is there a precedent for such a procedure?

If there are things that you can do with all liberty before the Lord, yet which could lead others to a wrong conclusion, or lead them to live in contradiction of their

own conscience, *“have it to yourself.”* Hold it as private property. Why should your private persuasions cause disturbance in the church, or be the cause of confusion to another believer?

This is a strong word, but it is a necessary one. Many offenses have been caused by those who are overly zealous to share such convictions. People have thus

received the wrong impression about believers, and about the Lord Himself. Many a person has actually thought less of Jesus and His great salvation because of the unwise presentation of positions and persuasions instead of Jesus Christ and the grace of God.

It is not our work to promote our personal view or conviction! That is not what God has called us to do! Our testimony is not to be what we are convinced is the right way to live, but to affirm what God has done in us through Christ Jesus. There are sufficient testimonies of godly men and women in Scripture to direct our efforts in this area. Time must be spent in calculating the effect our convictions have upon other people – whether they are helpful or harmful. If they are harmful because of the weakness of our brethren, we do not have to declare them. We simply keep them to ourselves before God. **Thus we can enjoy our liberty in Christ, and protect the weaker brethren at the same time.**

Of this verse, Chrysostom (347-

407 AD) wrote, "Hast thou an enlightened faith, showing thee the unimportance of these observances? Do not parade it needlessly before men." ^{PULPIT COMMENTARY}

THE HAPPY MAN

"Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves." Other versions read, "Blessed are those who have no reason to condemn themselves because of what they approve," ^{NRSV} "Blessed are those who do not condemn themselves by doing something they know is all right," ^{NLT} and "Blessed is the person whose principles do not condemn his practice." ^{NJB}

This has reference to a good and uncondemning conscience. The "happy" person is one who is blessed, fortunate,

and living with great benefit. The benefit, or blessedness, is that his conscience approves wholeheartedly of what he does. **He can offer his life, and the manner in which it is lived, to the Lord, without the slightest twinge of his conscience.**

While this is a much-to-be-coveted experience, it is not that common. Untold numbers of people live in violation of their own principles. However, when such a life is lived because of the unthoughtful example of professing Christians, a most serious circumstance exists.

There is a peace and joy that attends a clear and approving conscience. We do take our brethren into

consideration, but we basically live before the Lord, grateful for the privilege of serving Him without condemning ourselves. This principle applies equally to the person who feels he cannot eat meat, and to the one who knows he can. Both can be happy and blessed before the Lord. The weaker faith of the less advanced brother need not rob him of joy. He can still live in all good conscience before the Lord. The enlightened persuasions of the stronger brother do not need to make him unmindful of others. He also can live with joy for what he has liberty to do. Both brethren can live with a conscience that does not condemn them, which conscience is a jewel of great price! A clear conscience brings untold benefits to us, not the least of which is Divine approval.

DOUBTING AND CONDEMNATION

"²³ But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin." Here is a verse that towers above human reasoning. It stands in stark contradiction of an institutionalized religion that is driven by demand instead of "faith working through love" ^{NKJV} (Gal 5:6).

HE THAT DOUBTS

"But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith." Other versions read, "And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith," ^{KJV} "But those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because they do not act from faith," ^{NRSV} "But anyone who eats with qualms of

activity, particularly toward the Lord, **not** convinced that it is proper. It may involve going along with the crowd, so to speak. It may be something private, unknown by anyone but oneself. But the person has questions about whether or not it is really right and acceptable before God. It is something the person cannot offer to God, for there is a question about the matter. If such a person proceeds to do what he doubts is right, he "is condemned."

Here is a verse that towers above human reasoning. It stands in stark contradiction of an institutionalized religion that is driven by demand instead of "faith working through love"

Expressions of this sort do not conform to the "fashion of this world" (1 Cor 7:31). This is "the mind of the Spirit" (Rom 8:27), brought to bear upon the affairs of men. Here the Lord reveals to us the manner in which life in Christ is to be lived. Such living is not mere conformity to a code of ethics, a set of moral laws, or a prescribed discipline of life. All of these are popular with men, but none of them reach deep enough to sustain a life that is acceptable to God.

conscience is condemned, because this eating does not spring from faith." ^{NJB}

This verse is particularly strong, and rightly so, for it is dealing with the citadel of spiritual experience.

He Who Doubts

This does not refer to doubting God, His promises, or the Word of God. This is doubt concerning the eating of meat, observance of days, and such like. It refers to a person who engages in an

On a practical basis, this would be the person who believed the distinctions of meats outlined in the Levitical law were also binding upon those in Christ. It would also be the person who believed eating meat that had been offered to idols constituted honoring that false god. If such a person, because of pressure of others, or any other reason, proceeds to eat anyway, he "is condemned."

Condemned If He Eats

The word is strong - "condemned" The KJV says "damned." Does this mean the person is condemned to hell by God? Indeed not, for we have already been told that God has "received Him" (14:3). **This is the condemnation of ones own conscience.**

The Gentiles

This kind of condemnation was mentioned in the second chapter. Referring to the Gentiles, who were guilty of ignoring their conscience, it is said, “*their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while **accusing** or else excusing one another*” (2:15).

David

This is the kind of condemnation David experienced when he numbered Israel. It is written, “*And David’s **heart smote him** after that he had numbered the people*” (Sam 24:10).

The Woman Taken in Adultery

It also is seen in the men who brought a woman taken in adultery before Jesus, demanding that she be stoned. When the Lord challenged those without sin to cast the first stone, “*they which heard it, **being convicted by their own conscience**, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last*” (John 8:9).

In these cases, the conscience rose up and judged what was already done. In our text, it sounded an alarm **before** the act was done. However, the individual paid no heed to his conscience. Instead, he sought to emulate his brother, and thus was condemned by his conscience, not merely warned.

First John

John referred to this kind of condemnation, confirming that it erodes confidence and keeps our prayers from being answered. “*For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God*” (1 John 3:20-21). The idea is that if our heart condemns us, with only partial knowledge, we are to consider that God knows all things. That can be a blessing or a curse, a benefit or a judgment. The text elaborates no further on that matter, and we should take care not to carry the text further that the Spirit did.

Note, however, that confidence before God can only come if our heart does NOT condemn us. Also, the next verse parallels our text. “*And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that*

are pleasing in His sight” (verse 22).

The Relevance of the Matter

This is no light matter, for our lives can be lived unto the Lord only with the approval of our conscience. If we live contrary to our own convictions, our hearts grow hard and our souls become calloused. In such a state, like Adam, we are prone to flee from God instead of running to Him. Should this circumstance continue, and with the passing of time, all

the backdrop of a former declaration, “*the just shall live by faith*” (1:17). **If God has decreed that spiritual life is expressed and maintained by faith, then activities that are done apart from faith cannot be right.** They are sin, for they have violated the very principle of spiritual life. To go against the light produced by faith, however faint it may be, is sin. There are those who “*rebel against the light*” (Job 24:13), choosing to live in contradiction of the

Every work that does not have the consent of our conscience, and does not proceed from faith, is sin. That is, God has made no provision for us to live without regard to Himself and His will.

life will eventually fade away.

If the objective of the commandment involves a “*good conscience*” (1 Tim 1:5), and if faith is to be held, and live lived out, in the container of a “*pure conscience*” (1 Tim 3:9; 2 Tim 1:3), and the conscience must be “*pure*” in order to serve God (Heb 9:14), **then the conscience is to be honored, and its demands heard!** If your conscience condemns you, you have no satisfactory evidence that God does not do so also. Whether or not that is an accurate appraisal of the situation is not the point. The very thought of Divine disapproval puts a person in a backward stance. Only the energy of faith can push the soul forward, and faith works in concert with the conscience.

WHATEVER IS NOT OF FAITH

“*... for whatever is not from faith is sin.*” Other versions read, “*and everything that does not come from faith is sin,*”^{NIV} “*If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning,*”^{NLT} and “*and every action which does not spring from faith is sin.*”^{NJB}

Here is a definition of sin that is not generally known. It is given against

persuasions of their own faith.

To put this another way, whatever is done without being fully persuaded it is right before the Lord, is sin! That is the unequivocal meaning of this passage! No believer should do anything he doubts is proper! However, care must be taken not to assume that if a person thinks something is right, it **is** right. Persecuting the church, for example, was a sin of the greatest magnitude, even though Saul of Tarsus thought it was right (Acts 22:3-5).

Ponder the weight of this statement! **Every work that does not have the consent of our conscience, and does not proceed from faith, is sin.** That is, God has made no provision for us to live without regard to Himself and His will. Of whatever value appearance may seem, God looks upon the heart (1 Sam 16:7). Part of what He sees is the response we have to our conscience, and how our faith permeates what we say and do. If men believe “*with the heart*” (Rom 10:10), then we all do well to listen to our heart, and be sensitive to our conscience.

If we do not listen to our own conscience, what evidence is there that we

will listen to God Himself, who gave us our conscience? If God cannot be pleased "without faith" (Heb 11:6), how can

anything unrelated to faith be pleasing to Him? Remember this saying: "everything

that does not come from faith is sin." ^{NIV}
It will rescue you from many evils.

CONCLUSION

This section of Scripture is a powerful example of the nature of brotherly love. It takes into consideration the sensitivity of the conscience and the tenderness of faith. It refuses to cause disruption in the assembly of the righteous, or within the citadels of the heart of an immature believer. Jesus has invested too much in His people for us to be unmindful of them!

Also, we must encourage one

another to live within the boundaries of our own convictions. **No believer should attempt to force his view upon those who find it difficult to understand it – even if that view is absolutely correct.** This by no means suggests that we must live in a state of frustration, placing restraints upon our liberty, and living as though tied up with seven green Philistine withs (Judges 16:7). We can have our faith unto ourselves, living happily before the Lord

in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free (Gal 5:1).

We are not only free to do things which faith has convinced us are proper, we are also free to forgo that liberty in the interest of our weaker brethren. Whether weak or strong, Christ has freed us to live for God, heartily, and with the full consent of our conscience. We can live without our conscience or God condemning us, and be the happier because of it.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 10/5/2001. Continuing in our overview of the book of Romans, we will be covering verses 1-6 of the fifteenth chapter. The theme will be, **"BEARING ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS."** There is a mutuality in faith that neutralizes our the burdens of believers, and multiplies their strengths. The holy couplet of faith and love enables us to actually relieve the burdens of one another. 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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