

EXPLANATION OF 45TH BIBLEBOOK

ROMANS 14 (April A.D. 67)

INTRODUCTION

Romans 14:1 to 15:6 teaches the Christian's duty with respect to Christians whose faith is weak or strong. In this context, it is not their faith in Jesus Christ unto salvation that is meant, but their *faith concerning what they may or may not believe or do as Christians!* Their subjective faith determines their personal opinions, convictions or beliefs, especially concerning disputable matters.

But note, a Christian who has a 'strong faith' in the matter of disputable things may at the same time have a 'weak faith' in other spiritual matters, like knowledge of Christian truths, prayer, faithfulness or fervour in the Christian ministry. Likewise, a Christian who has a weak faith in the matter of disputable things may at the same time have a strong faith in the other spiritual matters.

OUTLINE

Theme. The behaviour of the believer towards the weak and strong Christians.

Romans 14:1 to 15:13 deals with the attitudes and behaviour of Christians with a weak and with a strong faith towards one another in the fellowship of the Church.

- (I) 14:1-23. The weak may not judge the strong and the strong may not offend the weak.
- The first exhortation to the strong and the weak: the strong must not offend the weak and the weak must not judge the strong (14:1-4).
 - Explanation to the strong and the weak: everyone should be fully convinced and live to the Lord (14:5-9)
 - The second exhortation to the weak and the strong: In the final judgement everyone will give an account of himself to God (14:10-14).
 - The third exhortation to the strong and the weak: the strong must not cause the weak to stumble and thus cause non-Christians to speak evil of Christians (14:15-20).
 - The fourth exhortation to the strong and the weak: the strong must keep his personal conviction to himself and the weak must not do anything against his personal conviction (14:21-23).

EXPLANATION

(I) 14:1-23. The weak may not judge the strong and the strong may not offend the weak.

- The first exhortation to the strong and the weak: the strong must not offend the weak and the weak must not judge the strong (14:1-4).

14:1. Him who is weak¹ (vppa) in faith (i.e. his faith falters at a given moment and in a specific case) you (i.e. the strong) must *always* accept (vmppm), but not for the purpose of² quarrelling³ about opinions (reasonings)⁴ (i.e. not with the idea of passing judgement on his opinions).

14:2. One person⁵ believes (vipa) he may eat (vnaa) everything, but another person⁶, being weak (vppa), eats (vipa) (only) vegetables.

14:3. The man who eats (vppa) must not *continue* to look down on (to consider as nothing, to treat with contempt)⁷ (vmpa) him who does not eat (vppa), and the man who does not eat (vppa) must not *continue* to judge⁸ (vmpa) him who does eat (vppa), for God has *once for all* accepted⁹ (viam) him.

14:4. Who are (vipa) you, the one daring to judge (vppa) the household servant¹⁰ belonging to another? To his own master he stands¹¹ (vipa) or falls¹² (vipa). And he will *certainly* stand¹³ (vifd), for the Lord is *always* able (vipa) to make him stand (to cause him to stand)¹⁴ (vnaa).

The difference between false teachings and disputable matters. In Paul's letters, he writes to Christians in complete different situations. His letters to the Galatians and to the Colossians deal with the problem of heresy (false teaching). But false teachings are *not* disputable matters. False teachings *must* be refuted¹⁵!

His letters to the Corinthians and Romans do not deal with heresy, but with the problem of quarrelling about *personal opinions about disputable matters*. *Disputable matters are matters about which there is no or not enough teaching in*

¹ G: astheneó

² G: eis

³ G: diakrisis

⁴ G: dialogismos

⁵ G: hos men

⁶ G: ho de

⁷ G: exoutheneó

⁸ G: krinó

⁹ G: proslambanó

¹⁰ G: oiketés

¹¹ G: stékó from hestéka, the perfect of histémi

¹² G: piptó

¹³ G: histémi

¹⁴ G: elengchó. Titus 1:9

¹⁵ Titus 1:9

the Bible. In spite of the fact that the Bible had nothing to say about such disputable matters, there are Christians that hold strong opinions, convictions or beliefs about these matters and consequently have arguments or disputes about these matters with other Christians.

The Galatian heresy. In the province of Galatia (in Asia Minor) the false teachers taught that keeping the Jewish ceremonial law, like circumcision¹⁶ and the observance of certain days and months and seasons and years¹⁷ was absolutely necessary for salvation! These false teachers aimed at turning people who had become Christians into Jews by propagating a ceremonialism that aimed at destroying the gospel. The Gentiles living in Galatia were pagans who worshipped idols. After many of them had become Christians, Jewish propagandists tried to persuade them to keep the Jewish ceremonial law.

Previously these Christians were *slaves to idols* and now the false teachers tried to make them *slaves to the Jewish law!* This would mean “a turning back to those weak and miserable principles”¹⁸ and believing in ‘a different gospel’¹⁹ than what they had accepted when they came to faith. Thus some people in the congregations in Galatia fell into the Jewish extreme of thinking that they would be saved by doing the works of the law. The apostle Paul spoke and wrote against this perversion of the gospel and taught the doctrine of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ apart from keeping the law²⁰. Whoever tried to be saved by keeping the law would not be saved, because nobody can keep the law perfectly. And whoever did not keep the law perfectly was accursed²¹. But whoever put his trust in Jesus Christ is certainly saved, because Christ carried the curse in his place²². However, believers who nevertheless turn from the gospel back to religious ceremonialism have alienated themselves from Jesus Christ and have fallen from God’s grace²³!

The Colossian heresy. In the city of Colosse the false teachers taught that salvation consisted in the liberation of the human spirit from the human body. This basically Gnostic heresy taught a clear-cut dualism between the spiritual and the material realms and combined elements of Greek philosophy (influenced by Eastern Hindu and Persian religions) with elements of Jewish ceremonialism: they worshipped angels and they practised a stringent asceticism. The elements of Jewish ceremonialism included glorying in circumcision, in food-regulations, in ablutions, in prayers, in fasting and the observance of special festivals belonging to the Old Testament period²⁴. The elements of asceticism included a harsh treatment of the body by observing many rules like “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”²⁵ and was commonly regarded as an important element in the process of liberating the imprisoned (good) spirit from the (evil) body. They also worshipped angelic beings, who were conceived of as the mediators of revelation from God to man and as the mediators through whom all prayer and worship from man to God could reach its goal. Asceticism (including long periods of fasting) was also part of the ritual by which the favour of these angelic powers was to be gained.

The Colossian heresy opposed the belief that Jesus was born from a virgin (a physical body), that his physical body was resurrected from the dead and that he would return at his second coming in his glorified physical human body. It particularly denied Christ’s pre-eminence as the One in whom dwelt the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form²⁶ and as the only Mediator between God and man²⁷. They taught that there were many mediators between God and man.

Paul answered this heresy by teaching that the Old Testament Law was only a shadow of the realities found in Christ²⁸. He taught that a harsh treatment of the body (fasting) has no value in restraining sensual indulgence²⁹. Jesus Christ is supreme in creation, because he created all angels and all other powers³⁰. All the fullness of God dwells in Jesus Christ in bodily form³¹.

¹⁶ Galatians 6:12; Acts 15:1

¹⁷ Galatians 4:10

¹⁸ Galatians 4:9

¹⁹ Galatians 1:6-9

²⁰ Galatians 2:16

²¹ Galatians 3:10-11

²² Galatians 3:13-14

²³ Galatians 5:4

²⁴ Colossians 2:16-17; 3:11

²⁵ Colossians 2:20-23

²⁶ Colossians 1:15-20; 2:9

²⁷ Colossians 1:20

²⁸ Colossians 2:17

²⁹ Colossians 2:23

³⁰ Colossians 1:15-18

³¹ Colossians 1:19; 2:9

The Corinthian problem. In Corinth many Christians came from a heathen background of idolatry. They were accustomed to eat food which had previously been offered to these idols³². Eating food contaminated by idolatrous worship was a problem for some Christians: Jewish Christians regarded it as ‘unclean’ with respect to the Old Testament ceremonial law. Some Gentile Christians still associated such food with the worship of idols and demons³³. Christians with a strong conscience believed that the idols were nothing³⁴ and therefore food bought on the market may be eaten³⁵. However, Christians with a weak conscience believed that food offered to idols was defiled³⁶ and therefore should not be eaten. Paul teaches that Christians with a strong conscience should not cause Christians with a weak conscience to stumble³⁷, but should eat or refrain from eating for the glory of God³⁸.

The Roman problem. In Rome there were Christians who came from many different backgrounds. The Christian Church in Rome was cosmopolitan. The majority believers were former Roman and Greek Gentiles and the minority believers were former Jews. These two groups had different opinions or convictions about certain matters and these differences caused tensions in the congregation. So they argued with one another about these matters and even passed judgement on one another’s opinions.

While the letter to the Corinthians focuses on the problem of food and drink offered to idols, the letter to the Romans does not mention food and drink offered to idols. Paul deals with certain weaknesses, which proceeded from the different backgrounds of the Christians. Unlike his strong denunciation of the heresies at Galatia and Colosse, Paul shows a tenderness and tolerance towards the Romans. In the letter to the Romans the issue at stake is not a heresy, but love in relationships towards one another.

One disputable matter was the opinion that only vegetables may be eaten. This was against the opinion that all kinds of food may be eaten (14:2). Christians with a weak faith regarded the eating of certain food as unclean. Another disputable matter was the opinion that certain days (i.e. the festival days) were more sacred than other days. This was against the opinion that all days were alike (14:5). Christians with a weak faith regarded the festival days of the Old Testament as having abiding sanctity. The possible background of these disputes was probably the ceremonial law of the Old Testament with which Christians, who were formerly Jews or proselytes, were acquainted. The ceremonial law in the Old Testament revealed God’s requirements with regard to how his Old Testament people should approach him and worship him. It contained regulations about holy persons (priests and Levites), holy places (tabernacle and temple), holy times (Sabbath days, religious festivals) and holy actions (sacrifices, circumcision, clean foods, ablutions, first-born, first fruits, tithes, etc). The religious teachers of the Jews added 365 prohibitions and 248 commands, thus in total 613 man-made laws, to the ceremonial law and regarded their laws as compulsory for all Jews.

Thus, Christians with a weak faith (especially Jews and Jewish proselytes that had later become Christians) still regarded such laws as very important or even compulsory. They had not yet understood that Jesus Christ had fulfilled³⁹, cancelled⁴⁰ and abrogated⁴¹ the ceremonial law of the Old Testament and that Christ had rejected all the man-made laws of the Jewish teachers of the law⁴²! They had not yet understood the implications of the transition from the Old Testament organised system to the New Testament organised system⁴³.

Christians with a strong faith recognised that the ritual observances of the Old Testament ceremonial law were abrogated with the passing away of the Old Testament ceremonial institution of temple, priesthood and sacrificial altar. There were thus differences of convictions among Christians in the congregation of Rome concerning these matters.

Opinions are views that are held as probable, while convictions are settled beliefs. The matter of differences in their opinions was complicated when the Christians on both sides began to regard their personal opinions as absolute truths, convictions or beliefs! The opinions on disputable matters were in themselves not wrong. They became wrong when the people who held these opinions *condemned* the people that did not hold the same opinions. And it became wrong when the people who did not hold these opinions had no regard for those who held such opinions. It became wrong when the conduct of the Christians with a strong faith caused the Christians with a weak faith to stumble in their faith or when the Christians with a weak faith engaged in loveless condemnation of the Christians with a strong faith.

Some disputable matters among Christians today. There are also opinions about disputable matters among Christians today. For example, Christians may have disputes about the following questions:

Which festivals in the Old Testament or New Testament should Christians celebrate?

Should Christians observe the Lord’s Day as a Jewish Sabbath day?

³² 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; 10:23-33

³³ 1 Corinthians 10:20

³⁴ 1 Corinthians 8:4

³⁵ 1 Corinthians 10:25-27

³⁶ 1 Corinthians 8:7

³⁷ 1 Corinthians 8:9-13

³⁸ 1 Corinthians 10:28-31

³⁹ Matthew 5:17

⁴⁰ Colossians 2:14

⁴¹ Ephesians 2:15

⁴² Mark 7:1-13

⁴³ John 4:21-24; Hebrews 7:12; 8:5,7,13; 9:8-10; 10:1-4

What is the correct method of baptising people with water?
Who may baptise with water?
What is the correct method of celebrating the Lord's Supper⁴⁴?
Who may lead the celebration of the Lord's Supper?
Is participating in the Sunday worship service compulsory⁴⁵?
May Christians sing other kind of spiritual songs besides the Psalms⁴⁶?
May Christians use musical instruments in their worship services⁴⁷?
May Christians clap their hands during singing⁴⁸?
Must Christians give tithes of their income to the congregation⁴⁹?

Should church leaders wear official religious robes or just ordinary clothes?
Should Christians wear prescribed religious clothing in public (clothes that distinguish them as Christians)?
Should Christian women always wear a covering on their heads⁵⁰?
Should Christian men always have short hair? Should they grow a beard⁵¹?
May Christians wear jewellery⁵²?

Should Christians have a quiet time every single day⁵³?
May Christians eat meat or only vegetables⁵⁴?
May Christians drink alcohol⁵⁵?
May Christians dance⁵⁶?
May Christians play games of chance without involving money?
May Christians watch television or go to the movies?

Some of the above questions have clear teaching in the Bible and are thus NOT disputable matters!

Christians need to have personal opinions or, even better, personal convictions about these things. But Christians also need to know how to relate to other Christians, who have different opinions or convictions about these things.

The culture of the Kingdom in the Bible is mandatory and not disputable. Read Matthew 5:21-22; Matthew 5:27-28; Matthew 5:31-32; Matthew 5:38-39; Matthew 5:43-44; Colossians 3:18-21.

The culture of any group of people in history consists of two things:

- Their world-view, their truths and beliefs, their values and morals, their superstitions and the spirit of their time.
- The way in which these are expressed in their convictions, their experiences and behaviour, their customs and traditions and their relationships and institutions.

The cultural context of the Bible also consists of two things:

- A *description* of the sinful and distorted aspects of every human culture (including the culture of Jews), which must be avoided or transformed. For example Romans 1:18-32.
- The *teaching* of the Kingdom of God culture, which must be adopted and followed. For example Matthew 5-7.

The cultural context of the Bible consists of the commands and teachings about human behaviour: *what God requires that should happen in human lives!* The cultural context of the Bible is always normative for Christian behaviour, unless the Bible treats it as limited.

- Human culture in any place on earth or in any historical period of time, which the Bible relates, does not determine what the Bible teaches, because it is tainted with sin and distortions of what God intended it to be.
- The culture of the Kingdom of God, which the Bible teaches, determines what human culture in every place on earth and in every period of time should become.

⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:23-29

⁴⁵ Hebrews 10:25

⁴⁶ Ephesians 5:19

⁴⁷ Psalm 149 and 150

⁴⁸ Psalm 98; 47:1; Isaiah 55:12

⁴⁹ Leviticus 27:30-33; Deuteronomy 12:5-7,17-19; 14:22-29

⁵⁰ 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

⁵¹ Leviticus 21:5

⁵² Isaiah 3:16-24; 1 Peter 3:1-6

⁵³ Isaiah 50:4-5; Mark 1:35

⁵⁴ Romans 14

⁵⁵ 1 Timothy 3:8; 5:23

⁵⁶ Psalm 149:3; 150:4

Sinful human culture. Read Romans 1:18-32. The Bible does not hesitate *to record and describe* the sinful and distorted aspects of human culture: murder⁵⁷, inter-marriage between believers and unbelievers⁵⁸, independence from God⁵⁹, homosexuality⁶⁰, rape or sex before marriage⁶¹, idolatry⁶², occultism and witchcraft⁶³. Also gossip⁶⁴, anger⁶⁵, materialism and greed⁶⁶, secularisation⁶⁷, relativism⁶⁸, injustice⁶⁹, bitterness (unforgiving spirit)⁷⁰, dishonesty with regard to money⁷¹, sinful ambition⁷², an immoral life⁷³, authoritarian leadership in the congregation⁷⁴ and toleration of false doctrine and evil behaviour in the congregations⁷⁵. Etc. All sinful aspects of human culture must be avoided or transformed. Of course, the way in which these sins are to be transformed must be with wisdom and love.

Kingdom of God culture. Read Deuteronomy 16:18-20; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 5:1-4.

The Bible gives cultural explanation and evaluation: that is, the Bible clearly teaches in what way human culture in every place in the world and in every period of time in human history must change. Virtually all the teachings, commands and prohibitions in the Bible give cultural explanation or evaluation, that is, they teach how God requires that human culture in every place and in every period of time should be! The Bible teaches how humans should view the world⁷⁶, which truths they should believe⁷⁷, which values and morals they should hold⁷⁸, how they should behave and relate⁷⁹, and which customs and institutions are pleasing to God⁸⁰.

In the Bible, human culture in every place and in every period of time is constantly evaluated, prohibited or commanded. By means of the clear prohibitions, commands and teachings in the Bible it is God's purpose to address the culture of every group of people in the world and change that culture to become more and more like the culture of the Kingdom of God! In his eternal plan for the universe, God intends to create a special people of God with a special culture, called the Kingdom of God culture (cf. 'The Sermon on the Mount' - Matthew chapters 5-7)!

Thus, it is *incorrect* to view or regard the cultural context in the Bible *as bound to a particular period of time* and for that reason not normative for Christians today. The books in the Bible are not simply historical books written in particular human cultures of the past, but are *books of God's revelation, revealing God and his Kingdom culture, revealing what God intends and requires human culture to become in every place and in every period of time!*

The Bible *exposes* the sinful and distorted aspects of the human culture in the place and in the time period it was written. Thereby it exposes the sinful and distorted aspects of human culture in every place on earth and in every period of time in human history⁸¹!

The Bible also *teaches* what human culture in every place on earth and in every period of time in human history must become! Christians must regard the cultural context in the Bible (the teachings, the commands and the prohibitions) as normative for all groups of people in the world and for all periods of time in human history! But they may not be enforced on non-believers.

The following are biblical examples of normative culture:

- The teaching of Jesus Christ concerning marriage and divorce is always normative⁸².
- The teachings of Moses and Paul against sexual immorality are always normative⁸³.

⁵⁷ Genesis 4:8

⁵⁸ Genesis 6:2,5

⁵⁹ Genesis 11:4

⁶⁰ Genesis 19:4-5

⁶¹ Genesis 34:2-7,31

⁶² Exodus 32:1-8

⁶³ Deuteronomy 18:9-13

⁶⁴ Proverbs 16:28

⁶⁵ Proverbs 16:32; 27:4; 29:11

⁶⁶ Isaiah 5:8

⁶⁷ Isaiah 5:12

⁶⁸ Isaiah 5:20

⁶⁹ Isaiah 5:23

⁷⁰ Matthew 6:15

⁷¹ Acts 4:32-5:4

⁷² Acts 8:18-23

⁷³ 1 Peter 4:3

⁷⁴ 3 John 9-10

⁷⁵ Revelation 2:14-16,20-23

⁷⁶ 1 John 2:15-17

⁷⁷ John 8:31-32; 14:6; 17:17

⁷⁸ 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 6:9-11

⁷⁹ Matthew chapters 5 to 7

⁸⁰ Malachi 2:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

⁸¹ For example the Bible condemns the recent burning of a Quran as an expression of the freedom of speech as a loveless provocation. It also condemns the call to a jihad (holy war) against Christians.

⁸² Matthew 19:3-9

⁸³ Leviticus 18:3-6,20,22-23; Romans 1:24-27

- The teachings of Paul concerning the responsibilities of family members are always normative⁸⁴. They all teach how God requires all human beings everywhere in the world and in every period of history to behave in marriage and family life. However, these teachings may not be enforced on non-believers.
- Likewise, there are biblical teachings how God requires human beings to behave in the government⁸⁵
- and in the courts⁸⁶,
- in the congregations⁸⁷,
- in leadership in the congregations⁸⁸
- and in the society outside the congregations⁸⁹.

Because these teachings are not limited by any other teaching in the Bible, they are *normative for everyone, everywhere and for all time!* However, the principles of God's Kingdom culture may not be enforced on people. They are adopted by repentance (a change of thinking) and by transformation (a change of behaviour).

The attitudes Christians should have with respect to the disputable matters (14:1-5). Verse 1 describes the faith of some Christians as *weak*. In this context, it is not their faith in Jesus Christ unto salvation that is meant, but their *faith concerning what they may or may not do as Christians with regard to disputable matters!* Their subjective faith determines their personal opinions, convictions or beliefs concerning the disputable matters.

There are Christians whose *personal faith forbids* them to eat certain foods and there are Christians whose *personal faith allows* them to eat everything. By the descriptions *weak* and *strong*, no contempt is intended, but only distinction. Paul calls the faith that forbids people to do certain things in the area of disputable matters *a weak faith*, because that kind of faith is more susceptible to stumbling and destruction by the conduct of Christians whose faith allows them to do those same things.

The Christian with a strong faith may not show contempt towards the Christian with a weak faith. The apostle Paul first exhorts the Christian with a strong faith. He should watch his conduct towards the Christian with a weak faith. He may *not treat with contempt* (look down upon, consider as nothing) the Christian with a weak faith. He may not make judgements concerning the thoughts or opinions of the Christian with a weak faith. He may not make the scruples of the Christian with a weak faith the subject of his analysis, dispute or judgement⁹⁰. For example, he may not make negative statements about the personal beliefs of the Christian with a weak faith concerning matters such as eating and drinking and the observance of special days.

The Christian with a weak faith may not condemn the Christian with a strong faith. The apostle Paul continues to exhort the Christian with a weak faith. He should watch his attitude and censorious judgement towards the Christian with a strong faith. He *may not condemn* the Christian with a strong faith for eating differently than he does, or dressing differently than he does, or singing differently than he does. God has accepted the Christian with a strong faith and therefore the Christian with a weak faith may not reject the Christian with a strong faith as not being a Christian at all or condemn him as being a second-class or less obedient Christian! God has accepted the Christian with a strong faith, who eats every kind of food. Christians may not condemn what God approves⁹¹ and they may not reject whom God has accepted⁹²! To do otherwise is to twist God's Word and make God a liar.

The Christian with a weak faith is exhorted not to meddle in the domestic affairs of the Christian with a strong faith, because God has accepted him including his lifestyle of greater freedom. The Christians with a weak faith tended to regard the exercise of freedom on the part of the Christian with a strong faith as worldliness or as backsliding, as a failing in his devotion to Christ. The Christian with a weak faith thought that the life-style of the Christian with a strong faith was subject to Christ's disapproval. But Paul says that the servant of another is not to be judged by the personal norms of anyone, but by the norms of his own master! When the conduct of the Christian with a strong faith meets with Christ's approval it cannot imperil his steadfastness as a Christian.

b. Explanation to the strong and the weak: everyone should be fully convinced and live to the Lord (14:5-9)

14:5. One person prefers (to distinguish, select)⁹³ (vipa) one day to another day; another person recognises (approves, holds alike)⁹⁴ (vipa) every day. Each person must *always* be fully convinced⁹⁵ (vmpp) in his own mind.

14:6. He who regards (holds an opinion, views)⁹⁶ (vppa) the (particular) day (as being special), holds this opinion (vipa) in honour of the Lord. And he who eats (meat or vegetables) (vppa), eats (vipa) in honour of the Lord, since he

⁸⁴ Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-21

⁸⁵ Romans 13:1-7

⁸⁶ Deuteronomy 16:18-20; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8

⁸⁷ Ephesians 4:1-16

⁸⁸ Acts 20:17,28; 1 Timothy 3:1-15; 5:17-22; 1 Peter 5:1-4

⁸⁹ Ephesians 4:17 - 5:17

⁹⁰ 1 Corinthians 12:10; Hebrews 5:14

⁹¹ 1 Timothy 4:3-5

⁹² Acts 10:15,28,34-35

⁹³ G: krinó, one meaning

⁹⁴ G: krinó, another meaning

⁹⁵ G: plérophoré

⁹⁶ G: phroneó

gives thanks (vipa) to God. And he who does not eat (meat) (vppa), in honour of the Lord he does not eat (vipa) (meat), also he gives thanks (vipa) to God.

14:7. For none of us (Christians with a weak and with a strong faith) lives (vipa) to himself alone and none dies (vipa) to himself alone.

14:8. If we live (vspa), we live (vipa) to the Lord (i.e. in honour of the Lord); and if we die (vspa), we die (vipa) to the Lord (i.e. in honour of the Lord). So then, whether we live (vspa) or die (vspa), we *continually* are (vipa) of the Lord (i.e. we belong to the Lord).

14:9. For to this end Christ *once for all* died (viaa) and *once for all* returned to life (viaa) so that he might *once for all* be the Lord (vsaa) of both the dead and the living (vppa).

Christians must be fully convinced in their own minds about the disputable matters (14:5). There are two extremes with regard to the disputable matters and both are rejected.

- A lack of personal conviction about the disputable matters in the Christians themselves. The apostle Paul commands each Christian to be fully convinced in his own mind about the various disputable matters, because that is the only way he can do these things or not do these things consciously for the Lord, even when other Christians may not approve. The Christian with a strong faith is free to enjoy what God has created to be received with thanksgiving⁹⁷. He should not feel guilty or rejected, because he holds certain convictions, which Christians with a weak faith reject. And the Christian with a weak faith is free to abstain from what he personally believes is wrong. Each Christian not only has the right to have a personal opinion or conviction in the disputable matters, but God demands that *each Christian should live according to his personal convictions*.
- Enforcing conformity to disputable matters in the church. This defeats the aim of God as well as the demand of love! The apostle Paul exhorts the Christians not to be *compelled to conformity*, but to *accept diversity* within the congregation and to accept one another despite the diversity of opinions or convictions regarding certain disputable matters in the congregation.

Of course, each Christian must be fully convinced about the teachings, commands and prohibitions in the Bible and live according to them. He must become fully convinced about what every Christian must believe and how every Christian must behave in matters that are not disputable, but mandatory! For example, a person that does not believe that Jesus Christ is the one he claims to be, will certainly die in his sins⁹⁸. Note the following teachings and commands:

- “Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’, and your ‘No’ be ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one”⁹⁹.
- “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you”¹⁰⁰.
- “Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me’¹⁰¹.”

Christians should let their whole conduct be determined by doing everything as to the Lord (14:6-9). In the realm of freedom a Christian’s conduct is not unreligious, because whatever he does or refrains from doing is “to honour the Lord”. He is never destitute of the consciousness that he is serving the Lord. The inner attitude with which a particular conviction is practised or refrained from being practised is what he regards as important in God’s eyes. The proof that the personal convictions and resulting conduct of both the Christian with a strong faith and the Christian with a weak faith are acceptable to God, is that they do things in an unlimited or limited way by giving thanks to God.

- “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God”¹⁰².
- “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him”¹⁰³.
- “For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer”¹⁰⁴!

Not only are the created things acceptable to God when they are used in accordance with the clear teaching of the Bible and when the Christian prays about them¹⁰⁵, but also what the Christian does or refrains from doing is acceptable to God when he thanks God in his choice. Thanking God proves *his sense of being in debt* to God, *his dependence* on God and *his devotion* for Christ!

Living and dying to the Lord (Jesus Christ) is demanded from all Christians. Our first assignment is to live to the glory of the Lord. And our last assignment is to die to the glory of God. The Lordship of Jesus Christ is as inclusive and pervasive as the sovereignty of God:

⁹⁷ 2 Timothy 4:3-5

⁹⁸ John 8:24; cf. Colossians 1:19; 2:9

⁹⁹ Matthew 5:37

¹⁰⁰ Luke 6:27-28

¹⁰¹ Hebrews 13:4-6

¹⁰² 1 Corinthians 10:31

¹⁰³ Colossians 3:17

¹⁰⁴ 1 Timothy 4:4-5

¹⁰⁵ cf. Matthew 15:36; Acts 27:35; 1 Corinthians 10:30

- “All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him”¹⁰⁶.
- “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”¹⁰⁷.
- “The Father has placed everything in his hands”¹⁰⁸.
- “God has made this Jesus Lord”¹⁰⁹.
- God the Father seated Christ in heaven above all rule and authority, power and dominion and every title that can be given¹¹⁰.
- “All things were created by him (Jesus Christ) and for him”¹¹¹.

No Christian lives to himself alone and no Christian dies to himself alone. It is not the Christian but the Lord who determines how long he lives and when he dies. What changes when a person becomes a Christian is his attitude towards death¹¹². Death remains an evil, an enemy, an abnormality which sin brought into the world (5:12). But the Christian believes that death will be swallowed up in victory¹¹³ and he longs to be clothed over with his new body¹¹⁴. *His transformed attitude to death does not spring from any change in the character of death, but springs from his faith in what Christ has done to death at his first coming and from his living hope in what Christ will do at his second coming.* Because the Christian belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, he will be involved in all this wonderful future!

Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead in order to reign as the Lord over the dead and the living. Christians live to the Lord by the power of the resurrected Lord (6:4-5)¹¹⁵. The Christian’s conduct results from his personal conviction that is based on the Bible and from his intimate relationship with God in prayer.

c. The second exhortation to the weak and the strong:
In the final judgement everyone will give an account of himself to God (14:10-14).

14:10. But you (i.e. the Christian with a weak faith), why do you *continue* to pass judgement (vipa) on your brother? Or you (i.e. the Christian with a strong faith), why do you *continue* to look down (vipa) on your brother? For we will all *certainly* stand (vifm) before the judgement seat¹¹⁶ of God.

14:11. For it is written (virp): “As surely as I *continually* live (vipa)”, says (vipa) the Lord, (in the last judgement) “every knee will *certainly* bow¹¹⁷ (vifa) before me; every tongue will *certainly* praise (confess, acknowledge)¹¹⁸ (vifm) God”¹¹⁹.

14:12. So then, (in the last judgement) each of us will *certainly* give (vifa) an account (a word) of himself to God.

14:13. Therefore (in the present time) let us *no longer continue* to pass judgement¹²⁰ (vspa) on one another. But rather you must make this your judgement (decision)¹²¹ (vmaa): *never* to put (vnpa) a stumbling block¹²² or obstacle¹²³ in your brother’s way¹²⁴.

14:14. I know (by relationship, reflection, intuition)¹²⁵ (vira) and am *fully convinced*¹²⁶ (virp) in the Lord Jesus that *nothing (is) unclean (that which comes into contact with anything and everything and therefore is common, ordinary, profane)¹²⁷ in itself. But if anyone *continues* to regard (reckon)(vppn) something to *always* be (vnpa) unclean, then for him it (is) unclean.*

Christians should not judge one another’s convictions concerning the disputable matters (14:10-13).

The weak and strong Christians will be judged by God (14:10-11). The final judgement will be universal (2:5-16). Also the judgement of Christians is certain¹²⁸. What will be judged is not the eternal destiny of Christians¹²⁹, but their careless judgments about the convictions of others in the disputable matters (14:12). When the weak and strong Christians judge one another about disputable matters, they put a stumbling block or obstacle in the other’s way.

¹⁰⁶ Matthew 11:27) (cf. Matthew 15:36; Acts 27:35; 1 Corinthians 10:30

¹⁰⁷ Matthew 28:18

¹⁰⁸ John 3:35; cf. 5:22-23

¹⁰⁹ Acts 2:36

¹¹⁰ Ephesians 1:20-22; cf. Philippians 2:9-11; 1 Peter 3:22

¹¹¹ Colossians 1:16

¹¹² Hebrews 2:14

¹¹³ 1 Corinthians 15:54

¹¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:4

¹¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 4:10-12; Colossians 3:1-4

¹¹⁶ G: béma

¹¹⁷ G: kauptó

¹¹⁸ G: exomologeomai

¹¹⁹ Isaiah 45:23; Philippians 2:10-11

¹²⁰ G: krinó

¹²¹ G: krinó

¹²² G: proskomma

¹²³ G: skandalon

¹²⁴ cf. Matthew 18:6-9

¹²⁵ G: oida

¹²⁶ G: peithó

¹²⁷ G: koinos

¹²⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:10

¹²⁹ John 5:24

Christians should differentiate between objective and subjective convictions (14:14). Christians should distinguish between a personal conviction based on a clear objective command, prohibition or teaching in the Bible and a personal conviction based on his subjective belief with regard to a disputable matter. What is clearly taught (revealed) in the Bible is *objectively truth*. And what is believed to be true, even when there is no clear teaching in the Bible about the matter, is *subjectively truth*.

For example, Jesus clearly taught that all food is clean¹³⁰. And the apostle Paul also taught that no food is unclean in itself and that everything God created is good and nothing should be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving (14:14,20)¹³¹. Paul holds to the objective truth that all food is clean and may be eaten as an objective truth that is taught in the Bible and as a subjective truth which he personally holds. However, although *the objective teaching* in the Bible regards everything as clean, it does not follow that *the subjective conviction* of every Christian regards everything as clean. A Christian with a weak faith may know the objective truth in the Bible and nevertheless have no subjective faith to accept that truth or to live out that truth. For example, he may know that Jesus declared all food ceremonially clean, but nevertheless may find it impossible to eat certain foods. Therefore, in relating to weak Christians, strong Christians should not only take the objective truth in the Bible into account, but also the personal, subjective conviction of the weak Christian!

The situation is similar with respect to idols¹³². Many Christians know the objective truth that *an idol is nothing at all in the world and there is no God but one*¹³³. However, not every Christian knows this! Some Christians are still so accustomed to the idols of their past life (which they regarded as existing or as powerful spirits) that they subjectively regard food offered to idols as unclean! The distinction is thus between the objective biblical teaching and the subjective personal conviction. The distinction is between “*what is true objectively*” and “*what is regarded as true subjectively*”! Christians should know the revealed biblical teachings about matters that are held by other Christians as disputable, but should nevertheless reckon with their own subjective feelings and opinions as well as with the subjective feelings and opinions of other Christians about these matters.

Only in an atmosphere of love, acceptance and mutual respect can Christians build one another up in their subjective opinions or convictions (the subjective truth believed in the mind and heart) and in the objective biblical (revealed) truth.

Every Christians will give an account about his own beliefs/convictions concerning the commands, prohibitions and teachings in the Bible and his behaviour. Jesus said: “But I tell you that men will have to give an account on the day of judgement for *every careless word* they have spoken”¹³⁴. Each person will render an account to him and not to any other man about his own beliefs and own behaviour¹³⁵. God in Christ will be the only Judge¹³⁶. *Every Christian will render an account concerning himself and not on behalf of other men. That is why he should look at his own life in the light of the coming final judgement and the account he is ultimately going to give to God! He should judge himself instead of sit in judgement of other Christians. He should take the beam out of his own eye instead of trying to pick out the splinter from another person’s eye*¹³⁷. Christians will not give an account to God *how other Christians lived*, but *how they themselves lived*!

God forbids Christians to judge people outside the Christian Church, because that remains God’s prerogative¹³⁸. And *God forbids Christians to judge other Christians, except in the case of obvious sin*¹³⁹. Then the elders of the church must judge those inside the church¹⁴⁰. Christians should rather judge their own judgemental attitudes, critical words and loveless conduct, judge whether they have lived in accordance with their own convictions and whether they have refrained from judging others for their different convictions about disputable matters.

d. The third exhortation to the strong and the weak:

the strong must not cause the weak to stumble and thus cause non-Christians to speak evil of Christians (14:15-20).

14:15. For if your brother (i.e. the weak brother) is seriously upset (to cause painful and bitter feelings in the heart)¹⁴¹ (vip) by food (which you eat), you (i.e. the strong brother) are no longer acting (walking)(vipa) in love. You must not *continue to destroy (ruin)*¹⁴² (vmpa) by your food¹⁴³ him, on whose behalf Christ *once for all died* (viaa).
14:16. Therefore you (i.e. the strong) must not *continue to allow your good* (i.e. what you regard as the good with respect to a particular disputable matter) to be spoken of as evil¹⁴⁴ (vmpp) (by the non-Christians).

¹³⁰ Mark 7:15,19

¹³¹ 1 Timothy 4:4-5

¹³² 1 Corinthians 8:4,7

¹³³ Isaiah 45:22

¹³⁴ Matthew 12:36; cf. 1 Peter 4:5

¹³⁵ 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Ecclesiastes 12:14

¹³⁶ John 5:22

¹³⁷ Luke 6:39-42

¹³⁸ 1 Corinthians 5:12-13

¹³⁹ Matthew 7:1-5

¹⁴⁰ Luke 17:3-4; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 1 Timothy 5:20

¹⁴¹ G: lupeó

¹⁴² G: apollumi

¹⁴³ G: bróma

¹⁴⁴ G: blasphémeó

14:17. For the Kingdom of God is (vipa) not (a matter of) eating¹⁴⁵ and drinking¹⁴⁶, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

14:18. because he who continues to serve (vppa) Christ in this way (is) pleasing¹⁴⁷ to God and respected (tried and approved)¹⁴⁸ by men.

14:19. Let us (i.e. the strong) then continually pursue (vspa) the things of (i.e. that lead to) peace and the things of (i.e. that lead to) mutual edification.

14:20. You (i.e. the strong) must not continue to tear down (the opposite of to build up in verse 19)¹⁴⁹ (vmpa) the work of God for the sake¹⁵⁰ of food. Everything, indeed, (is) clean, but (it is) wrong for a person (i.e. the strong) who by continuing to eat¹⁵¹ (vppa) is the efficient cause of stumbling¹⁵² (i.e. for the weak).

The strong Christian may not use his personal conviction to destroy the weak Christian (14:15). The Christian with a weak faith is hurt by painful and bitter feelings caused by the food which the Christian with a strong faith eats. His sorrow, distress and displeasure are not simply caused when he observes the Christian with the strong faith exercising his liberties, which in his esteem are wrong. They rather arise from his own censorious judgement in which he indulges. He stumbles and falls when the example of the Christian with a strong faith causes him to violate his own religious scruples. His sin, occasioned by the stumbling block or obstacle, is that he violates his own conscience! When he does what he regards to be wrong, his conscience accuses him.

Thus, a Christians with a weak faith is grieved or distressed when he violates his own religious convictions! It is this tragic result for the Christian with a weak faith which the Christian with a strong faith must take into account. The Christian with a strong faith may not use his freedom to set an example or be an occasion for the Christian with a weak faith to violate his own religious convictions and as a result his own conscience! Therefore the Christian with a strong faith should refrain from doing what is intrinsically his right. *This is an issue and expression of love!*

Christians should let their conduct be determined by love and not by their rights or freedoms. “Speak the truth in love”¹⁵³! The Christian with a strong faith has the right and the freedom to hold certain opinions or convictions concerning the disputable matters. However, he has no right or freedom to publicly express his opinion or conviction concerning a disputable matter when it causes the Christian with a weak faith to stumble in his faith. He may also not exercise his right or freedom in the area of disputable matters in the presence of Christians with a weak faith. *The law of love is far more important than the law of rights and freedoms (demanded by people with a sinful heart)!*

When the Christian with a strong faith nevertheless misuses his right and freedom, he destroys his brother. Therefore, whenever the Christian with a weak faith is present, the Christian with a strong faith should refrain from expressing or exercising whatever the Christian with a weak faith regards as wrong. The great issue within the Christian brotherhood is not personal rights and personal freedoms, but exercising love towards Christians with different opinions or convictions about the disputable matters.

Christians should let their conduct be determined by building others up. Speak “what is helpful for building others up”¹⁵⁴! The Christian with a strong faith may not destroy his brother with a weak faith (14:15). He may not destroy God’s work in the other Christian (14:20). The word ‘destroy’¹⁵⁵ is a very strong word¹⁵⁶. But here it does not refer to the weak brother falling away from the Christian faith and also not to his eternal perdition. It refers to the strong Christian tearing down the personal subjective conviction of the weak Christian.

All sin is destructive and all destructive behaviour is sin! When the Christian with a strong faith exercises his right and freedom with regard to a disputable matter without considering the subjective opinion, conviction or belief of the Christian with a weak faith, he is acting destructively, that is, he sins against the brother and against God. The sin of the Christian with a strong faith is that he violates the demands of love and that he fails to exercise concern for the religious well-being of his brother. His loveless conduct is the cause that the Christian with a weak faith stumbles in his faith concerning the disputable matters. It is the cause that the opinion or conviction of the Christian with a weak faith in regard to a disputable matter is being destroyed.

Also when the Christian with a weak faith allows his religious conviction to be overturned by the conduct of the Christian with a strong faith, he acts destructively towards himself, that is, he also sins against himself and against God. The sin of the Christian with a weak faith is that he violates his personal religious conviction and his conscience. If the Christian with a weak faith would continue to violate his personal convictions and conscience, and if this breach of

¹⁴⁵ G: brósis

¹⁴⁶ G: posis

¹⁴⁷ G: euarestos

¹⁴⁸ G: dokimos

¹⁴⁹ G: kataluó

¹⁵⁰ G: heneken

¹⁵¹ G: esthió, phagomai, ephagon

¹⁵² G: dia + genitive: proskommatos

¹⁵³ Ephesians 4:15

¹⁵⁴ Ephesians 4:29

¹⁵⁵ G: apollumi

¹⁵⁶ 1 Corinthians 8:11

fidelity is not repaired, it could lead to his perdition. Nevertheless, also in his case, the Lord is able to make him stand (14:4).

The Christian with a strong faith should consider the effect that his convictions and conduct could have on Christians with a weak faith. Neither the Christian with a strong faith nor the Christian with a weak faith may take refuge behind the biblical doctrines of the security of Christians and the final perseverance of Christians. Christians with a weak faith are still God's workmanship¹⁵⁷ and God is still in the process of building them up. Therefore, Christians with a strong faith may not break down Christians with a weak faith by the loveless display of their rights and freedom.

The strong Christian must not give cause to non-Christians to speak evil of the Kingdom (14:16). When the strong and weak Christians quarrel with one another about their personal convictions with regard to the disputable matters, they give cause to the non-Christians to speak evil of what they regard as good. What they regard as 'good' could be the extent of their Christian liberty¹⁵⁸. However, 'the good' is best understood as the gospel of the Kingdom (14:17)¹⁵⁹. The outsiders would more likely slander the gospel and the Kingdom itself than to take sides in the debate between the strong and the weak.

The strong Christian has the responsibility to promote God's Kingdom (14:17-21). The strong Christian has the responsibility to promote God's Kingdom and not his own rights and freedoms. "Seek first the Kingdom of God"¹⁶⁰! When the rights and freedoms of the Christian with a strong faith become the cause of damage to the Christian with a weak faith, then his rights and freedoms come into disrepute. *What is essential in God's Kingdom is not holding strong opinions or convictions on disputable matters, but to promote righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (14:17).*

The Kingdom of God is the realm to which all Christians belong¹⁶¹, the sphere in which God's sovereign rule is recognised and his will is supreme! When questions of food and drink become our chief concern, then it is apparent how far removed from the interests of God's Kingdom our thinking and conduct have strayed¹⁶². The Christian responsibilities in God's Kingdom are: to stand in a right relationship with God and people and to do what is right in God's eyes. It is to help people to make peace with God and to live in peace with others. It is to do what brings joy to as many as possible.

Only by doing these things, Christians serve Christ, are well pleasing to God and are respected by other people, especially non-Christians. Inconsiderate conduct on the part of strong Christians has tremendous repercussions in the estimate and judgements of non-Christians. Christians should not give the enemy occasion to speak reproachfully of the Christian Church (2:24)¹⁶³. Doing what is right in God's eyes and harmony in relationships are the two things that must govern the attitude and conduct of Christians in the fellowship of the Church.

e. [The fourth exhortation to the strong and the weak:](#)
the strong must keep his personal conviction to himself
and the weak must not do anything against his personal conviction (14:21-23).

14:21. (It is) better (i.e. for the strong) not to eat (vnaa) meat¹⁶⁴ or drink (vnaa) wine¹⁶⁵ or to do (anything else) by which your brother (i.e. the weak) stumbles (is induced to sin)¹⁶⁶ (vipa).

14:22. You (singular) must always keep (vmpa) the conviction (faith) which you have (vipa)(i.e. whatever you believe about these things) for yourself¹⁶⁷ in the presence of God (i.e. between yourself and God). Blessed is the person who does not continually condemn¹⁶⁸ (vppa) himself by what he again and again approves (after testing the matter)¹⁶⁹ (vipa).

14:23. But the person (i.e. the weak) who continually doubts (hesitates, waivers, has misgivings)¹⁷⁰ when he eats¹⁷¹ (vsaa) stands condemned¹⁷² (virp), because (his eating does) not (spring) from faith; and everything (that does) not (spring) from faith is always (vipa) sin!

The Christian with a strong faith is exhorted to make every effort to do whatever builds people up instead of what breaks them down (14:20a). Paul does not address the weak in verse 20, when he addresses the strong in the previous and the following contexts. The Christian with a strong faith must keep in mind that there are non-essential things, like eating meat and drinking wine, over which a Christian with a weak faith stumbles.

The strong Christian should keep his personal convictions between himself and God (14:22a). Thus, the Christian with a strong faith may *not parade and protest* his rights and freedoms to the detriment of the Christian with a weak

¹⁵⁷ Ephesians 2:1

¹⁵⁸ cf. 1 Corinthians 10:30; 1 Timothy 4:4-5; 6:17

¹⁵⁹ cf. Acts 20:24-25

¹⁶⁰ Matthew 6:33

¹⁶¹ Luke 17:21

¹⁶² Matthew 6:31-33

¹⁶³ 1 Timothy 3:7; 6:1

¹⁶⁴ G: kreas

¹⁶⁵ G: oinos

¹⁶⁶ G: proskoptó

¹⁶⁷ G: kata + accusative: serves to isolate or separate

¹⁶⁸ G: krinó

¹⁶⁹ G: dokimazó

¹⁷⁰ G: diakrinó

¹⁷¹ G: esthió, phagomai, ephagon

¹⁷² G: katakrinó

faith! However, the Christian with a strong faith has the right to hold such convictions and he may not surrender his convictions!

Christians should develop strong personal convictions (14:23). Christians must do all things according to their personal faith, that is, according to their personal convictions.

Christians with a strong faith have the right to hold strong opinions or convictions about their freedoms and to exercise their freedoms in the disputable matters. However, they may not surrender their personal convictions, because if they do, they would act without faith (14:23).

Christians with a weak faith have the right to hold different opinions or convictions about the same disputable matters and refrain from doing what the Christians with a strong faith do. However, they too may not surrender their personal convictions, because if they do, they too would act without faith (14:23). They may not do anything about which they have doubts or about which their conscience condemns them. Although Christians with a weak faith may be tempted by the example of Christians with a strong faith to violate their own convictions, they remain responsible for all their own actions. When the Christian with a weak faith nevertheless violates his own conscience and does something he is convinced he should not do, he is acting without faith. Doing anything without faith is sin.

That is why both Christians with a strong faith and Christians with a weak faith must only do those things that they subjectively believe are right. It is by faith that Christians stand firm. Christians can only stand firm by a sincere *objective faith in the teachings of the Bible* (what God teaches as the truth) and by a sincere *subjective faith about disputable matters* (what their conscience regards as truth).

Note the difference between Romans 8:7-8 which teaches that a non-Christian *cannot* please God, and Romans 14:23 which teaches that a Christian who violates his own conscience *does not* please God¹⁷³.

¹⁷³ cf. Hebrews 11:6