

(14:1) - HIM THAT IS WEAK IN THE FAITH RECEIVE YE, BUT NOT TO DOUBTFUL DISPUTATIONS. - This chapter concerns the issues of love of brethren and guarding our fellowship in the faith, not allowing non-essential issues to divide us or cause us to judge one another to be saved or lost based on the wrong ground. ***“Him that is weak in the faith”*** does not describe those who are ignorant of or who deny the faith, the Gospel of God’s grace in Christ wherein the righteousness of God is revealed. Believers have no fellowship with unbelievers and must judge them lost according to God’s Word. When it comes to disagreements over issues of Gospel truth, faith, and repentance, we must take a dogmatic stand. Paul wrote later in Romans, ***“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple”*** (Rom. 16:17-18). He wrote in Galatians, ***“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed”*** (Gal. 1:8). John wrote, ***“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son”*** (2 John 9). Even those who claim to be “Christians” but who either deny or are ignorant of essential Gospel truth are not to be embraced as weak brethren. They are lost and in need of salvation. Those who believe a false gospel of salvation by works and free-willism are not weak believers. They are lost, and we are to pray for their salvation.

“Weak in the faith” describes true believers, those who had been brought by God to faith in the true Christ and repentance of dead works but had not yet been taught and convinced of the liberty that believers have in the eating of certain foods and in how we are to view certain days. Some of these could have been converted Israelites who had not yet been taught and convinced in their own conscience from God’s Word that God’s commandments, such as the dietary and sabbath laws, given under the Old Covenant were no longer in force and to be kept by believers in the New Covenant. Being believers, they knew that abstaining from eating certain foods and keeping of certain days was not their salvation or righteousness before God. They knew and believed that forgiveness and righteousness come by the obedience unto death of Christ as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer.

“Receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations” - Paul instructs mature believers who knew and experienced their liberty in Christ to accept these weaker believers in their fellowship, but not just to argue with (or brow-beat them) over these disputed matters. The mature believer, who rightfully enjoys his/her liberty in Christ, should not sit in judgment on the sincere but underdeveloped thoughts that govern the weak believer’s conscience. Weak believers our patience, love, compassion, and teaching. Let those who are mature use wisdom and love in dealing with weaker brethren.

(14:2) - FOR ONE BELIEVETH THAT HE MAY EAT ALL THINGS: ANOTHER, WHO IS WEAK, EATETH HERBS. - The first issue is - What should a believer eat or not eat? The mature believers enjoy their freedom to ***“eat all things”*** (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1-6). ***“All things”*** does not mean everything without distinction. It means all edible foods. The weak believer is hindered having been convinced that certain meats are unclean. This may have been what he had been taught in the Old Covenant law. In the Corinthian church there was a dispute about eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols (***1 Cor. 8:1-13***). Apparently, some of the weak believers thought that they could only eat ***“herbs”*** and vegetables. Again, because of their being identified here as weak brethren, it could not be that they thought that abstaining from meat contributed to their salvation or made them righteous before God. If that were the

case, then they could not be considered as brethren in the faith (*Gal. 2:19-21; 5:1-5; Col. 2:16-23*). These seem to be immature believers who were convinced in their own consciences that this diet was the way of godliness and obedience to God. If any of them imagined that not eating meat made them holier or that if one was a true believer, he/she would not eat meat, then the problem descends into legalism. But, understand, all believers are “recovering legalists,” and we still have the ungodly spirit of legalism in our flesh. In the warfare of the Spirit against the flesh, we must all fight the remaining self-righteousness and legalistic tendencies of the flesh.

(14:3) -- LET NOT HIM THAT EATETH DESPISE HIM THAT EATETH NOT; AND LET NOT HIM WHICH EATETH NOT JUDGE HIM THAT EATETH: FOR GOD HATH RECEIVED HIM. - To “*despise*” someone indicates contempt for them as worthless, and who not deserve our love and fellowship. The mature believer is not to act as if he is holier or more saved than the weak believer. The weak believer is not to “*judge (condemn) him that eateth*” as if to say he/she is lost or doing something sinful when he exercises his liberty to eat all things. “*For God receiveth him*” - God receives both the weak and the mature believer in and by the Lord Jesus Christ. Our salvation is not based on what we eat or do not eat. It is based solely upon the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Any who think that eating or abstaining recommends them unto God are in serious error. Christ is our hope and assurance of salvation. Christ is our only righteousness and holiness before God, not our works in any way or form.

(14:4) -- WHO ART THOU THAT JUDGEST ANOTHER MAN’S SERVANT? TO HIS OWN MASTER HE STANDETH OR FALLETH. YEA, HE SHALL BE HOLDEN UP: FOR GOD IS ABLE TO MAKE HIM STAND. -

We who are saved by God’s grace in Christ, who have been justified by His righteousness, who have been born again by the Holy Spirit, are servants of God. Christ is our Master, and we follow His Word, not the words and traditions of men. We stand or fall only as God judges us in Christ, not as men judge us based on their religious traditions or personal convictions (*Rom. 8:33-34*). All who rest in Christ for salvation will be held up, preserved, and stand, not based on his abstinence or his liberty, but by the God of all grace who blesses us all and keeps us safe in Christ (*Jude 24-25*).

A WORD ABOUT LEGALISM

In reality, a true legalist is an unbeliever who sees himself under the law as a way of salvation, righteousness, and acceptance with God by their efforts to obey the law. A legalist judges himself to be righteous and despises others who do not measure up in his eyes (*Luke 18:9-14*). He judges others by a self-righteous standard (*Matt. 7:1-5*). A legalist is one who uses the law and his obedience in a way that denies the Gospel of salvation by God’s grace based on the righteousness of Christ (*Gal. 2:19-21; 5:1-5*).

One who is seeking to obey God’s law is not necessarily a legalist. He may not have been taught in matters concerning the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. He may be confused on particular issues of the law that should be obeyed and, therefore, he may misunderstand the liberty that believers have in Christ. But if he knows that his obedience to the law is neither the cause nor the ground of his salvation, righteousness, and acceptance with God, and he is convinced that Christ and His righteousness imputed is the only cause and ground of salvation, he is not a legalist. Consider that Moses and every other true believer who lived under the Old Covenant law were bound to obey that law but NOT for salvation, righteousness, and acceptance with God (*cf. Rom. 14*).