
THE WEAK & THE STRONG

ROMANS 14

Who are the weak?

- Eats vegetables not meat (vv. 2, 22)
- Regards some days as more special than others (vv. 5ff)
- Doesn't drink wine (vv. 17, 21)

Who are the Strong?

- Know how to live in the freedom of justification by faith; the weak do not.
- Are able to grasp the significance of Christ's death for daily living; the weak are not.

Origin of the Problem?

- Food problems
 - Jewish food laws
 - Clean & unclean
 - Food offered to idols
 - Remember:
 - Jesus pronounced all foods clean (Mark 7:15-19)
 - Peter's vision on the housetop (Acts 10: 9-16)
- Religious Observance of Certain Days
 - Paul was easier on the Romans than he was on the Galatians and the Colossians because here, in Romans, it was a matter of lifestyle while in the other places it was seen as a condition for salvation.

- (Col 2:16) Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath [*days*]:
- (Col 2:17) Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body [*is*] of Christ.
- (Col 2:18) Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,
- (Col 2:19) And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.
- (Col 2:20) Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,
- (Col 2:21) Touch not; taste not; handle not;
- (Col 2:22) Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men
- (Col 2:23) Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

What do the “Weak” and the “Strong” have in common?

- Both groups are Christians; they are genuine believers. (Romans 14:1-4, 6, 10, 13)
- Each is very critical of the other. (Romans 14: 3, 4, 13)
- Each individual will have to give an account to God. (Romans 14:10)

Where do they differ?

- The strong believed that they could eat anything (meat as well as vegetables); the weak were vegetarians (14:2).
- The strong regarded everyday as being “good.” The weak regarded one day on the week as being better than the others.

What was Paul's attitude?

- Paul agrees with the strong. (Romans 14:14, 20; 15:1)
- Both groups ought to avoid looking down at the other. (Romans 14:3, 5, 19)
- He denounces those strong in particular who have a bad attitude towards the weak. (Romans 14:14-21)
- The strong must lovingly bear with the failings of the weak. (Romans 15:1)
 - The problem with the weak is not that they are more spiritually mature—to the contrary.
- The matter of eating and drinking is not nearly as important as being a citizen of the Kingdom of God. That is, “peace, joy in the Holy Spirit” is what we need.
- Both groups should seek those things that lead to peace. (Romans 14:19)

What was Paul's Advice to the Weak?

- People are not justified by
 - Vegetarianism
 - Sabbatarianism
 - Total Abstinence

What is Justification?

- A judicial act of God whereby the sinner is declared righteous; thus we are pardoned and accounted righteous before God, only on the merit of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, by faith and not for our own works or deserving. “He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” (PAON Statement)

Dangers of the Weak

- “Weak” people can become tyrants seeking to restrict the behaviour of others who exercise their Christian liberty in some things.

- “Weak” people can tend to externalize God’s righteousness into a new legalism supposing that vegetarianism and such like are sufficient to create an acceptable standing before God.
- “Weak” people tend to judge the “strong” as unspiritual.
- Paul sees “Weakness” as an “infirmity” or “failings.” It ought to be grown out of or cured. In this case, the “weak” were not just immature in need of teaching; they are morally and spiritually unwell.
- Compare
 - (1Co 11:30) For this cause many [are] weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.
 - (Rom 15:1) We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

Advice to the Strong

- accept, in love, the weak person, but not for the purpose of arguing the person into a “strong” position. People are not won merely by argument.
- Do not have a superior attitude towards the weak.
- Do not judge your brother.
- Be flexible enough to restrict your behaviour to avoid causing injury to your weaker brother. The basic principle is to “give way to others” in matters that do not endanger the Gospel or cause misconceptions about the nature of redemption. E.g., the message of Galatians and the issue of circumcision.
- Don’t “give way to others” if the heart of the Gospel is being compromised.
- Tolerate each other; don’t bicker, complain or gossip about people.
- Build each other up; don’t destroy each other.
- Don’t major on minors. “The kingdom of God is more than meat and drink.”
- We might want to add that causing unnecessary emotional distress in your brother or sister violates the principle of love.