



## The Unity between Strong and Weak Believers Part 4

November 23, 2025      Romans 14:1

---

(Video 42:57)

You want to turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 14, and as you do, I want to thank you, Jason Hohn, for leading us in prayer and you and Naomi for spearheading Operation Christmas Child with Samaritan's Purse. As I look over here, I also want to commend you as a church. You are an incredibly, incredibly generous, generous small body of believers. I saw Mike Fink over here during the worship service, and I got scared for a moment. I thought he was engaging in the world's largest Jenga game, and I thought he's going to pull that middle box out and it's all going to come down. But somebody does need to take a picture of that, because if we're privileged to do this again next year, we'll try to beat it. But that is quite a wall of kindness.

Okay, enough of that. Turn in your Bibles. I think I've stalled long enough for you to do it. Turn to Romans chapter 14, as we continue on in this wonderful, wonderful portion of God's Word. In the generation of my parents, the generation that went before us, without question, never, ever, ever did it fail when I asked any one of my parents' generation, "Where were you when Pearl Harbor was bombed?" They could tell you, when you first heard about it, they could tell you exactly where they were, exactly what they were doing, the time of day when they first heard that news. In my generation, for those of you who are in my generation, yesterday, I asked the question of Teri and a couple of other people, "Yesterday, 62 years ago yesterday, where were you?" I sent that text to my younger brother-in-law, Kimber. He shot back in two seconds. He said, that was November the 22nd, 1963. I was pushing little cars on the hallway of our home and my mother was ironing and we heard the news on black and white TV. Well, I'm talking about the Kennedy assassination, November 22nd, 1963, when President



Kennedy was shot. Everybody knows where they were at that point in time. They know the time of day when they heard it. They even know what the weather was when it happened and how they felt and so forth. Well, of course, a few years after that, they assassinated Martin Luther King. Later that summer, they assassinated Bobby Kennedy. Next year, they shot George Wallace and paralyzed him for life in a Laurel, Maryland parking lot. A couple of years later, they tried to kill Nixon and they tried to, I think her name was a house lady by the name of Sarah Moore. She and one of Manson's followers, Squeaky Fromm, both were stopped short trying to kill Gerald Ford. They ultimately, Hinckley shot Reagan and they shot Trump. Now here recently, they shot Charlie Kirk and I tell you what scares me. We were stunned and shocked by those things. It was so unbelievable when Kennedy was shot. We hadn't had a president shot since McKinley in 1897. But now with the violence and the rhetoric that goes on and you see these polls at 40 some percent of people in certain age groups thinks violence is okay in order to accomplish political goals. It was bad in the 60s, but this is totally, totally, totally out of control different. And you say, okay, what's the point and what's that got to do with Romans 14? It is so ironic to me that we as believers in Christ, we were always called upon to live life separate from the world. We were always called upon to live different, but it is amazing to me, we are in a section of scripture and we're going to continue on with more of it here in Romans 14 today where the apostle Paul goes to tremendous lengths to tell believers who have an informed conscience, who understand Christian liberty, so-called stronger brothers, how we are to be incredibly sensitive and careful not to offend even the conscience of a so-called weaker brother. It's such a stark contrast to the culture that we live in right now and it's why we continue to say over and over again, they'll know we're Christians by our love and they're going to see it more and more and more as we matriculate through this culture because we're getting darker and darker and darker as a culture with



each passing year, but the light of Christ, especially within the family of God, should shine the brightest.

Paul has got one thing, you know, it's really difficult in a passage like this because from Romans 14:1 all the way through chapter 15:13, you've got really one theme. He's only talking about one thing. It's unity within the body of Christ and how we are to act as weaker brothers towards stronger brothers and not criticizing and condemning them, how we are to act as stronger brothers towards the weaker brothers and not to despise them and look down on them. It's the unity within the body of Christ that he's pounding on and pounding on here, but because it's so long, he can say in five verses, it takes me five weeks to unpack what he's talking about. And so I got to give it to you in snippets and bite size, and it becomes sort of frustrating, but that's the theme. That's what he's talking about. It's unity in the body of Christ and we've been hitting that.

Some of you say, well, okay, well, such as such as what? Remember, just so you understand the passage, the Gentiles are coming out of paganism where certain foods sacrificed to idols, it gives them problems if you eat, if that food was sold in a meat market, now I'm sort of eating something. They got hangups on it. The Jews coming out of Judaism, if you will, or old covenant Judaism, if you will, they're hung up on dietary restrictions and food as well. So he goes through this whole passage talking about food and drink and meat and drink and you start saying, what is the big deal? Just plug in for "meat" and food (One eats meat. One doesn't eat meat.) any particular activity or conduct that is traditional, ceremonial that you do that's non-moral, it's not sin, but some people think you're really not living a spiritual life and really living pleasing God if you do X, Y, and Z, or you're really not living a spiritual life and you're really not pleasing God if you don't do X, Y, and Z. Some situations are, if you're from Seventh-day Adventist background, you're struggling if anybody offers you pork. Some Seventh-day



Adventists don't even think you ought to eat meat, you ought to be vegetarians, and let alone the day of the week that you worship on. Some people, if you have these thin little pieces of paper and they have funny pictures on them and you shuffle them and you hand them out to people, that drives some people really have problems with that, whatever it might be. What you eat, what you drink, you take a certain kind of plant and you chop it up and you put it in a cigarette piece of paper and light it and put it in your mouth, drives some people crazy thinking that you shouldn't be doing something like that. On and on and on. Some people say, you know what, you got a beard, you got a mustache, you can't be living a life pleasing to God. Other groups say, you don't have a beard, you can't be living a life pleasing, and it just goes on and on and on. I'll tell you one, bringing it more to today. You just heard Naomi Hohn sing one of the most beautiful renditions of Give Me Jesus you'll ever hear. Last week, Brian was up here. He did one of the, by the way, we have an unbelievably gifted church, a little church that's got this kind of talent, it's unbelievable. He's up here and does one of the most beautiful renditions of a hymn I'd ever heard. I even got up and commented on that as well. I never clapped when Brian played that hymn and I never clapped at the end of Naomi's hymn, because I come out of a background where I just worship full and I'm appreciative. Now, Hector isn't here today, we talked about this last week. If Hector had been here, he'd have been the first to be standing up clapping for Naomi Hohn. Now, amen, and there's another one. Some people sit in church, I can still remember my father-in-law today, he handled it so well. He was in a Christian Missionary Alliance church and every once in a while, he'd be preaching and somebody'd say, amen. Remember last week, I said some churches, they were having a conversation with the pastor. Well, there was one guy in their church who was a little bit loud, amen, amen, and repeat, amen. Some people were complaining about it. In typical, my father-in-law's typical fashion, he took it head on from the pulpit the next week.



He said, I know that some of you, the spirit of God, you're so blessed by the word of God and something that happens, it's just, you let an "amen" out, you let a "so be it" out. He said, now I want you to know something. That's good, that's all right, but you know what, God's not hard of hearing, but he immediately brought a balance to it. They all laughed like you did. Then he brought a balance to it, because he knew that some of the people that were complaining were a little bit finicky, and he said, let me tell you something, God's also not nervous. It's okay. Clapping, I've had people say to me, are you a clapping church? I don't know if we are or we're not, but I know one thing. I don't know if Hector is the weaker brother or if I'm the weaker brother. All I know is his culture and his background and many others clap, they're not applauding Naomi. They're giving, hopefully, the glory to God. And when I don't, it's not that I don't, I come up and say something nice, but in my worship experience, that's the way I'm giving glory to God. Friends, it's okay. It's called accepting one another in the body of Christ. Don't get nervous about it either way. It's all okay. But it's Paul's concern that people do not start breaking up into groups.

And so in Romans 14, he started breaking it down for us in the first 10 or 12 verses. He taught us how we're to accept one another with understanding. Why? He says, because of the first couple of verses, because God accepts us. God accepts your weaker brother. God accepts the stronger brother. They're both believers in Christ. They're accepted.

Second of all, he says there in verse four of Romans 14, ***Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand.*** And you remember last week I underscored the fact that, look, what he's saying there is, look, you don't have to worry about his spiritual life because he claps or doesn't clap. You don't have to worry about his spiritual life because he engages in this activity or he doesn't engage some activity. Weaker or stronger, God is going to get all the



believers to glory. Exactly as He has planned, and He's going to accomplish everything through their life that He wants to accomplish.

The third thing he said, why we're to accept one another with understanding, he says the Lord is sovereign over each. Meaning what? That pastor that I talked about who had an issue with facial hair or whoever my, he believed in all his heart he was serving his Lord. And the guys that stand up in a singing group and have beards and mustache, they believe in all their heart, they're serving the Lord. The guy that thinks your hair's got to be above your ear, he thinks he's serving the Lord. They serve the Lord.

And the last reason he gives here in these last few verses, in verses 10 through 12 is basically everyone, the end of verse 12, ***So then each one of us shall give an account of himself to God.*** God ultimately is the judge. God is the judge.

And so the issue is possession, not expression. Do you possess a liberty in Christ? Not necessarily: do you have to exercise it? So what happens? If you have freedom in Christ, you feel like you can do something, do you always have to exercise that privilege just to prove that you're the stronger brother or sister? The answer to that is. "no". As a matter of fact, the key phrase is that love leads liberty. Liberty is limited by love, agape love. Love always seeks the best for the object of its love. We've talked about this. And so your Christian liberty is to be reigned in and restrained by that so that you, as we're going to see, don't cause a problem, which we're going to elaborate on today, with the weaker brother. But something happens as a result of that. Christians who have a liberty don't exercise it in love to respect the ones who are struggling and still think that that might not be a spiritual thing to do. Well, what happens? Then churches take on a certain conformity, if you will. They develop certain traditions that other churches don't have because the problems of most of the weaker brethren start



controlling what gets done until those weaker brethren grow and mature, if you follow what I'm saying. In other words, I'll use the Hector and the clap example. Like we said, if Hector and I and you applauded in some Scottish churches, let's say, or churches right here in Phoenix, their heads would explode for you doing that. And like I said last week, there's other churches where there's almost a running conversation with the pastor. People are yelling, amen, and that seems so foreign. And so churches take on their own certain cultural differences. And the early church was no different, and churches are no different today. And that's okay. It's all right.

So where are we in the passage of scripture? Well, let me just say that it isn't just your Christian, it isn't just love that constrains you from exercising your liberty in Christ. There's several other areas in the Word of God that tell you and me, be very careful in what you do and don't do and what you see is your Christian freedom, if you will. The Bible places a lot of restraint on our liberty, and Paul only deals with a couple of them here in Romans 14. But let me give you a few others.

First of all, you should never use your freedom in Christ to do something, whatever it might be, as self-deception. Self-deception. What are you talking about? 1 Peter 2:16, important passage of scripture, ***Act as free men, and, he says, do not use your freedom as a covering for evil.*** What do you mean? Some people are so, are overly addicted, they're newsaholics, or they're TV-aholics. They literally, they can't miss a particular TV program. They can't miss, they are a news junky. They're constantly on their phone or constantly consumed by this, to where it actually almost becomes addictive, and it's a bad stewardship of time. I can slip into using some of those things too much, Teri's very good about holding me accountable. What are we doing here? The point of that being, whatever, something that is not evil in and of itself, of course, almost you say, well, look, I'm free to do this, yeah, but how much time are you



wasting doing that and ignoring things that you, being a good steward, should be doing, you're self-deceiving yourself. Here's another one. 1 Corinthians 6, don't ever use your Christian liberty, not only for self-deception, but for self-destruction. I mean, 1 Corinthians 6:12, ***All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable.*** All things just aren't profitable. One commentator gave an example that you wouldn't think of ordinarily, he said there's a well-known evangelist in the 1970s who, because he was traveling around the country and as an evangelist and so forth, he had time during the week to play golf, nothing wrong with playing golf. This guy started playing golf almost all the time and then started betting other people on his golf games. He was betting at times \$4,000 a match on his golf games. True story. The guy not only loses materially, he blows his entire ministry because literally he got caught up in gambling on his own golf games. Just a self-destructive type of thing. That is repeated again in 1 Corinthians 10:23, ***All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.***

Here's one that will really shock you. 41% of American adults say that they are mildly to strongly addicted to, are you ready, chocolate. Now I like chocolate, but apparently the studies show there's a chemical response in the brain that is very similar to what happens when you do drugs and things in terms of benefit and reward and so forth, and it literally becomes an addictive type of personality. God created man to have dominion over the earth, and yet the fall has reversed so many things. So many things in our culture have dominion over us. It's just unbelievable.

As we approach the Lord's table next week, I want you to, and even your thanksgiving table, as much as we thank God for the things that we're thankful for, we also need to take really self-examination and say, are there things that aren't inherently sinful in and of themselves, but I've pushed them to excess, I do them too much. With me, I remember early on in my



Christian life, again, the newspaper, many of you don't know what that is, but just think of now, just your cell phones, a newspaper would be delivered to my apartment door every morning, 4:30-5 o'clock in the morning. What's the first thing you do? No cell phones, okay, no computers back then, no internet. What's the first thing I'm doing? I'm picking up that newspaper and going right to the sports page, and I'm reading about the football scores and the baseball scores and the boxing scores, and I'm spending an hour, hour and 15 minutes before I get ready for work, and it was robbing me of time, after I became a believer, from the word of God. I literally was shortchanging time in the word of God because I wanted to see what the St. Louis Cardinals did the night before. So I had to say, wait a minute, I'm going to do this later, I'll do it at work on a break, I'll do it tonight, and I don't want to miss it. Very simple stuff, but God wants to grow you and me in holiness, and so as you think about it this week, there may be things that are not sinful at all, but are you doing the best thing? Are you doing the most edifying thing? Or are you addicted to this piece of hardware so much that we talk about this a lot, but you can't go to dinner without somebody texting you. You have to respond to a text, you have to pick up a text. Just think about it. That's all I'm saying. Just think about it.

Okay, Romans 14, Romans 14:13, he picks up and goes on, ***Therefore, let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this - not to put an obstacle or stumbling block in a brother's way. I know and am convinced in the Lord***, I love that. I am convinced in the Lord. That's what he was saying back in verse five. ***Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.*** He's touching upon the conscience again. I'm ***convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself***; Don't be thrown by that word unclean. That's ceremonially unclean. He's talking to both Gentiles and Jews. The Jews, dietary restrictions, those things are, quote, ceremonially, religiously unclean. I can't eat them. And he says, the Gentiles, those



things are religiously unclean. They were offered to idols in a temple and then sold out the back door to the meat market and boy, I can't eat that. Paul says, look, I get it. I understand my freedom in Christ. I am totally convinced in the Lord that there's no nothing, none of these non-moral things are binding on me. Nothing is unclean and inappropriate in itself, **but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.** In other words, I'm over in 1 Corinthians 8 that we talked about before and says, look, everybody doesn't have this knowledge. Everybody's conscience isn't as informed as maybe yours or mine is. And so they do have these hangups and to them it is an issue. And so what? And so he says, vs 15, **For if because of food**, again, for food, meat, drink, you just plug in any activity you want. If because of hair length, if because of the day you worship on, if because of what you eat, what you drink, if because of card games, if because, if because, if because. By the way, I'll give you one. My wife's wearing slacks. Debbie's wearing slacks. Naomi's up here wearing slacks. Let me tell you, there's some people that think the roof is going to fall in if you women show up at church in anything but a dress. And so it throws some people like it. Plug in any of those taboos, any of those cultural traditions for the word 'food'. For some of your translations might say meat or drink. And you'll know exactly what the word of God is saying on this subject. He says, for if because of some non-moral activity, **your brother is hurt**. Now the word there hurt is *lypeō* (G3076). It's the same word in other passages of scripture when it says, do not grieve the Holy Spirit. If your brother is grieved over this, how would he be grieved? Well, my weaker brother, Jeff, sees me standing up preaching the word of God with hair over my ears. But he comes out of an area where he's got to have his hair above his ears and he doesn't [inaudible], and so you know what? It would cause him so that hair is probably a bad analogy, but some activity. If it causes him to grieve and if I can avoid doing that, I would do so. I don't want him to be. He can grieve just by observing it, if you will. He might even be led into certain activities



or things because of what I do. So I'm to restrain my freedom in that regard. He says, if because of food, your brother is grieved, ***you are no longer walking according to love.*** And that's the key phrase. Our liberty is always limited by our love. ***Do not destroy***, now that is even a stronger word. And the reason I'm building to a point and my point is this. This stuff sounds like it's nitpicky. This stuff may not be a "big deal" to you. This stuff is a big deal to God because of the conscience. Again, He does not want you and I causing our brothers and sisters in Christ to violate that God given guardrail against sin called the conscience. And to the extent we do that, we're aiding and abetting in sin. And he uses this word *apollymi* (G622), *apollymi* in Greek. Sometimes it's used to mean eternal damnation. But that isn't what it's talking about here in context. What he's talking about here in context is basically that you ***destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.*** In other words, you totally, totally crush him.

In this passage of scripture, he's given us several ways that we can avoid offending our brothers and sisters in Christ. And at the same time, build them up. OK, first one is obviously in verse 13. Don't cause them to stumble by your conduct or by your insisting that they engage in an activity that bothers them.

The second one here is in verses 14 and 15. Never cause a brother to hurt or grieve, hurt or grieve in what way? Offending his conscience such that he loses his Christian joy. If he if I were to do something that that Jeff thought wasn't an appropriate thing for us and I thought Jeff, get over it. Come on, grow up. We're free and Christ. And he engages in that. His conscience gets wounded. He loses joy. He loses assurance. He starts feeling guilty over it. It starts even causing a breach. I can't believe that John didn't care enough or he caused me to do it. And on and on and on it goes.



Then to show you how serious God takes this. Turn over to Matthew chapter 18. This is exactly why I wanted Justin to read this, by the way. By the way, Peggy Brown, I mentioned Walt's memorial service tomorrow. Because of Walt in his latter months and the last couple of years, really physically limited and they could not get out. They watched and worshiped online up at a Greyhawk assisted living facility. Well, there's many people up there who are Christians and want to worship together, but they're bound physically and they can't get to their churches. So they decide that they want to have a worship group up there at the Greyhawk Center. Well, they're coming from Mennonite backgrounds and Methodists and Presbyterians and Baptists and Episcopalians and you name it and everybody [has their ideas]: What do you mean the women are going to be here and their heads not covered? You know, and it just goes on and on and on. Wait, you mean you're not going to read from the King James? You're actually going to use the NIV? And so Peggy says we had to develop an agreement as to what we could all agree on just so we could worship together. And she says that she cut this out of their bulletin and brought it to me. She says this is the one thing we all could get together on without causing all these problems. Here's what it says. Greyhawk Christian Worship Center. What we believe. One, the deity of Christ. Two, literal resurrection. Three, authority of God's word. Four, atonement. Christ's sacrifice reconciles us to God. That's it. Everything else you can do it or don't do it. It's up to you. And that was it. They distilled it down to its basics. And I thought, well, that's really, really very good. OK, so. So basically, he goes on here and he's laying out different things we can do. That word destroy. I'll put you literally tear down the one for whom Christ died. And he goes on in verse 16. ***Therefore, do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*** And you're



taking away the righteousness and the peace and the joy and the assurance of your weaker brother and sister in Christ.

Now, I wanted to underscore the seriousness of this. And I ask you to go back to Matthew chapter 18. And that's why I had Justin read this passage of scripture. By the way, it's amazing. I see now why in God's sovereign plan, when they put the scriptures together, they put Matthew as the first book in the New Testament, just like Genesis has the seed plot of so many things that play themselves out. Matthew has the seeds of so many things that play themselves out through the New Testament. So in Matthew 18:1, this is one of the most misunderstood passages of scripture in the Bible. Matthew 18:1. ***At that time the disciples came to Jesus saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"*** We're talking about people, Lord, who are already in the kingdom of heaven. Believers already saved, justified. So, okay, who's the greatest? All right. We're not talking about non-believers. Talking about believers. Verse two, ***and He called a child to Himself and set him before them.*** Verse three, ***and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven."*** He was using a little child as an object lesson. Why? Children have to trust on mom and dad for everything. They don't have money. They can't feed themselves. They can't clothe themselves. They can't do anything. They have to trust. That's the point. You have to be humble and totally trust God. That's the heart attitude which a person must have to enter into the kingdom of heaven. He's talking about how people enter the kingdom of heaven. He's talking to believers. ***"Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."*** In other words, it's a dead heat. Only God is great. You're in the kingdom of heaven, if you will. ***"And whoever receives one such child in my name receives me."*** What's he talking about? He's talking about receiving others in the body of Christ. The little children are as a euphemism for believers regardless



of your chronological age. Some of these people were in their 40s and 50s. He's referring to them as little children because that's the way everybody enters the kingdom of heaven. A heart attitude of a little child. Verse six. ***"But whoever"***, get this, ***"causes one of these little ones who"*** are non-believers. No, ***"one of these little ones who believe in me."*** He's talking about causing believers to stumble. I can't tell you the number of children's conferences where I've heard people use this passage as a basis for evangelizing children. It's got nothing to do with evangelizing children. This is not the text to use. It's talking about the sensitivity that you and I are to have for other believers in Christ, never to do anything to cause them to stumble. You mean stumbling to sin? Yeah, that too, but that's not the stumbling. It's violating their conscience. It's in non-moral areas. Well, how serious does God take this? I'll tell you what Jesus says. Look at verse six. ***"Whoever causes one of these little ones"***, a believer in Jesus Christ, ***"to stumble, it's better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea."*** Before you laugh at that pastor who made those guys shave their mustaches off before they sang to his church. Before you look down on somebody who says, you know, women ought to have their head covered and they need to wear dresses in church. Before you and your heart and mind, you think, how ridiculous is that? You better check your heart at the door because God says you cause one of them to stumble, you need to have a millstone put around your neck and thrown in the sea be better off for you. That's how seriously I take your agape love for other people in the body of Christ. Hector wants to clap, let him clap. John doesn't want to clap, let him not clap. These are, this is irrelevant. God judges the heart. I believe I'm worshiping God. Hector believes he's worshiping God. I believe I'm giving God glory for the talent of a Naomi. He believes he's giving God glory for the talent of a Naomi. Praise God for both of us. And again, I'm not so sure which one of us is the weaker one. I know one thing, we need to accept each other. That's



exactly what the word of God says. Verse seven. ***“Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks!”*** The world is going to throw things in your way. The world is going to cause you to sin, no doubt about it. ***“For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come;*** (meaning from the world) ***but woe*** (and that's the Bible's way of saying you better watch out and never do this) ***woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!”*** And man, you and I as a believer in Christ don't want to be a part of that. And what's the stumbling block? Yeah, it could be causing them to sin. By the way, if you cause them to violate their conscience, it is sin and therefore you're an aider and an abettor in their sin. But He's talking about violating their conscience by non-moral in and of themselves do's and don'ts. ***“And if your hand...”***, now this is rhetorical device. This is hyperbolic language. This is not monasticism. This is not self-flagellation. This is not where you're supposed to literally go cut your hand off. He says ***“if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off.”*** By the way, think about it. If you cut your foot off, you'd really be stumbling. If it causes you to stumble, ***“cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than having two hands or two feet to be cast in the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, and throw it from you. It's better for you to enter life with one eye...”*** Again, you know it's hyperbolic. You know it's rhetorical language because if I can see something inappropriate with one eye, I can see it inappropriate with the other eye that I don't pluck out. If I pluck out both eyes, I'd be blind. But yet people do stupid things. Okay. He says ***“...better for you [to enter life with one eye], than having two eyes and to be cast into the fiery hell. See that you do not despise...”*** (there it is. You stronger brother, you who think it's ridiculous that these people are hung up over hair length and hats in church and the type of scripture we read and whether you clap or you don't. See that you don't look down on them. Don't you despise them? And by the way, you weaker brother, you brother and sister who are really hung up on these



things. Don't you get a critical spirit and start condemning me or the Fusaro's or whoever, because maybe they don't have that conviction in that non-moral area that you do. And what's he say?) *...you do not despise one of these little ones*, (Talking about believers, not chronological age.) *for I say to you that their angels in heaven* (I hate to burst your bubble on this. It doesn't mean that we all have guardian angels. It's basically collective there) *their angels in heaven continually behold the face of the father who is in heaven*. What's he saying there? Almighty God is constantly watching his sheep, believers in Christ. Angels in heaven are constantly staring at the face of God and wanting to see what He may want them to do and dispatch angels to minister as needs come up to His sheep. They're constantly looking for the welfare of the sheep. And what he's saying is don't you look down on a so-called weaker brother or sister. Almighty God and the angels in heaven are watching over that individual's life as well as your own. Now that verse 11 in my New American Standard Translation is in brackets. And what the compilers are telling you there is it was not in the original and perhaps best manuscripts. And they're right. Verse 11 says *[For the son of man has come to save that which was lost.]* I think that was added later. That's a scribal addition is not in the original text. And I'll tell you why. Because the entire flow of this chapter is about believers. It's not about salvation/justification. It's about salvation/sanctification and growing in holiness and glorification if you will. So I don't even think it should be there. I think they're right to omit it. Verse 12. What do you think? *If any man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray...* We're not talking about the lost in terms of heaven. They're already sheep. They're in the fold. They can't be lost eternal damnation. He's talking about if any man has a sheep who who strays falls into sin or is hung up on something if you will *...has gone astray. Does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying?* Verse 13. *And if it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you he*



**rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. Thus it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.** Same word, *apollymi* (G622). It doesn't mean go to hell. The word can also be translated: become useless. And that's what he's saying here. He's saying it is your Father in heaven, it's not His will that any one of these sheep become useless, become unfruitful, because you would despise them and cause them to violate their conscience and cause them to engage in things that they have guilt feelings over and that bothers them.

Go back to Romans 14. Romans 14 again. And we'll tie down a couple of points. Oh, no. Go to Acts 15. Go to Acts 15. I'll tell you why. I love the way they did this. Remember I said that Paul jumped all over the Galatians. Here he's telling you be very careful. You be tender. You be loving. Your weaker brother is hung up on he thinks you got to have candles and incense or in the Jewish context he feels like you need to worship on a certain day or you need to do this or you need to go through these rituals or you know you can't eat a certain food. He's still tied into dietary laws and stuff like that. You be very careful with him. When it comes to the Galatians he just blisters them remember? And says if anybody else preaches you another gospel let him be anathema. How dare you foolish Galatians. Are you so ready to go back to another gospel which is not another gospel at all? Were you saved by keeping these works of the law or were you saved by grace and faith in Christ and he blisters them. Why? Because they were making salvation justification contingent upon keeping all those ceremonial laws. That's not the case here. We're talking about people who are already saved by grace through faith in the family of God but they got some traditions that they still think are spiritual if you do or don't do them and they're hung up and you get that. Okay why did I want you to go to Acts 15? Because in Acts 15 is the famous situation where, and by the way, Paul comes out of being a Pharisee. If anybody kept dietary laws and restrictions and could be a legalist it would



be Paul. He gets it. But in Acts chapter 15, look at verse 1. ***And some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you're circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."*** Well, then Paul and Barnabas confront them and a big diatribe develops. And they say, man, you better go talk it over with the other elders in Jerusalem to figure out how to answer these guys. And look at verse 5. ***But certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees,*** exactly what Paul was out of, ***who had believed,*** they're genuine believers, ***stood up, saying, "it is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses."*** We're talking about Gentiles who've come to faith in Christ. But the Jewish believers are saying, some of them, are saying, wait a minute. That's not enough. I mean, it's okay that you're genuine in the family of God, but you also got to keep all these customs of Moses, okay? It's not a question of whether they're born again or not. They're born again. But it's a question of if you're going to do things right and really honor God and live a holy life, you also have to keep all of these other rituals. That council talks it over, realizes that no, that's not right. Don't need to do that. But I love the response that the council gives. Verse 19. ***Therefore it is my*** (and this is James speaking on behalf of the Jerusalem council) ***it's my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles,...*** In other words, we're not going to lay on them all these ceremonial laws because it's not appropriate. They're believers in Christ. And they don't have a conviction, and they're not hung up on that. And they have a freedom in Christ. And it's okay. And I know that some of the Jewish believers are still hung up on some of that stuff. So what do they tell them? ***...but that we write to them,*** that's these new Gentile believers, ***that they abstain,*** get this, ***from things contaminated by idols and from fornication...*** They say that because there was a certain sexual promiscuity that was engaged in some of their idolatrous temple worship when they were pagans. And before they came to know Christ. So basically what they're



saying, and then I'll finish it out. **...and what is strangled and from blood.** In other words, strangling, twisting the neck of the bird and sprinkling its blood on these pagan rites and altars. The sexual promiscuity that went with these pagan rites and so forth. Meat that's worshipped to idols, contaminated by idols, that kind of stuff. He's saying, look, write and tell those Gentile believers new believers in Christ they're not bound by the ceremonial Jewish laws. Any more than the Jews will grow, we hope, to realize they're not either. He says, but so that they don't offend their weaker Jewish brethren and their weaker Gentile brethren. Tell them, since they found their newfound faith in Christ, not to engage in any of those previous activities that were associated with temple life or that could in any way be seen to counter against some of the Jewish customs. Just live their life, in other words, their freedom in Christ, guarded, held back, reserved. So they don't cause their fellow Jewish believers or their Gentile believers who maybe still struggle with some of those things to have a problem.

Well, as Brian comes to lead us in a closing hymn, I want you to see how chapter 14 ends in Romans 14. He says, **The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God.** Let it be a matter of vertical relationship. It isn't that you have to exercise your freedom. You know you possess it. Have it before God. When it comes to exercising it, make sure you judge your audience. Former pastor of Scottsdale Bible Church, 30 years ago, gave a wonderful true life illustration. He had performed a wedding, and they were having a wedding reception at a country club here in the valley. Well, the wife, Holly, Holly and Daryl Delhousaye, Holly in the ladies room, overheard that some people were questioning, is the new pastor going to dance at the wedding? On the way there in the car, Daryl turned and said to her, tonight, Holly, at this wedding reception, we will not dance, to the glory of God. About 9, 10, 11 months later, he performed another wedding, another venue, another situation. Knew the people, knew everyone, was familiar with the relationships, and so forth. And at the wedding reception,



sitting at the table that night, after judging the room, he turned and said to his wife, tonight, we will dance to the glory of God. It's a question of knowing when, and when not, to curtail your liberty in love for your fellow believer.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for this time in Your word. Thank you for these truths from Your scripture. Lord, the simple leading principle is love. Seeking the best for our fellow believers. We live now in a culture which is daily increasing in vitriol, hate, bitterness, harsh language, and a self-righteous do-it-my-way attitude. We, as believers in Christ, are to live totally opposite lives. By Your grace, Father, enable us to do so. We ask it all again in the matchless name of Your Son, Jesus the Christ. Amen and amen.