

Who is the Weak Christian?

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[0 : 00] I'd like you to take your copy of the Scriptures and open up to Romans chapter 14.

! Romans chapter 14. And if you're using one of the pew Bibles that we have scattered around in the chairs for you, we just turned to page 948 in those Bibles and you'll be exactly where we need to be.

We've taken quite a bit of time off of our study from the book of Romans. In fact, there are probably some of you who are new to us and have only been coming more recently and you've missed all of the first 13 chapters of Romans.

That's okay. They're all online. You can go online and listen to them and catch up if you want to. It would take a while for you to listen to all of them, so just pick out a few of the key ones and listen to some of them and catch up with where we are because we've been in Romans for over two years.

And so there's a lot there. We've spent a great deal of time in this great book. And now here we are coming back to Romans after some time off, jumping in at chapter 14. And I'm excited for us to get back into this book, to get back into sort of the home stretch.

[1 : 14] We've got 14, 15, and 16 left in Romans. And this is going to be a great journey as we finish out this book together over the next two or three months. This morning we're just going to read the first four verses of chapter 14.

I really debated how much should I read. Really chapter 14 all the way down to chapter 15, verse 13. It's all one unit, but we're going to limit ourselves to just four verses this morning so that we can remember, hopefully, what we've read together.

So would you all stand in honor of the Word of God as we read together? The Apostle Paul writes in chapter 14, verse 1, As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.

One person believes that he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.

Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? Father, it is before his own master that he stands or falls, and he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

[2 : 26] Father, our great desire is that you would make us stand. That you, through the power of your Spirit working within us, would cause us to persevere in the faith, and to endure to the end, and so prove ourselves to be genuine followers of Jesus.

And so teach us this morning from your Word, and do that great work of preserving us and causing us to persevere, as we learn and meditate from your Word this morning.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat. All of us, if we were honest, would have to admit that life can, at times, be very difficult.

And it can be difficult for a lot of reasons. For instance, the Apostle Peter tells us that the devil is lurking around. He's roaming around like a roaring lion, and he's looking for people to devour.

So we have a real spiritual enemy who's actively trying to destroy us, who's actively trying to derail us in our walk with Christ, who's attempting to do all that he can to make shipwreck of our faith, and to cause us to walk away from Christ, or to cause us to fall headlong into sin.

[3 : 49] So that there's a great difficulty in life just knowing that there is an enemy out there. But even with the knowledge and even knowing that Satan is real and he's actively engaging in battle against us, if we were to be real honest, and if I were to be real honest this morning, I'm not sure that his activity is the primary thing that makes my spiritual walk difficult.

In fact, there are some other realities and some other issues that for me at least, and I think probably for many if not all of you, are more of a challenge than even the work of the enemy in our midst and against us.

There is, for instance, the reality that I'm a fallen, sinful person. That's just the truth. I'm sinful. Every day I'm tempted.

Every day I'm pulled by my own desires and by my own inclinations, quite apart from the work of the enemy who plays on those, yes, and who draws those out of me, yes, but even apart from that I find myself waking up in the morning still sinful, still fallen, still struggling, and so that's a reality that we have to wrestle with as we think about how to live the Christian life, how to be obedient to Christ.

Yes, Satan is a hindrance to that, but we ourselves are probably our biggest hindrance to ongoing and growing obedience to Jesus. But then, of course, there's another reality, and it's the fact that everybody else around us is fallen and sinful.

[5 : 23] It's bad enough that I have to wake up and deal with myself every morning, but I also have to wake up and deal with all of you guys every day, and you have to wake up and deal with me and everyone else around us.

I mean, it's bad enough that we're beset by our own fallen sinful desires, but so is everyone else in our family, so is everyone else in our church and everyone that you work with and that you are engaged with on a daily basis.

They're all, all of us together, we are sinful and fallen people, and some of the biggest challenges that we face in terms of growing spiritually and becoming more obedient to Jesus is just the simple fact that I'm a sinner, you're a sinner, and that makes life pretty hard most of the time.

It really, really does. And these chapters that we're looking at here in the book of Romans, particularly beginning in chapter 12, verse 1, down through chapter 15, verse 13, these chapters are really devoted to teaching us and showing us how to live a God-honoring life, how to live a life that, as Paul describes it in chapter 12, verse 1, is a life offered up of worship to God, how to do that, even while we are still struggling with our own sinful desires, and even while the people around us are still wrestling and struggling with their sinful desires.

These chapters are devoted to helping us, to giving us directions and pointers, to showing us how is it that your life can become increasingly an offering of worship up to God our Father, even while you are still struggling with sin and you're still having to deal with sinners out there in the world around you.

[7 : 06] And that's because Paul, as we've said over and over, in chapter 12, verse 1, turns a major corner in the book of Romans. He wrote the letter of Romans to the church in Rome so that he could familiarize them with himself and with his ministry.

So that the bulk of this particular letter is written not to give us instructions on how to live the Christian life, but the first 11 chapters are largely devoted to Paul's proclamation and defense of the gospel that he preaches.

He wants the Roman Christians to know, to understand what it is that he preaches, what is central to his message, and he wants to give a good account and a good defense of the gospel that he himself preaches.

So for 11 chapters, we have seen the Apostle Paul, and if you've not been with us through those 11 chapters, I encourage you to go back and listen to at least a handful of the sermons from those 11 chapters.

But for those 11 chapters, he proclaims the gospel to us. He helps us to understand what the gospel is and how God has gone about accomplishing our redemption.

[8 : 15] So that he tells us at the very beginning of Romans that though we are fallen, though we are sinners, he says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. He tells us though that through faith in Christ, those who are sinners can in fact be made right with God.

That through faith in Jesus Christ, we can be declared by the judge of all the earth to be righteous, to be in a right standing with Him.

And that happens, Paul says, and he argues throughout the first 11 chapters of this book, that happens by faith alone in Christ alone. So that I can't move forward in chapter 14 and I couldn't have moved forward into chapters 12 and 13 without first saying to you what Paul says to us for 11 chapters here.

You need to trust in Christ and not in yourself and not in your own works and not in anything that you can perform if you want to receive the gift of eternal life.

It comes to us by faith alone as God counts the righteousness of Jesus to be our righteousness and as He punishes our sin on the cross in Christ.

[9 : 24] Or as Paul says, God made Him to be a propitiation for our sins. So 11 chapters are devoted to defining and defending and proclaiming that gospel message of justification by faith alone.

And yes, He chases some rabbits in the midst of those 11 chapters. Yes, sometimes He deals with the application of that truth throughout the first 11 chapters. But largely that's what most of Romans is devoted to.

But then in the beginning in chapter 12 verse 1, Paul turns the corner and begins to answer the question, how are those who have been made right with God through faith in Jesus?

That is, how are Christians supposed to live their lives? And most of the answer to that question has to do with, how do we handle living in this world as a sinful fallen person who has been redeemed by Christ and is in the process of being transformed by Christ?

But how do we live our lives as those kinds of people in ways that increasingly bring honor and glory to God Himself? And the reality of it is, and the answers that Paul gives, have to do with how we view ourselves and how we interact with people around us.

[10 : 41] That is, how do we address sin within us? And then how do we interact with other people who are trying to address sin within themselves? So that he tells us very early on in chapter 12 that we ought not to think too highly of ourselves.

Don't think too highly of yourself, the Apostle Paul says. Don't think too much about yourself. Know who you are. Understand, you're still a sinner. You're still struggling. You're still having to fight against being conformed to the world.

And you're still having to have your mind continually transformed by God Himself. That's who you are. That's the process that you're in. So don't think too much about yourself. But then he goes on immediately to begin to deal with, but how does a fallen sinful person redeemed by Christ in the midst of being transformed by God?

How does he deal with other people who are fallen and sinful and redeemed and in process of being transformed? So he tells us, for instance, when people persecute you, when they come against you, when you have to deal with people who are fallen and sinful but not yet redeemed, what do you do?

How do you interact with them? He says that you're not to seek vengeance against them. You're not to try to repay evil for evil. You're not to do that. That's not the Christian way. That's not the way that we interact with other fallen people in the world around us.

[11 : 56] And then he even applies that to our relationship to secular civil government. But then as you approach sort of the end, getting near the end of chapter 13, Paul arrives at what I think is the high point of his instructions to us on how can we live the Christian life with other Christians when we're all sinful and fallen?

How do we do that? If you sort of picture the book of Romans as a great mountain range, and you have these moments where Paul climbs to the top of the mountain and he really gets to the heart of the matter.

Say, for instance, in chapters 3, the end of chapter 3 and the first part of chapter 4 where Paul really gets to the heart of the matter of justification. Or in chapter 8 where there's so many memorable verses.

If you have very many verses memorized from the book of Romans from Sunday school or something like that, then probably most of them come from chapter 8 because chapter 8 is another peak within the mountain range of the book of Romans.

Then as you come to chapter 12, chapters 12 through 15 are another mountain. You picture them as another mountain within Romans. And the summit of that mountain is found in chapter 13 verses 8 through 10 where Paul tells us that the key, the absolute key to being able to live as a sinner in the midst of other sinners in a way that brings honor and glory to God is to love your neighbor.

[13 : 18] It is, in fact, love. Love your neighbor as yourself. It is not make a list of rules and do all that you can to live your life in accordance with those rules.

He says, in fact, that love for others, love for your neighbor results in the fulfilling of all the rules that you might list out and even all of the laws that God Himself has given to us in His law.

If you will love others, you will, Paul says, have fulfilled the law, you will be living the kind of life that is worshipful, that is an offering up to God.

And now here we come to chapter 14 where Paul is going to focus very, very specifically upon relationships within the body of Christ.

How does love for others play itself out within the body of Christ when the body of Christ is made up of people who have a lot of differences?

[14 : 18] When the body of Christ is made up of people who have real substantive disagreements on a number of issues, you and I are not going to agree on everything.

We're simply not. And there are going to be other Christians that you encounter in your life that are going to disagree with you on any number of things. So the question that we have to ask is, how does the command to love one another, how does it apply when we are dealing with real substantive differences of opinion among us?

Particularly, differences of opinion on the kind of life that brings honor and glory to Jesus. What do we do? What do you do if the person sitting in the chair next to you at church has a disagreement and disagrees with you on the way that you live some area of your life?

How do you handle that? That's what chapter 14 and the first half of chapter 15 are written to address. Paul is going to show us and teach us how do we deal with these differences among us.

And he spells out here for us two different groups within the church. I want you to take a look and you can see them very clearly. He uses these terms. He describes one group as those who are weak and another group as those who are strong.

[15 : 37] So if you look in verse 1 Paul says, as for the one who is weak in faith. And he's going to use that term weak over and over again.

And then if you move down to chapter 15 verse 1 we'll see the other term. We who are strong he says have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak. So there are two groups here that Paul wants to address in the church at Rome.

There are those whom he describes as strong and those whom he describes as weak. And for us I think this morning the main question that we need to address before we can move through the rest of chapter 14 and into chapter 15 we have to have a good handle on what does Paul mean when he describes a person as being weak.

What does that mean? Who is the weak Christian that Paul describes here? That will help us to see and understand who the strong Christian is and it will help you to see which category do you belong?

Which category should you be fit into? The reality is though that there will be times when on some things you go into the category of the strong and on other issues you may fall into the category of the weak.

[16 : 54] So it's very important for all of us to know and understand before we move forward who is the weak person? Who is this? What does Paul mean by that? Well in Paul's original context here writing to the church at Rome I think that the people that Paul is describing as weak are Jewish believers who have certain convictions that are not shared by Gentile believers in the church at Rome.

The church at Rome was a fairly diverse church. It really was. And that's to be expected in the capital of the empire. If you're going to find diversity within churches you don't usually find that in small towns.

You usually find it within the city. And that was the same then as it is now. And there was no more important city than the city of Rome. A busy, bustling city. A city where a number of Jews lived and of course a city primarily populated by Romans and Greeks.

So that the church in Rome was very, very diverse. And it had within it both Jewish believers who had converted and it had within it many Gentile believers who had come to trust in Christ.

And there were some fundamental differences of opinion about how the Christian life ought to be lived between these Jewish believers in the church of Rome and the Gentile believers of the church at Rome.

[18 : 18] Now specifically here Paul points out three things. There were probably more things. But Paul points out three issues that had arisen in the church at Rome.

One was the matter of whether or not a person could eat meat. And we're seeing that in the verses that we're looking at this morning. Take a look at verse 2. One person believes he may eat anything.

I take that to be a description of the Gentile believers in Rome. One person believes he may eat anything while the weak person eats only vegetables. Right? So there's the issue of eating.

Can we eat only vegetables? Or is it okay to eat just about anything we want including meat? And then later on Paul adds to that the issue of drinking wine.

Is it okay to drink wine? Or should we abstain entirely from the consumption of alcohol? There was a difference that they had among the various believers in the church there. And then lastly there is the third issue and that is the celebration of particular days.

[19 : 19] Most likely and we will take a look at this issue next week. Most likely these are issues of the Sabbath and other important Jewish holidays. How should those be treated?

The Gentile believers in Rome had no problem eating anything that they want. They didn't observe the Sabbath the way that the Jewish believers did and they had no problem drinking wine.

But these Jewish believers apparently did not eat meat, did not drink wine and continued as they had been before they had come to Christ. They continued to be devoted to things such as the Sabbath and the celebration of other days and events on the Jewish calendar.

Now, you might ask yourself and you might be thinking, but I've read the Old Testament, right? I mean, hopefully you have. But I've read the Old Testament and while there are a lot of laws about what the Jews could eat and drink, there's no law that says they cannot eat meat.

meat. And there's no law that says that they cannot drink wine. So why in the world are you labeling these people who do not eat meat and do not drink wine, why are you saying that they are most likely Jewish believers in the church at Rome?

[20 : 32] And there are a couple of reasons that I have for that. I want you to see and I want you to understand what these reasons are. One of the reasons is that there are occasions when the Jewish people would in fact abstain from the eating of all meats and not just certain meats like pork and shellfish.

There were occasions when they would abstain from the eating of all meats and usually coupled with that they would abstain from drinking wine. The best known instance where we see those two things actually coming together is in the book of Daniel where Daniel was in exile in the land of Babylon outside the land of Israel under the rule of the Babylonians and while he was there we are told very specifically he would not eat the king's food their meat primarily but he ate only vegetables and fruits and he would not drink the wine.

He abstained from those sorts of things. So we know that there is a precedent in the Old Testament particularly when you have a scattered people a people of the dispersion who the Jews in Rome would have been particularly when they're in that instance of saying I'm not going to participate in this culture and I'm not going to eat their meat and I'm not going to drink their wine.

So there's a precedent within the Old Testament for doing that at times. And then there may have been some even more basic practical reasons why a Jewish person living in Rome at that time and in particular a Jewish Christian living in Rome at that time would not have eaten meat.

So for instance we all know that that for Jews to eat most foods particularly meats they need to be certified as kosher. Now today in our world you can go to the grocery store and you'll sometimes find a section of kosher food and you'll find some foods that are labeled as kosher.

[22 : 15] In the ancient world particularly among those who were scattered throughout the world those things were usually determined within the synagogue by the rabbis. Certain things were blessed and they were allowed to eat those things.

But it probably would have been much more difficult in the city of Rome so far removed from the land of Israel it probably would have been more difficult there to obtain that kind of food and to have it readily available.

And then on top of that if you followed Christ if you become a follower of Jesus you have probably been ostracized by the synagogue itself. So there's every reason to think that a Jewish Christian living in Rome at this point in time very well may have for various reasons abstained from the eating of meat and in addition to that abstained from the drinking of wine.

So there are good reasons for thinking that may be the case. But the primary reason that I would say that these are probably Jewish believers is found here in the text of Romans 14 itself.

I want you to take a look at what the actual issue is here. Alright? So we can see it if you look down all the way to verse 14. Paul says, I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean so you might want to underline or circle that word unclean.

[23 : 33] Nothing is unclean in itself but it is, here it is again, unclean for anyone who thinks it, unclean. Alright? So the issue here is is the food unclean?

Or on the other hand, you can look down in verse 20, do not for the sake of food destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, Paul says. So there's this distinction being made, there's a debate raging over whether or not the meat that they have available to them and the wine that they have available to them.

Is it clean or is it unclean? And that is fundamentally a Jewish question. Read through the book of Leviticus if you have time this week. And you will see over and over and over the laws of the book of Leviticus are defining and drawing parameters around which foods can be considered clean and which foods ought to be considered unclean.

And that's the issue here. It's not primarily about whether or not you can eat meat or drink wine. It's primarily about what's clean and what's unclean. And that is a very Jewish issue coupled with the issue of the celebration of particular days which is probably Sabbath issues we'll talk about next week.

And you have a good strong case for saying Paul is dealing with a rift. He's dealing with a division within the church at Rome that runs along the lines of Jewish believers and Gentile believers.

[25 : 03] So that the weak are those Jewish believers who abstain from meat and wine and celebrate certain days and the strong are those who eat meat drink wine celebrate their freedom in Christ and do not feel burdened by the Jewish calendar the Old Testament ceremonies in any way.

Those are the groups and there is some sort of division amongst them in Rome that Paul before he even comes before he even gets there he wants to address it he wants to deal with it and he wants to apply the gospel to that particular issue.

But we shouldn't say well if this is an issue between Jews and Gentiles it really doesn't have anything to do with us. I mean it's nice to sketch it out historically so I can understand what was going on in the church there when Paul wrote this letter but I'm not quite sure that it has any real application to me.

And that's where I think we need to broaden out and understand that though Paul is addressing specifically here issues of division between Jewish believers and Gentile believers what he says here has broad application to an entire range of issues that we're going to have to grapple with as we discern and as we try to figure out what's permissible and what is not permissible for believers to do and what do we do when we disagree on the answers to those questions.

So in Paul's context the weak or Jewish believers the strong or primarily Gentile there's probably some overlap probably some Gentile believers who side with majority Jews and some Jews who would side with majority Gentiles but on the whole that's the division that we're seeing.

[26 : 49] But we need to say a little bit more about the group that's called the weak. We need to understand a bit more about them because let's be honest when we see that term weak it strikes us very negatively and it ought to because it's a negative term right?

It's a pejorative term so it ought to strike us in a negative fashion but I fear sometimes that we allow it to hit us with more of a negative force than it ought to and if that happens then we will not understand Romans 14 rightly and we certainly will not apply Romans 14 rightly.

So let me make just a few more observations about the identity of the weak there in Rome and here among us today before we look at some ideas of application from the text here.

So first of all the first thing that we need to recognize about the weak is that I keep calling them Jewish believers because in fact they are believers. They are Christians which means that they affirm and accept justification by faith alone or to put it another way they believe the gospel.

These are not people who are insisting that in order to be saved you have to obey the law or you have to follow a certain set list of rules if you want to be justified by God.

[28 : 10] They are not arguing that. They are not saying that. If they were saying that Paul would not address them in the way that he addresses them here. If you look in the book of Galatians where Paul actually does deal with a Jewish contingent that has made their way into the church that says you have to obey the law you have to follow these rules to be saved and to be justified Paul deals with that group in an entirely different way than the way in which he addresses these people in Romans 14.

He tells them that they ought to be anathema accursed cut off that's what he says if you preach any other gospel Paul says other than the one he preached which is justification by faith alone then you are to be accursed Paul says that's how he treats people whom we might label as legalists who insist that you have to obey rules to be saved.

Paul says no but he doesn't do that here no he never condemns these people here that he calls weak in fact four times in chapter 14 he refers to them as brothers they're not outside the faith they're not pretenders they're not false teachers they're not teaching a false gospel they're not laying a burden for entry into the people of God upon the Gentiles that they ought not to lay upon them no these are brothers in Christ I said four times they're addressed as brothers you can take a look and you can see in chapter 10 why do you pass judgment on your brother why do you despise your brother then in verse 13 we're not to put a stumbling block or a hindrance in the way of a brother in verse 15 if your brother is grieved by what you eat over and over these are brothers in Christ you can see it though just in the way that Paul introduces the category of weak as for the one who is weak in faith in other words they have faith right they're weak in faith but they're not faithless they don't lack faith in Christ entirely they are weak in faith but they indeed have faith so we need to start by acknowledging that these people that belong into the category of weak whether in Paul's day or our own day they are our brothers and sisters in Christ we can make clear distinctions between what is inside and outside the faith what is what is contrary to the gospel and opposed to the gospel and that which is a disagreement but not a gospel issue

Paul's able to do that we ought to be able to do that Paul identifies the issues at play here in these chapters as not fundamentally opposed to the gospel and so should we anytime that we are able to identify issues that put a person into the category of weak they're not fundamentally gospel issues so these are believers these are followers of Jesus secondly we can layer in on top of that that these are not only believers but these are people who live God honoring lifestyles they give honor to God and glory to God in the way that they live and indeed Paul describes them as those who give thanks to God take a look here at the passage we can see in verse 6 the one who observes the day observes it note in honor of the Lord the one who eats eats in honor of the Lord since he gives thanks to God while the one who abstains there's the weak see it the one who abstains abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God so this is a person who lives their life in honor of the Lord they're bringing glory and honor to Jesus in the way that they live and they're living out of a heart of gratitude and thanksgiving to God so we ought to acknowledge that they're believers but even further than that we ought to acknowledge that they are godly men and women they love Jesus just as I do just as you do they are not to be labeled as well they're Christians but they're they're not really living a life that's pleasing to the Lord no

Paul says they are they are seeking his honor and glory in the ways in which they live and then the third thing that I want to point out to you besides those two things is that and more specifically it's that they're abstaining from eating certain foods and drinking wine and their observance of these particular days is not in and of itself a sinful thing now I say that because if you look down all the way to the end of chapter 14 Paul says this whatever does not proceed from faith is sin but we've already seen that their actions and their lifestyle are God honoring and that though they are weak in faith they do possess faith so that their lives are lives lived out of faith in Christ and their lives lived for the honor and glory of God and therefore their abstention from these things is not to be labeled by those who partake of those things as a sinful abstention it should not be treated that way it should not be thought of as that as that way and we will apply that observation here in just a few moments as we get back to the first four verses but I want you to really understand who it is that we're talking about what kind of group that we're dealing with before we do anything else in these two chapters these are followers of Jesus who love God and honor God in their lives and their refusing to do certain things is not in and of itself a sinful mindset or activity it simply is not so then you might be thinking why then are they called weak if they believe in Jesus and they live in a way that evidences their love for Jesus and their refusal to do these things that other believers freely do is not sin why does Paul use such a negative term to describe them why call them weak in what sense are they in fact weak and therefore lacking in the strength that is possessed by the strong they're lacking something something must be missing it's not a sinful something it's not a

[34 : 52] I don't want to glorify God something it's not a I don't believe the gospel something but something is missing and here here's an occasion where I think it is helpful for us to think about other places where Paul deals with similar issues now I have to say I don't think that Paul deals with this exact same issue anywhere else in any of his letters but he does deal with a very similar issue in 1 Corinthians chapter 8 now there Paul is not dealing with a division between Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians in 1 Corinthians chapter 8 Paul is dealing with a division between one group of Gentile believers and another group of Gentile believers and there the issue is not whether or not a person will eat meat or not eat meat it's will they eat meat that has been offered up to pagan idols in their temple that's the issue that Paul is addressing in 1 Corinthians 8 but he uses very similar language he uses the language of the weak and the strong in these chapters in 1 Corinthians so that I think that Paul is dealing with an issue that is so similar and so close to what he's dealing with in Romans chapter 14 that we can gain a better understanding of how he uses this term weak to describe other fellow believers and then bring that back and apply it here so I want you just quickly to turn over to 1 Corinthians chapter 8 1 Corinthians chapter 8 the issue as I said before is is it okay for the believers in the church at Corinth to eat meat that has already been offered up in sacrifice to some idol because the practice back then was that a person would go to the temple of whatever god it was that they worshipped and their animal would be slaughtered and the meat would be offered up as an offering and a portion of the meat would be kept by the priests that's how they got their food and then most of the meat just a small little bit of it would actually be burned on an altar most of the meat would then be taken to the market to be resold they weren't going to waste it all they were going to offer a piece of it a bit of it as a burnt offering a bit of it for the priest but then most of it would be taken off to the markets and depending upon what kind of offering it was and what sort of temple it was the proceeds of that sale would go to various places but that's the way that the system worked and so the question that they were wrestling with in Corinth was if you know that the meat being sold in the market was previously used in offering up a sacrifice and worship to a false god should you buy that meat and should you eat that meat that's the question that's the dividing point in Corinth a bit different than the dividing point in Rome but having said that let's look at what

Paul says here in 1 Corinthians chapter 8 verse 4 therefore he says as to the eating of food offered to idols we know and I want you to underline that word no we know that an idol has no real existence and that there is no god but one and we're going to get into all the details of this because I'm preaching in Romans now not 1 Corinthians but I just want you to recognize that Paul here in 1 Corinthians chapter 8 when he's talking about those who are weak he'll use the word weak down in chapter 9 to describe them when he's talking about the weak he says that the weak the weak apparently do not know this or they do not understand this to the degree that Paul who's among the strong that he understands it we know the strong we know that an idol is not anything there's no god but one so therefore we can eat the meat it's no big deal we know when we buy meat offered up to some false idol that idol is just a piece of wood or a piece of stone we know there's nothing to it so it's okay verse 7 however he says not all possess this knowledge you say to yourself what is it that the weak are lacking that the strong have the answer

I believe is knowledge there's some information some bit of knowledge that they do not possess that the strong possess and their lack of understanding their lack of some truth leads them to conclusions that those who possess that knowledge are not led toward now turn back to Romans chapter 12 and we've already read this but I want you to see the tie-in chapter 14 verse 14 I know Paul says see there I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself but he says it is unclean for anyone who thinks they think it's unclean but Paul knows he's certain he has knowledge there's nothing wrong with eating meat there's nothing wrong with drinking wine there's nothing wrong with not observing these particular days he knows that but the weak apparently do not know that and they think they are misinformed they are misguided they are lacking knowledge they think that it's wrong to do the things that

Paul knows it's okay to do that that's that's not a problem now we we are going to run into a multitude of issues alright in which which there will be some who lack knowledge that you have and you should not immediately label their lack of knowledge as some sort of sinful failing on their part Paul does not do that right he does not do that perhaps you have been a part of churches throughout your life that have been very clear in teaching what the Bible says maybe you have been discipled really well throughout your life maybe and maybe another believer has not been discipled well throughout their life and so they have some convictions they believe some things are wrong that in fact you know are not wrong do not look down upon them and do not think that they are sinful that they are doing something that is entirely contrary to the gospel and what they are doing do not treat them that way what they lack is knowledge and if you have the knowledge and if you know and you've been properly taught by the word and discipled it is then your job not to frown on them but slowly and patiently to teach them that is in fact what

Paul is doing in Romans 14 the weak are going to read this in Rome they're going to read it and they're going to learn from the apostle himself it's all clean it's okay but they're going to learn that when they read this letter and we should be as patient as Paul is and let them learn and let them grow Paul has some specific instructions in these first four verses that I want us to look at and then we'll be done he has some specific instructions first for how the strong should regard the weak and then how the weak should regard the strong so let's look at the first set of instructions and in the second Paul tells us you begin to see it just in verse 1 as for the one who is weak in faith welcome him that is literally receive him let him be a part of the community of the body of Christ let him come in and be a part don't ostracize them don't push them to the side but let them actually be a part of your life and the life of the local church let them really be a part it's okay that they're weak in faith it's okay that they lack certain knowledge of certain things welcome them in let them come in!

[43 : 13] again these are not gospel issues these are not fundamental theological issues that would put them outside the bounds of Christianity these are internal debates and Paul says welcome them bring them in receive them then he's going to say something else he says there in verse two one person believes he made anything while the weak person eats only vegetables let not the one who eats that's the strong let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains let not the one who eats the strong the one who knows these things are okay let him not despise the weak the one who abstains and we are sometimes guilty of that are we not we see them we think they just don't know and that's true but we look down on them for it they don't know they they're clueless they need to pick up their Bible and read it sometime because they got all these rules and regulations and it's just not in the book it's not there it's not a part of!

what is wrong with these people and we despise them and look down upon them as they are somehow subpar and yet these are people that Paul says are living their lives to the honor and glory of God and they're living lives of gratitude and thanksgiving to him we cannot despise the weak we cannot look down upon them that is to be our attitude you are among the strong you receive the and you do not look down upon them we'll have more to say in a few weeks about how the strong are to interact with the weak because Paul has more to say about it but we need to start there by saying the strong need to embrace and not despise the weak but then Paul turns his attention the interesting is that throughout these two chapters!

Paul doesn't really give a lot of instructions to the category of the weak most of what he has to say is addressed to the strong but here we do get a very clear command to the weak so let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains and now here's the command directed toward the weak and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats for God has welcomed!

So the strong are not to despise the weak but then the weak on the other hand are not to look at the strong they of course wouldn't in their minds ever label them as strong but they look at them and they think what kind of lifestyle are you living what are you doing what are you thinking are you going to go out and drink a bunch!

what is wrong with you! his own master you are not his judge he has a master his name is Jesus it's before his own master that he stands or falls you don't have the right to judge others weak you can't look at them because they do things that you don't think are okay to do you cannot look upon them and think they just don't know what they're doing of course I thought as I read this if these are really followers of Christ then in what sense are they going to judge right because if they believe the gospel they're obviously not going to look up on people who do things that they find to be unworthy of the Christian life they're not going to look up on them and say you're going to hell because you're not doing the things you have to do!

[46 : 56] I struggled to do the gospel and they're not going to do that because they believe the gospel what sense are they going to judge what does it mean for them to judge the strong and as I thought about it this is what came to mind because this is what I have seen most frequently I think at times those who have very strong convictions!

about certain behaviors and activities they will see others who do not share those convictions within the body of Christ and they will think things like this they will not say immediately you're not saved because you can't do that and be saved they won't say that immediately it contradicts the doctrine of justification but they will begin to think things and express things like!

I just don't know how anybody! who actually loves Jesus could do that or I don't get how anybody who believes in Christ could actually participate in that kind of how could they do that and then as a corollary to that very quickly it segues into you know what if they keep going down that way if they keep doing that then that's just going to show me that they never really believed in Jesus at all and therefore they judge them as not being worthy of the label Christian and we do these kinds of things all the time on a wide variety of issues and sometimes we don't even stop to think about why it is that we have differing opinions among ourselves on certain issues of behavior

I think one of the things that most readily leads someone to fall into the category of weak that is to develop convictions about specific behaviors that the Bible itself doesn't directly condemn what leads a person I think most often to find themselves in that category is a rightful recognition of a true and good biblical principle for how we ought to live our lives okay it starts there and that's good but then they zero in on how they are applying that principle in their own lives or the lives of their family or the life of their church or whatever they have a particular application of a biblical principle but over time they elevate their very particular application of a biblical principle to the level and give it the authority of the biblical principle itself and then they see others believers who agree with them on the biblical principle but do not apply that principle in the same way and then they conclude that that person is being disobedient to the scriptures let me try to make this more concrete for you alright let me give you some good examples of this perhaps

I hope these will be good I hope these will be somewhat helpful alright let me give you one that I think is very applicable within our church okay I'm up here each week I look around each week and rare is the week that I see more than one or two kids in our church that go to public school we just don't have very many alright I've sometimes laughed about that because when we started the church it never was one of those things where we're going to be a homeschool church or we're going to be an anti-public school church anything like that I never never entered my mind we're just planting a church we're just going to reach people right it's just sort of the way that God has knit us together at this point in time and throughout our last five years that's just how he knit us together as a church which is good and wonderful in a lot of ways my kids we've done homeschool they're all in private school right now so I is is a conviction based upon a solid sound biblical principle that parents are ultimately and finally and primarily responsible for the raising and upbringing of their kids and for the passing on of values and knowledge to their children that's a biblical principle and it's a good solid principle that everybody here should affirm we should all affirm it we should all agree that yes in an ideal normal family situation where you have a

[51 : 48] Christian family with Christian parents it is those parents job primarily to be the ones who instruct their children in how to live life and how to honor Jesus and everything that they do and so there are a lot of parents with that conviction will say we're going to do that by by homeschooling our kids we're going to have them with us every day and we're going to pass on this knowledge and that is a wonderful application of a true biblical principle right are you guys tracking with me I hope that you are but where we go astray is when we say anyone who does not do that is sinful and they're not being good parents and they're not acting like Christian parents they follow any other course to which I say where is that in the Bible right I can't find it what I find is a good sound solid biblical principle that has wonderful application through homeschooling but I don't find the Bible labeling the use of other people to help you in the education of your children as in and of itself sinful there are a lot of other factors granted that have to be considered in all of those things and there are some places where you would never want to hand your children over to be educated and I understand that and I get all of that it's a much more complicated issue than I'm making it out to be but at the root at its core it's a if we if we move from our application of a solid biblical principle to making a law that everyone must follow or they're living in sin then we have fallen into the category of the weak on that particular issue we have indeed or consider the issue of one that Paul addresses here in this chapter the consumption of alcohol is it okay for Christians to consume alcohol in any way and on any level well there are numerous places in the Bible where we are told that we are not to get drunk there are numerous places in scripture where we're told that we ought to not let anything have a controlling influence over us those are good true biblical principles and guidelines and rules that we ought to follow but when you apply that by saying therefore

I'm going to avoid drunkenness and I'm going to avoid being controlled by any substance by total abstinence from drinking consuming any sort of alcohol that's perfectly fine that's okay that's a choice that I've made I don't drink any alcohol primarily because I look behind me in time and see generations of alcoholics in my own family and at a very young age though I wasn't convinced that drinking was in and of itself wrong I became convinced that for me to apply the biblical principles of not being controlled by anything I better not touch it because it's probably going to gain the upper hand on me really quickly so that's my application for me I don't drink alcohol at all but then for me to impose my application of true biblical principles upon anyone else would be for me to then fall into the category of the weak and there there are issues upon issues upon issues where we can do this in the media that we consume and take part of in the stuff that we watch the stuff that we listen to in the places that we go in the people that we interact with and that we build relationships with there are numerous occasions there are numerous aspects of life in which there are solid real good biblical principles to guide us and every one of us is going to have to find our own applications of those principles in our lives and we are always going to be tempted to take our own application make a rule out of it and hand it to everybody else so that everybody who doesn't follow the rule is violating the principle and therefore they are guilty right what's the principle here in Romans 14 and 15 you don't want to do anything that dishonors God there's the principle something is defiling in any way if it defiles you if it makes you unclean before God you don't want to be a part of that that's a good biblical principle right and for some of the Jews who are part of the church in

Rome they've concluded this meat's going to defile us drinking wine's going to defile us if we don't observe the Sabbath we'll be defiled and then they lay that obligation upon the Gentile believers or those who disagree so there they fall into the category of the weak and Paul says if you're in that category do not judge your fellow believer in Christ do not judge them now the reality is that you don't usually know when you're in the category of the weak which means that all of us need a heavy dose of humility and patience to go along with it because if you're in the category of the weak you don't know you're there and you're still convinced that people around you are doing things that are wrong they ought not to be doing and so how do you handle that no one's come along yet to teach you no one's come along yet to instruct you in that area and disciple you in that area you must have humility and patience with others

I have no doubt in my mind that there will be times and issues upon which I fall into the category of the weak I know it even though I'm a pastor even though it's my job to teach and disciple I know there will be issues upon which I'm ultimately at the end of the day going to be in the category of the weak it's going to happen and so since I know that that's going to happen but when it happens I'll be blind to it I want to approach in general my life in the midst of other fellow fallen sinful people I want to approach them with humility and patience so that I don't begin to judge them and condemn them when they ought not to be our hope and the ground and the basis of all that we look forward to is the finished work of Jesus upon the cross for us and if we know that we have been redeemed and rescued and saved by mercy and by grace alone we ought to no matter which direction we're looking from the vantage point of the strong or from the vantage point of the weak we ought to extend that same kind of mercy out to our fellow brothers and sisters in

Christ let's pray