Romans 14

Weak in the faith—Heavy reliance on self. Obedience is stressed over trust. Instead of personal responsibility a person weak in the faith operates with more of a “control of their own destiny,” type of attitude.

Sensitive conscience—Since people who are “weak in the faith” stress obedience over trust they are more prone to anxiousness and worry about whether they have done right. They have a hyper vigilant conscience that has been trained to feel “okay” when it is appeased and totally discouraged when things don’t seem right.

Don’t look down—View yourself as superior

Must not condemn—Don’t write someone off as never amounting to something…until a person’s last breath assume that God can save them and make something of them.

Their own master will judge—You and I are not master of anyone else. God alone has the right to decide our destiny.

Some think one day is more holy (others think everyday is alike)—I will never forget when a Seventh Day Adventist said to me…”Saturday is the Sabbath, that is the day we are to worship.” I replied, “I’m pretty sure every day we are supposed to worship God.”

Those who eat any kind of food do it in honor of the Lord

Those who refuse certain foods do it to please God

Common denominator here is the “do it in honor of God.” If you believe that you shouldn’t drink coffee, or eat pork, or drink wine, in order to please God, then don’t.

If on the other hand you use coffee and pork, and wine as a reason to give thanks to God then, by all means enjoy those things.

Notice that Paul never says that people with a weak conscience are in the wrong and he never says that people whose conscience allows them to eat anything are superior. Instead he encourages them both to show honor and deference to each other. That leads to his next statement in which he says:

“Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall.” Romans 14:13

What does it mean to “cause another believer to stumble and fall?” Thankfully, we have a passage in 1 Corinthians 8 that helps us understand this concept…Paul wrote to the Corinthians…

**8**Now regarding your question about food that has been offered to idols. Yes, we know that “we all have knowledge” about this issue. But while knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church. **2**Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn’t really know very much. **3**But the person who loves God is the one whom God recognizes.

**4**So, what about eating meat that has been offered to idols? Well, we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God. **5**There may be so-called gods both in heaven and on earth, and some people actually worship many gods and many lords. **6**But for us,

There is one God, the Father,  
    by whom all things were created,  
    and for whom we live.  
And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
    through whom all things were created,  
    and through whom we live.

**7**However, not all believers know this. Some are accustomed to thinking of idols as being real, so when they eat food that has been offered to idols, they think of it as the worship of real gods, and their weak consciences are violated. **8**It’s true that we can’t win God’s approval by what we eat. We don’t lose anything if we don’t eat it, and we don’t gain anything if we do.

**9**But you must be careful so that your freedom does not cause others with a weaker conscience to stumble. **10**For if others see you—with your “superior knowledge”—eating in the temple of an idol, won’t they be encouraged to violate their conscience by eating food that has been offered to an idol? **11**So because of your superior knowledge, a weak believer for whom Christ died will be destroyed. **12**And when you sin against other believers by **encouraging** them to do something they believe is wrong, you are sinning against Christ. **13**So if what I eat causes another believer to sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live—for I don’t want to cause another believer to stumble.

1 Corinthians 8

Remember at the beginning of my sermon today I talked about…

Weak in the faith—Heavy reliance on self. Obedience is stressed over trust. Instead of personal responsibility a person weak in the faith operates with more of a “control of their own destiny,” type of attitude.

Sensitive conscience—Since people who are “weak in the faith” stress obedience over trust they are more prone to anxiousness and worry about whether they have done right. They have a hyper vigilant conscience that has been trained to feel “okay” when it is appeased and totally discouraged when things don’t seem right.

In the Corinthian church, much like the church in Rome, there was a mix of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. Some of the gentiles had come from backgrounds where eating certain foods was a way to gain favor with their so called gods. Since this was the case some were prone to thinking that these food sacrifices could help or hurt their relationship with Jesus, as well.

They had a heavy reliance on self and a sensitive conscience. As Paul had wrote to the Romans…

“…we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God. **5**There may be so-called gods both in heaven and on earth, and some people actually worship many gods and many lords. **6**But for us,

There is one God, the Father,  
    by whom all things were created,  
    and for whom we live.  
And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
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**7**However, not all believers know this. Some are accustomed to thinking of idols as being real, so when they eat food that has been offered to idols, they think of it as the worship of real gods, and their weak consciences are violated. **8**It’s true that we can’t win God’s approval by what we eat. We don’t lose anything if we don’t eat it, and we don’t gain anything if we do.”

Romans 14:4-8

Remember Jesus said…

**14**…come and hear. “All of you listen,” he said, “and try to understand. **15**It’s not what goes into your body that defiles you; you are defiled by what comes from your heart.”

**17**Then Jesus went into a house to get away from the crowd, and his disciples asked him what he meant by the parable he had just used. **18**“Don’t you understand either?” he asked. “Can’t you see that the food you put into your body cannot defile you? **19**Food doesn’t go into your heart, but only passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer.” (By saying this, he declared that every kind of food is acceptable in God’s eyes.)

**20**And then he added, “It is what comes from inside that defiles you. **21**For from within, out of a person’s heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, **22**adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. **23**All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you.”

If another distressed by what you eat or drink (not acting in love if you eat it).

All foods acceptable…But wrong to eat if it might **cause** another to stumble (in matters of faith).

If you have doubts and you do it anyway, then you aren’t following your convictions.

Let me finish with a slightly different example. When I was in Bible college, I had the privilege of getting to know a woman who was a member of local Indian tribe. She had a relative who had died and they were going to have a typical Native American burial service.

She struggled with whether or not she should go. To me it seemed easy. My thought was, “just go and support your family all the rituals wouldn’t change my faith in God.”

But she truly had spiritual concerns. She was worried that she might slip back into some of the ways that she was raised, putting her spiritual dependence on things other than Christ.

If I would have told her she should go…I might have caused her to stumble. This is what this passage is about.

It is not about someone feeling bad that they are a smoker or a drinker and then them starting again after they see you smoke or drink.

It is about us leading people to do things that are against their conscience before God when it comes to their faith in Jesus.

Can you be a smoker or a drinker or eat pork or shellfish or celebrate the Sabbath or set aside Sunday or gamble or watch rated R movies and love Jesus?

I say “Yes.” After all, it’s not what goes into the body, but what comes out…

But I would never tell someone who says “No,” that they have to say, “Yes.” That might cause them to stumble.