

# Romans 14:13-15 Commentary

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Romans 14:13 **Therefore** let us not **judge one another anymore**, but **rather determine this** --not to **put** an **obstacle or a stumbling block** in a **brother's** way. ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** Meketi oun allelous krinomen (1PPAS): alla touto **krinate (2PAAM)** mallon, to me tithenai (PAN) proskomma to adelpho e skandalon.

**Amplified:** Then let us no more criticize and blame and pass judgment on one another, but rather decide and endeavor never to put a stumbling block or an obstacle or a hindrance in the way of a brother. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**NLT:** So don't condemn each other anymore. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not put an obstacle in another Christian's path. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** Let us therefore stop turning critical eyes on one another. If we must be critical, let us be critical of our own conduct and see that we do nothing to make a brother stumble or fall. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** Therefore, no longer let us be judging one another. But be judging this rather, not to place a stumbling block before your brother, or a snare in which he may be entrapped.

**Young's Literal:** no longer, therefore, may we judge one another, but this judge ye rather, not to put a stumbling-stone before the brother, or an offence.

**ROMANS ROAD  
to RIGHTEOUSNESS**

[Romans 1:18-3:20](#)

[Romans 3:21-5:21](#)

[Romans 6:1-8:39](#)

[Romans 9:1-11:36](#)

[Romans 12:1-16:27](#)

SIN	SALVATION	SANCTIFICATION	SOVEREIGNTY	SERVICE
NEED FOR SALVATION	WAY OF SALVATION	LIFE OF SALVATION	SCOPE OF SALVATION	SERVICE OF SALVATION
God's Holiness In Condemning Sin	God's Grace In Justifying Sinners	God's Power In Sanctifying Believers	God's Sovereignty In Saving Jew and Gentile	God's Glory The Object of Service
Deadliness of Sin	Design of Grace	Demonstration of Salvation		
		Power Given	Promises Fulfilled	Paths Pursued
Righteousness Needed	Righteousness Credited	Righteousness Demonstrated	Righteousness Restored to Israel	Righteousness Applied
God's Righteousness IN LAW	God's Righteousness IMPUTED	God's Righteousness OBEYED	God's Righteousness IN ELECTION	God's Righteousness DISPLAYED
Slaves to Sin	Slaves to God			Slaves Serving God
Doctrine				Duty
Life by Faith				Service by Faith
Modified from Irving L. Jensen's excellent work " <a href="#">Jensen's Survey of the NT</a> "				

#### THEREFORE: oun

- [Romans 14 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Therefore** refers back to [Ro 14:10-12] in which Paul reminds his readers that God alone is qualified and has the authority to judge the minds and hearts of His people, who will all stand before His judgment seat (Ro 14:10) and give account of themselves to Him (v12 cf. 2Co 5:10). Judgment is God's exclusive prerogative (cp Ro 12:19-note).

**John MacArthur** - The word "therefore" takes us back to the first twelve verses of Romans 14. Since the Lord receives every Christian--whether weak or strong--since He is able to hold up both strong and weak, since He is sovereign over each, and since the Lord is the final judge, we are not to judge one another. The weak are not to judge the strong because they think they are abusing their freedom, nor are the strong to condemn the weak for their lack of faith and small-mindedness. ([Building Up One Another Without Offending, Part 1 - See dropdown list](#))

**James Denney** explains that in Ro 14:13-23 "The Apostle now proceeds to argue the question of Christian conduct in things indifferent from another point of view—that of the influence which our conduct may have on others, and of the consideration which is due to them, thus much follows from what has been said already, and **judge** (not) therefore forbids both the censorious and the contemptuous estimate of others. ([Romans 14 Commentary - Expositors Greek Testament](#))

**John Murray** (introducing Ro 14:13-23) - This section is directed largely to the strong and enjoins upon them the action which love for the weak requires. In this part of the epistle it has been already noted how much emphasis falls upon love (cf. 12:9; 13:8–10). The necessity of walking according to love (vs. 15) is in this section applied to the behaviour which consideration for the well-being of weaker brethren must constrain on the part of the strong. ([Epistle to the Romans - NICNT](#))

**Middletown Bible** - The Law of Love (Romans 14:1-15:3) - For further help in understanding how to live so as to not cause a brother to stumble, see our paper entitled, "[Guidance: 67 Biblical Tests to Use in Deciding Upon a Course of Action](#)"

#### LET US NOT JUDGE ONE ANOTHER ANYMORE: Meketi oun allelous krinomen (1PPAS):

- Mt 7:1, 2, 3, 4, 5 James 2:4, 4:11
- [Romans 14 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Let us no longer have the habit of criticizing one another.

This statement summarizes what we have covered so far: we are not to judge one another which is in harmony with what the Jesus instructed [Mt 7:1-note] It is the unloving attitude of contemptuous superiority by strong believers and the equally unloving attitude of self righteousness by weak believers (Ro 14:3-note) by which they judge one another. From Paul's day to ours, those wrongful judgments have been major causes of disrespect, disharmony, and disunity in the church.

**Let us not judge (krino)** - Note that this phrase is a **present imperative with a negative** which means to stop an act (judging) that has begun.

**A T Robertson** writes ""Let us no longer have the habit of criticizing one another." A wonderfully fine text for modern Christians and in harmony with what the Master said (Matt. 7:1)." ([Word Pictures of the New Testament](#))

**Bengel** adds that this is "A beautiful Mimesis (repetition of words in order to refute them) in relation to what precedes, let us no longer judge (This matter requires careful attention. V. G.)

**Vine** - This is addressed to the strong. There is a slight change in the use of the word krinō, "judge," amounting almost to a play on the word. It now signifies "let this be your decision," or "determination." Decisions thus made, in the exercise of our judgment in our service here below, will determine the nature of our reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ. (Collected writings of W. E. Vine)

**One another (240) (allelon)** means each other and speaks of a mutuality or sharing of sentiments between two persons or groups of persons. **Allelon** is a reciprocal pronoun which most often is used in the context of encouragement and edification which is mutually beneficial. In the present context the reciprocal activity (passing judgment) is mutually detrimental, divisive or even destructive.

**One another** is a common NT phrase (especially in Paul's letters) with most uses relating to the building up of the body of Christ. As such the "**one anothers**" in the NT would make an excellent Sunday School study (or topical sermon series), taking time to meditate on each occurrence, asking whether it is being practiced (in the Spirit-note) in your local church and seeking to excel still more (cp Php 1:9, 10, 11 -notes; 1Th 3:12-note, 1Th 4:1-note), 1Th 4:10-note). Below is a list of the NT uses of **one another** (be sure to check the context for the most accurate interpretation).

Ro 12:10, 16; 13:8; 14:13, 19; 15:5, 7, 14; 16:16; 1Co 6:7; 7:5; 11:33; 12:25; 16:20; 2Co 13:12; Ga 5:13, 15, 26; Ep 4:2, 25, 32; 5:19, 21; Php 2:3; Col 3:9, 13, 16; 1Th 3:12; 4:9, 18; 5:11, 13, 15; 2 Th 1:3; Heb 3:13; 10:24, 25; James 4:11; 5:9, 16; 1Pe 1:22; 4:8, 9, 10; 5:5, 14; 1Jn 1:7; 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2Jn 1:5

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**Unfairly Judged** - We sometimes criticize others unfairly. We don't know all their circumstances, nor their motives. Only God, who is aware of all the facts, is able to judge people righteously.

John Wesley told of a man he had little respect for because he considered him to be miserly and covetous. One day when this person contributed only a small gift to a worthy charity, Wesley openly criticized him. After the incident, the man went to Wesley privately and told him he had been living on parsnips and water for several weeks. He explained that before his conversion, he had run up many bills. Now, by skimping on everything and buying nothing for himself he was paying off his creditors one by one.

"Christ has made me an honest man," he said, "and so with all these debts to pay, I can give only a few offerings above my tithe. I must settle up with my worldly neighbors and show them what the grace of God can do in the heart of a man who was once dishonest."

Wesley then apologized to the man and asked his forgiveness.

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**BUT RATHER DETERMINE (judge, decide) THIS: alla touto krinate (2PAAM) mallon:**

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**But (alla)** is a strong contrast (see **term of contrast**)

**Rather (mallon)** is a comparative adverb referring to what is better (as compared to what is merely "good"). **Mallon** then implies prioritizing or ranking which elevates the better over the good, i.e. the higher priority (the more important = "determine not to put an obstacle") over the less-important ("let us not judge").

**Determine** (2919) (**krino**) (see 14 uses in [Romans](#)) is used twice in this verse, but with a slightly different connotation. In the first use of "**krino**" "**let us not judge one another**" the verb carries the idea of condemnation, as it does in (Ro 14:3, Ro 14:4, Ro 14:10). But in the present phrase, **krino** is translated **determine**, which refers to making a decision.

**Aorist imperative** conveys the sense of taking a definite action ("Do it now! Just do it!"), even a sense of "urgency": The idea is **Do this & do it now! Do it effectively!** Check yourself out first -- Are you pushing your Christian liberty so hard, are you insisting on your rights in certain areas, and your freedom to indulge in something, that you are upsetting others and forcing them to act beyond their own conscience (stumbled or snared)? That is what you ought to judge. What is the effect upon others of your attitudes about some of these things?

We should **determine** (judge) that we will never do anything to hinder a brother in his spiritual progress. None of these nonessential matters is important enough for us to cause a brother to stumble or to fall.

"Being judgmental" carries the negative idea of denunciation, whereas "using your best judgment" refers to making a careful decision, with no negative connotation. Paul's play on words demands that we should never be judgmental of fellow believers but instead should use our best judgment to help them.

**MacArthur** - Paul tells us we do have a decision to make. And he puts it in the form of an **aorist imperative**, which calls for action. Our decision should be not only to stop judging one another, but also to stop putting stumbling blocks in the way of others. That has to be the preoccupation of our lives. Picture a brother or sister walking along the path of the Christian life, then someone puts something in their path to cause them to fall. We don't want to stop a fellow believer in their spiritual progress by causing them to fall into sin. ([Building Up One Another Without Offending - See dropdown list](#))

#### NOT TO PUT AN OBSTACLE: to me tithenai (PAN) proskomma:

- [Romans 14 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Obstacle** (4348) (**proskomma** [word study] from **prós** = to, against + **kópto** = cut, strike) means to cut toward or against, to strike against and is used of those who strike against a stone or other obstacle in the path. It can describe literal or figurative stumbling (figurative of course in this context). It is something a person trips over. Thus **proskomma** can describe that over which a soul "stumbles," i.e. by which is caused to sin or backslide or even apostatize. It is also used figuratively, to describe a cause of falling or an occasion of sinning (Ro 14:13, 20; 1 Cor. 8:9; Sept.: Ex. 23:33; 34:12)

**Proskomma** - 6x in 6v in **NAS** - Ro 9:32, 33; 14:13, 20; 1Cor 8:9; 1Pet 2:8. **NAS** = obstacle(1), offense(1), stumbling(3), stumbling block(1).

**James Denney** explains that **proskomma** "does not occur in the Gospels, but it is a remarkable fact that in most of our Lord's express teaching about sin, it is sin in the character of skandalon, a snare or stumbling-block to others, with which He deals. ([Romans 14 Commentary - Expositors Greek Testament](#))

**Barclay** writes that "**proskomma**, means 'a barrier', 'a hindrance', 'a road-block'. It is the word that would be used for a tree that has been felled and laid across a road to block it. We must never do or allow anything which would be a road-block on the way to goodness. (William Barclay. New Testament Words)

In this verse **proskomma** speaks of the spiritual hindrance to another caused by a selfish use of liberty or alternatively our tendency to set up a list of do's and don'ts. Either way could cause the other person to stub his spiritual toe!. Paul says do not do this.

**Robertson McQuilkin** has a note regarding the importance of context as a guide to accurate interpretation (see also **Keep Context King**) in his excellent work **Understanding and Applying the Bible...**

**Romans 14:13-15:1: The Strong and the Weak** - We might think that a strong person is one who is strong in his opinions, his convictions, his character, or his spirituality. One who is weak is weak in one or more of those areas. That view is legitimate. But is that what Paul was contrasting in Romans 14 when he spoke of the strong and the weak? The context must determine. He was speaking of being strong in faith and weak in faith. The one who is strong in faith has confidence that he may eat anything. The one who is weak in faith lacks that confidence. In Paul's case, he was the strong person and biblical in his convictions. However, it is quite possible to be strong and wrong. Such a person could be weak in character or weak spiritually and still be "strong" in the sense in which Paul used the term here.

It is important for the interpretation of the entire passage to learn from the context what the meaning is. That is, incidentally,

another good example of how the context extends beyond chapter divisions. In Romans 15:1 we have additional exhortation and contrast between the strong and the weak: "Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves." Paul then gives Christ as a model to show how that difficult injunction can be obeyed—all in another chapter but part of the same thought. (Moody Pub. 1983, 1992)

## OR A STUMBLING BLOCK IN A BROTHER'S WAY: to me tithenai (PAN) proskomma to adelpho e skandalon

- [Romans 14 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**James Denney** - (Stumbling block) does not occur in the Gospels, but it is a remarkable fact that in most of our Lord's express teaching about sin, it is sin in the character of **skandalon**, a snare or stumbling-block to others, with which He deals. Paul develops his ideas quite freely from his conception of faith, but in all probability he was familiar with what Jesus taught (Matthew 18). ([Romans 14 Commentary - Expositors Greek Testament](#))

**A Stumbling Block** (4625) (**skandalon** from a root meaning jump up, snap shut) was originally the piece of wood that kept open a trap for animals. Outside the Bible it is not used metaphorically, though its derivative skandalethron (e.g. a trap set through questions) is so used. The English word **scandal** is derived from the noun via the Lat. **scandalum**.

Thus **skandalon** was literally, that movable part of a trap on which the bait was laid, and when touched caused the trap to close on its prey. **Skandalon** thus came to mean any entanglement of the foot. Figuratively, as used most often in Scripture, **skandalon** refers to any person or thing by which one is drawn into error or sin. (but see more detailed notes below)

The use of alcohol is an example of a stronger brother who in the process of using his liberty regarding alcohol intake potentially sets a stumbling block in his weaker brother's way. One must never underestimate the potentially detrimental effect this can have on a former alcoholic. Our drinking, even in moderation, could easily place a stumbling block in that brother's way and cause him to fall back into his former addiction.

**Skandalon** - 15x in 13v in the **NAS** - Mt 13:41; 16:23; 18:7; Luke 17:1; Rom 9:33; 11:9; 14:13; 16:17; 1 Cor 1:23; Gal 5:11; 1 Pet 2:8; 1 John 2:10; Rev 2:14. **NAS** = cause for stumbling(1), hindrances(1), offense(2), stumbling block(7), stumbling blocks(4).

**Trench** explains "**stumbling block**" or skandalon as "literally, that part of a trap on which the bait was laid, when touched caused the trap to close on its prey came to mean any entanglement of the foot."

When the bait touches trap it is triggered and closes shut on its victim. That's a "great" picture of sin which is deceptive (Heb 3:13-note) and virtually always looks alluring (and in fact does have a transitory "pleasure" - Heb 11:25-note), but when "touched" (whether in thought, word, or deed), it captures its unsuspecting prey (cp "cords of sin" in Pr 5:22 - see exposition ; Jesus' warning in Jn 8:34 where commit is in the present tense = one's habitual practice!)

**Vine** has a helpful discussion: **Skandalon** originally was the name of the part of a trap to which the bait is attached, hence, the trap or snare itself, (in the picture of the trap note the centrally located "pitchfork" shaped trigger where bait is to be placed & which when stepped on releases the two side bars which entrap the victim in a vise like grip -- keep this picture in mind as you meditate on the uses of this word in Ro 14:13 & in the other NT passages) as in Ro 11:9, 'stumbling block,' quoted from Ps 69:22, and in Re 2:14, for Balaam's device was rather a trap for Israel than a stumblingblock to them, and in Mt 16:23, for in Peter's words the Lord perceived a snare laid for Him by Satan. "In NT Skandalon is always used metaphorically, and ordinarily of anything that arouses prejudice, or becomes a hindrance to others, or causes them to fall by the way. Sometimes the hindrance is in itself good, and those stumbled by it are the wicked."\* Thus it is used (a) of Christ in Ro 9:33, "(a rock) of offense"; so 1Pe 2:8; 1Co 1:23 (kiv and rv, "stumbling block"), and of His cross, Ga 5:11; of the "table" provided by God for Israel, Ro 11:9; (b) of that which is evil, eg, Mt 13:41, rv, "things that cause stumbling" (kiv, "things that offend"), lit., "all stumbling blocks"; Mt 18:7, rv, "occasions of stumbling" and "occasion"; Lu 17:1; Ro 14:13, rv, "an occasion of falling" (kiv, "an occasion to fall"), said of such a use of Christian liberty as proves a hindrance to another; Ro 16:17, rv, "occasions of stumbling," said of the teaching of things contrary to sound doctrine; 1Jn 2:10, "occasion of stumbling," of the absence of this in the case of one who loves his brother and thereby abides in the light. Love, then, is the best safeguard against the woes pronounced by the Lord upon those who cause others to stumble. Cf. In Ho 4:17, the Septuagint is translated: "*Ephraim partaking with idols hath laid stumbling blocks in his own path*" (metochos eidolon Ephraim etheken (3SAAI) heauto [skandala](#)) ([Vine, W. Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#))

**Steven Cole** - In a sermon on our text, Pastor Ligon Duncan commented that someone needs to write a book, Romans 14 for Dummies, and he would be the first to buy it, because this is a difficult text to understand and apply in its context. I'd buy one, too! We're not concerned in our day about the spiritual implications of eating or not eating meat, which is the main issue Paul was

addressing. He also mentions keeping certain days as holy (Ro 14:5) and drinking wine (Ro 14:21), which may be a bit more relevant. But even so, it's difficult to apply these verses in a way that is true to the text.

For example, I've heard of older believers who wrongly use this text to lay unbiblical rules on younger believers. They tell them, "As a Christian, you can't dress or look like worldly young people do. You need to dress and look as I do. If you don't, you're causing me to stumble." In some strict Christian circles, women are not allowed to wear any makeup. Sometimes men are not allowed to grow beards, but in other groups, all the men must grow beards. And so it goes!

One of the most ridiculous church splits that I've ever heard of happened years ago when a preacher was trying to make a point with a strong gesture and his hand got caught in his necktie. Of course this distracted the congregation from his point, so he tore off his necktie and declared that ties are from the devil. Others disagreed, and so they split into the non-tie church and the tie-wearing church. My sentiments are definitely with the non-tie brothers (I think that ties are strangulation devices), but obviously this is not a biblical reason for splitting a church!

In Romans 14:1-12, Paul's main point is that we are to accept one another and not judge or look with contempt on those who differ with us over non-essential matters. He was talking both to weaker and stronger believers. The weaker believers were not weak in the sense of not being able to resist temptation. That kind of weakness is sin. Rather, they were weak in that they were hung up with scruples about things that the Bible does not command or with stipulations of the Jewish law that were fulfilled in Christ and thus no longer in effect. They tended to judge the Gentile believers who were not bound by these scruples. The stronger brothers (Paul classed himself with them, Ro 15:1) realized that we are no longer under the Mosaic Law, and so they didn't have a problem eating non-kosher meat. They realized (1Cor. 8:8), "But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat." But their tendency was to look with contempt on their Jewish brothers, belittling them for their petty rules.

Now (Ro 14:13-23), after an introductory summary that goes out to both sides (not to judge one another), Paul turns mostly to the stronger believers. He was concerned that they would flaunt their liberty in Christ to the detriment of weaker believers, who may be influenced to violate their consciences. Paul tells the stronger believers that love for their brothers should trump their use of liberty. As he states (Ro 14:15), "For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love." So the principle is: **Love for others should govern our exercise of liberty in Christ when our liberty would cause a weaker brother to stumble** Our main focus should not be on our liberty or our rights, but on loving our brother. Love gladly yields its rights when it is necessary to keep a weaker brother from stumbling. But while the overall principle is fairly clear, the difficulty is in the details. Love does not judge others on non-essential matters, but determines not to put obstacles or stumbling blocks in a brother's way (14:13).

Romans 14:13: "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way." Paul uses a play on words here: the word translated "determine" is the same word translated "judge" earlier in the sentence. We might paraphrase, "Don't judge your brother; rather, judge yourself so that you don't put an obstacle or stumbling block in your brother's way." Keep in mind that in this chapter, Paul is talking about non-moral matters where the Bible does not give clear commands. He is not talking about judging your brother regarding sin or serious doctrinal error (which we need to do), but rather on non-moral or secondary matters.

Not judging your brother means that you do not condemn him or question his salvation over matters of doctrine where the Bible is not clear or behavior where it gives no direct commands. You can have your own convictions before God by working through the issue biblically (Ro 14:5, 22), but let your brother work out his convictions. You aren't his judge; God is his judge and your judge, too!

The words "obstacle" and "stumbling block" are basically synonymous. "Obstacle" refers to anything that would trip up your brother. "Stumbling block" originally referred to a trap. Here it refers to any cause of spiritual downfall or ruin. Paul (Ro 9:32-33) uses both words of Jesus, who is the "stone of stumbling" and "rock of offense" for those who try to be justified by their works. The cross of Christ offends the self-righteous because it tells them that their works can never commend them to the holy God.

To put an obstacle or stumbling block in your brother's way would be to do something in front of a weaker brother that for you is a matter of liberty in Christ, but it's not something that he feels free to do. When he sees you doing it, he joins you in doing it, but it violates his conscience. Perhaps he goes along with you because he wants your approval, but he gets his eyes off of living to please the Lord. He sins because he is not acting in faith (14:23). He is disobeying the Lord.

It's difficult to come up with modern examples, but perhaps one example would be having a glass of wine or beer. The Bible does not prohibit drinking alcoholic beverages, as long as you do not get drunk and you're not depending on the alcohol to escape from your problems. But perhaps you're with a new believer who had a problem with alcohol before he got saved. Because of the devastating effects alcohol had on his life, he now believes that it's wrong to have even one drink. You're out to dinner with him and you order a beer or a glass of wine with your meal. Your brother sees this and wants to fit in, so he orders a drink with his food, but in so doing, he violates his conscience. His guilt causes him to fall away from the Lord. Perhaps he begins drinking to excess again. You have put a stumbling block in your brother's way.

Does this mean that you must become a teetotaler? Well, there may be good reasons to do that, but not necessarily. The entire church is not limited by the conscience of the weakest believers in its midst. But you should not flaunt your liberty in front of a weaker believer when you know that it's an issue for him (see 1Cor. 10:23-30). Out of love for him, limit your liberty in his presence. As the Lord gives opportunity, you may teach him about true liberty in Christ. But don't do anything that would cause him to violate his conscience by following your example. That's the next point, which Paul explains in verse 14: ([Love Trumps Liberty Romans 14-13-16](#))

**Thomas Brooks** - O sirs, as you would not harden sinners, as you would not encourage sinners, as you would not tempt sinners, as you would not stumble sinners, yes, as you would not have a hand in the damnation of sinners—take heed of scandalous sins, Romans 14:13. O sirs, as you would not provoke the great God, 1 Kings 11:9, as you would not crucify afresh the Lord of glory, and put him to an open shame, as you would not set the Comforter a-mourning, who alone can comfort you, as you would not raise a hell in your own consciences, and as you would not darken the church's glory—fly from scandalous sins as you would fly from hell itself. ([Holiness](#))

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## Resolve

Resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way. —Romans 14:13

I once decorated a notebook with definitions of the words idea, thought, opinion, preference, belief, and conviction to remind myself that they do not mean the same thing. The temptation to elevate an opinion to the level of a conviction can be strong, but doing so is wrong, as we learn from Romans 14.

In the first century, religious traditions based on the law were so important to religious leaders that they failed to recognize the One who personified the law, Jesus. They were so focused on minor matters that they neglected the important ones (Matt. 23:23).

Scripture says that we need to subjugate even our beliefs and convictions to the law of love (Rom. 13:8,10; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8), for love fulfills the law and leads to peace and mutual edification.

When opinions and preferences become more important to us than what God says is valuable to Him, we have made idols out of our own beliefs. Idolatry is a serious offense because it violates the first and most important command: "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex. 20:3).

Let's resolve not to elevate our own opinions above God's, lest they become a stumbling block and keep others from knowing the love of Jesus.

A Prayer Lord, help me not to elevate my opinions and make others follow. You are the convicter of hearts. May others learn of Your love through me.

The greatest force on earth is not the compulsion of law but the compassion of love.

By Julie Ackerman Link ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

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**Living With Others in View** -To become a Christian is easy — for it is just receiving God's grace through faith in the Savior. To live the sanctified life, however, is extremely difficult, especially since the pathway to Glory is narrow, and our instructions for travel include such admonitions as: "pray without ceasing," "be ye perfect," and "love thy neighbor as thyself." In fact, we are told to curb even legitimate desires, if they tend to offend a weaker brother (Rom. 14: 19-21). Paul warns in our text that we must be doubly careful not to put a "stumbling block or an occasion to fall" in the way of a fellow believer.

I am told that tourists in the Alps are cautioned at certain points by the guides not to speak or sing or even to whisper, as the faintest breath might start reverberations in the air which could loosen a delicately poised avalanche from its place on the mountain, and bring it crashing down upon the villages and fields in the valley below. J. R. Miller, in commenting on this, wisely points out, "There are men and women who are walking under such a stress of burdens, cares, responsibilities, sorrows and temptations, that one whisper of censure, criticism, complaint or unkindness may cause them to fall under their load. Let us beware, therefore, how we conduct ourselves, for it is a crime thus to imperil another soul."

Recognizing the seriousness of life, every Christian who is consecrated at all must guard against being an offense to others. Let us walk carefully and prayerfully today lest some thoughtless word or deed impede the spiritual progress of a fellow believer! Have your feet on errands of love been bent,

Or on selfish deeds has your strength been spent? Has someone seen Christ in you today; Or has your life led a soul astray? — V.



**Live for thy neighbor, if thou wouldst live for God!**

—Seneca (An Unbeliever!)

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**Resolve to Resolve** - I haven't made any New Year's resolutions since 1975. I haven't needed any new ones—I'm still working on old ones like these: write at least a short note in my journal every day; make a strong effort to read my Bible and pray each day; organize my time; try to keep my room clean (this was before I had a whole house to keep clean).

This year, however, I am adding a new resolution that I found in Paul's letter to the Romans: "Let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way" (14:13). Although this resolution is old (about 2,000 years), it is one that we should renew annually. Like believers in Rome centuries ago, believers today sometimes make up rules for others to follow and insist on adherence to certain behaviors and beliefs that the Bible says little or nothing about. These "stumbling blocks" make it difficult for followers of Jesus to continue in the way of faith that He came to show us—that salvation is by grace not works (Gal. 2:16). It requires only that we trust in His death and resurrection for forgiveness.

We can celebrate this good news of Christ in the coming year by resolving not to set up hurdles that cause people to stumble. -- Julie Ackerman Link ([Resolve To Resolve - Our Daily Bread](#)) ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Thank You, Lord, that You sent the Holy Spirit  
to do the work of convincing and convicting.

May I be content with my own assignment:  
to do what leads to peace and edification.

**Faith** is the hand that receives God's gift,  
then **faith** is the feet that walk with God.

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Agreeing to Disagree

Read: Romans 14:1–13

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace. Romans 14:19

I remember hearing my dad talk about how difficult it was to walk away from unending arguments over differing interpretations of the Bible. By contrast he recalled how good it was when both sides agreed to disagree.

But is it really possible to set aside irreconcilable differences when so much seems to be at stake? That's one of the questions the apostle Paul answers in his New Testament letter to the Romans. Writing to readers caught in social, political, and religious conflict, he suggests ways of finding common ground even under the most polarized conditions (14:5–6).

According to Paul, the way to agree to disagree is to recall that each of us will answer to the Lord not only for our opinions but also for how we treat one another in our differences (v. 10).

Conditions of conflict can actually become occasions to remember that there are some things more important than our own ideas—even more than our interpretations of the Bible. All of us will answer for whether we have loved one another, and even our enemies, as Christ loved us.

Now that I think of it, I remember that my dad used to talk about how good it is not just to agree to disagree but to do so with mutual love and respect.

Father, please enable us to be patient and kind with those who don't agree with us about anything or everything.

We can agree to disagree—in love.

By Mart DeHaan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

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**An Obstacle Inventory** - Fault-finding is a popular pastime, and unfortunately a lot of us find it's easy to join the fun. Concentrating on the warts of others is a great way to feel better about ourselves. And that's just the problem. Avoiding the faults that need to be fixed in our own lives not only stunts our spiritual growth but also obstructs God's work through us. God's effectiveness through our lives is enhanced or hindered by the way we live.



It's no wonder, then, that Paul made a concerted effort to "put no obstacle in anyone's way" (2 Cor. 6:3 ESV). For him there was nothing more important than his usefulness for Christ in the lives of others. Anything that got in the way of that was dispensable.

If you want to be authentic and useful for God, take an obstacle inventory. Sometimes obstacles are things that in and of themselves may be legitimate, yet in certain contexts may be inappropriate. But sin is clearly obstructive to others. Gossip, slander, boasting, bitterness, greed, abuse, anger, selfishness, and revenge all close the hearts of those around us to the message of God through us.

So, replace your faults with the winsome ways of Jesus. That will enable others to see your "no-fault" Savior more clearly. [Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#)

Wherever I am, whatever I do,  
O God, please help me to live  
In a way that makes me credible  
As your representative.  
—Egner

**Followers of Jesus are most effective  
when attitudes and actions are aligned with His.**

**Romans 14:14 I know and am [convinced](#) in the [Lord Jesus](#) that [nothing](#) is [unclean](#) in [itself](#); but to him who [thinks anything](#) to be [unclean](#), to him it is [unclean](#). ([NASB: Lockman](#))**

**Greek:** oida (1SRAI) kai pepeismai (1SRPI) en kurio lesou hoti ouden koinon di heautou, ei me to logizomeno (PMPMSD) ti koinon einai (PAN) ekeino koinon.

**Amplified:** I know and am convinced (persuaded) as one in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is [forbidden as] essentially unclean (defiled and unholy in itself). But [none the less] it is unclean (defiled and unholy) to anyone who thinks it is unclean. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**GWT:** "The Lord Jesus has given me the knowledge and conviction that no food is unacceptable in and of itself" ([GWT](#))

**NLT:** I know and am perfectly sure on the authority of the Lord Jesus that no food, in and of itself, is wrong to eat. But if someone believes it is wrong, then for that person it is wrong. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** I am convinced, and I say this as in the presence of Christ himself, that nothing is intrinsically unholy. But none the less it is unholy to the man who thinks it is. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** for I know with an absolute knowledge and stand persuaded in the Lord Jesus that not even one thing is unhallowed in itself except it be to the one who reasons it out to be unhallowed.

**Young's Literal:** I have known, and am persuaded, in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean of itself, except to him who is reckoning anything to be unclean -- to that one it is unclean

**I KNOW AND AM CONVINCED IN THE LORD JESUS THAT NOTHING IS UNCLEAN IN ITSELF: oida (1SRAI) kai pepeismai (1SRPI) en kurio lesou hoti ouden koinon di heautou:**

- 1Ti 4:4, 5
- [Romans 14 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**I know and am convinced** - Bengel says of the words, "I know and am persuaded,"

**Know** ([1492](#))(eido - only in the **perfect tense** = oida) properly means to see with one's physical eyes but here speaks of "mental seeing" (like the phrase "I see what you mean.") Eido then in general means to know by perception, but speaks of a fullness of knowledge or an absolute knowledge (that which is without a doubt), rather than a progress in knowledge (cp ginosko). **Eido/oida** is not so much that which is known by experience as an intuitive insight that is drilled into our heart. Eido/oida is a perception, a being aware of, an understanding, an intuitive knowledge which in the case of believers can only be given by the Holy Spirit. In short, Paul's spiritual seeing (knowing), through faith, was (and is always) a work of God's (and the same is true for all believers).

**Marvin Vincent** explains **eido** type of knowing - "The things of God's Kingdom are not apparent to the natural vision alone. A new power of sight is required, which attaches only to the new man. Compare 1Cor 2:14. For the believer, seeing (**eido**) transforms into knowing (understanding) through God's inbirthings of faith ("inner persuasion").

**Am convinced** (persuaded) ([3982](#))(**peitho**) fundamentally refers to inner persuasion and means to be persuaded of what is trustworthy. The basic idea in the active sense is to cause one to come to accept a particular point of view or course of action.

**A T Robertson** - "He **knows** it and **stands persuaded** (**perfect** passive indicative of **peitho**, to persuade), but in the sphere of **the Lord Jesus** (cf. Ro 9:1), not by mere rational processes." ([Word Pictures of the New Testament](#))

**Wuest** adds this note regarding the **perfect tense** - Paul's reasoning had gone on through a process to a point where it was complete, with the result that he had come to a finished persuasion that was permanent. He stands persuaded. He could not be budged from his conviction, so sure was he of the truth of the matter. (Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament)

**MacArthur on in the Lord** - Paul states emphatically that he didn't receive his teaching by hearsay; he received it directly from his personal, intimate communion with the Lord Jesus Christ. That was the unique privilege of writers of Scripture. Paul is telling believers not to go to the other extremes and give up their liberty entirely. He wants them to understand and enjoy their liberty. After all, the strong are right: sin does not reside in food, drink, film, electronics, games, recreation, or cigarettes. ([Building Up One Another Without Offending, Part 1 - See dropdown list](#))

**Unclean** ([2839](#))(**koinos**) is an adjective which means primarily **common**, as belonging equally to several, being of mutual interest or shared collectively, that which is **common** to everybody. (Acts 2:44; 4:32; Titus 1:4 = "common fatih"; Jude 1:3 = "common salvation")

In later Greek **koinos** came to mean that which is profane or being of little value because of being common.

It refers to that which is defiled or ceremonially unacceptable opposite of **katharos** which is clean, pure (Mk 7:2, 5; Acts 10:14, 28; 11:8; Ro 14:14; Hb 10:29; Rev 21:27.)

It refers to that which is not consecrated and is the opposite of holy or dedicated (**hagios**).

**Koinos** gives us our word **Koine**, the Greek language commonly spoken and written in the Near East in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

More generally, and usually in a negative sense, **koinos** means **defiled** (corrupted in regard to its purity or perfection), **unclean** (because it is treated as common and thus considered morally or spiritually impure) or **profane** (not holy because unconsecrated, impure, or defiled).

**Webster** (1828) definition of **common** - Not distinguished or exceptional; inconspicuous; ordinary; plebeian; - often in a depreciatory sense. Belonging or relating equally, or similarly, to more than one; as, you and I have a common interest in the property. Belonging to or shared by, affecting or serving, all the members of a class, considered together; general; public; as, properties common to all plants; the common schools; the Book of Common Prayer.

**Koinos** describes spiritual desecration which occurs when one treats that which is considered sacred or holy (set apart to God) as ordinary ("not special").

**Wuest** gives us insights into **koinos** in his comments on the derivative verb **koinoo**, (Mk 7:15) - "The word **koinos** refers to that which is common to everybody. In later Greek it came to mean what is profane as in Mark 7:15 (verb form **koinoo** is used) contrasted to the hallowed or sacred. "**Profane**" is used in the sense of secular, non-religious. When our Lord spoke of that which enters a man in Mk 7:15, He was speaking of food. That does not make a man **ceremonially unclean**, (does not defile - **koinoo**) even though he eat it with **ceremonially unwashed hands**. When He spoke of that which comes out of a man which defiles him, He was referring to the extra-biblical teachings of the Pharisees which defiled them in the sense that these teachers were, by their teachings which were in direct opposition to God's Word, constituted false teachers, thus, not hallowed or set apart for God.... (In another note Wuest says) **Koinos** means "common" in the sense of that which is general, which stands in connection with everything which does not distinguish or separate itself from anything else. It denotes that which is opposed to the divine (Cremer). It means in this connection, "unhallowed." The thing described as unhallowed would be something not connected with the worship and service of God, and in that sense unclean. It is used in the Levitical sense of that which is unholy or impure in a ritualistic, ceremonial fashion. (Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English reader)

**Koinos** can also describe that which belongs equally to several and thus that which was treated as in common (communal = shared or used in common by members of the community) (Acts 2:44, 4:32).

**Koinos** describes that which is unconsecrated and thus is common or ordinary and the opposite of that which is holy (Rev 21:27).

**Koinos** describes that which is defiled and thus is ceremonially unacceptable, which is the opposite of that which is clean or pure (katharos). (Acts 10:14).

**Koinos** describes **unclean...hands** (Mk 7:2), **meats** (Acts 10:14, 28, 11:8, Ro 14:14), the **blood** of the covenant (Heb 10:29).

**Vine** says **koinos** means "common and from the idea of coming into contact with everything, "defiled," is used in the ceremonial sense in Mark 7:2, 5. **Koinos** denotes (a) "**common, belonging to several**" (Lat., communis), said of things had in common, Acts 2:44; 4:32; of faith, Titus 1:4; of salvation, Jude 3; it stands in contrast to **idios**, "one's own"; (b) "**ordinary**, belonging to the generality, as distinct from what is peculiar to the few", hence the application to religious practices of Gentiles in contrast with those of Jews; or of the ordinary people in contrast with those of the Pharisees; hence the meaning "unhallowed, profane," Levitically unclean (Lat., profanus), said of hands, Mk 7:2 (KJV = "defiled,") rv marg., "common"; of animals, ceremonially unclean, Acts 10:14; 11:8; of a man, Acts 10:28; of meats, Ro. 14:14, "unclean"; of the blood of the covenant, as viewed by an apostate, Heb. 10:29, "unholy" (rv, marg., "common"); of everything unfit for the holy city, Rev. 21:27, rv, "unclean" (marg., "common"). ([Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words](#))

**Enhanced Strong's (with definitions of English words added)** - (1) **Common** (of or relating to a community at large), i.e. belonging to generality. (2) by the Jews describes that which is opposed to holy (**hagios**); hence **unhallowed** (unsanctioned by or showing lack of reverence for religion) or **profane** (not holy because unconsecrated, impure, or defiled) and thus Levitically unclean (Mk 7:2, 5, Ro 14:14).

**Marvin Vincent** - **Koinos** is literally, **common**. In the Levitical sense, as opposed to holy or pure. Compare Mark 7:2, "With defiled (common), that is to say, with unwashed hands." See Acts 10:14 (**unholy**). ([Romans 14 - Vincent's Word Studies](#))

**Classic Greek use of koinos** - **Koinos** means "common"—in the sense of common ownership—in classical Greek. For instance, "common property" is property whose ownership is held by more than one person. The term is also used in reference to "public" affairs, such as elections. From this idea of commonality **koinos** grew to have a slightly negative connotation. Something "common" was "ordinary," hence inferior; thus "common things" came to be contrasted with "holy things," which resulted in **koinos** meaning "unclean, profane." ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**Wayne Detzler** - In English the word "**common**" has two basic meanings. First, it describes those things which are shared by a group of people, what is held by a "community." Second, it refers to things which are unimportant because of their "commonness," as common as an "old shoe." Both of these meanings are embraced by the Greek word **koinos**. Plato projected a day when the **common** good would dominate all decisions. Guardians and soldiers would be fed **communally** from a vast storehouse. Their wives and children would likewise form a "**commune**." Aristotle even advocated a **common** ownership of wealth. In the New Testament the word **koine** takes on further significance, because it speaks of the common interest of all Christians (Jude 1:3). Like many other words, the word **koinos** has other connections. A companion is called a **koinonos**, and the fellowship of believers is **koinonia**. A partner in business is called **sugkoinonos** (combining **sun/syn**, "together," with **koinonos**, "companion"). Incidentally, the Greek language of the New Testament is called **Koine Greek**. This was the "common" language spoken on the streets of the Roman Empire. The Holy Spirit "put the Bible on the lower shelf," so many people could read it...."**Common**" also means something which is ordinary, low-class, or vulgar. Could the explanation be that some things are owned by so many people that they lose their value and become ordinary? This might explain the second meaning of common, a meaning which is also found in Greek. Peter referred to ceremonially **unclean** meat as being "**common or profane**" (Acts 10:14, marg.). Then the Lord taught him that no meat is "**common or profane**" (Acts 11:9). This was an object lesson the Lord used to compel Peter to evangelize the Roman Centurion Cornelius. Here too is a wonderful lesson: no one is ordinary in God's eyes. A second reference to this meaning of "**common**" is found in Paul's writings. Here too the teaching is tremendous, that no food is **unclean** in God's eyes (Ro 14:14). In Hebrews we learn of people who pervert the Cross of Christ and thus make it common or ordinary. They do this by sinning willfully against the Lord after hearing the Gospel (Heb. 10:29). This elicits from the inspired writer a warning of judgment which will be swift and severe (Heb 10:30-31). There is nothing "**common**" about the Cross of Christ. Though God rejected the Pharisees' views of things which are ceremonially clean or unclean, the Revelation warns that certain **people are unclean**, and they will never be tolerated in heaven. What makes them **unclean**? They have rejected the Lord Jesus Christ, and their names are not in the Lamb's Book of Life. These are unclean in God's eyes (Rev. 21:27). Thus the two meanings of **koinos** come together. Christians are people who hold all things in common, and they meet one another's needs. They also share a "common" salvation and hope. Nothing is ceremonially "common" or unclean, except those who treat the Cross of Christ as common or unclean, and they will never enter heaven. ([New Testament words in today's language- Wayne A Detzler](#) - recommended resource)

**ISBE** - **Common** = **koinós** , in the classics, and primarily in the New Testament, means what is public, general, universal, as contrasted with **ídios** , what is peculiar, individual, not shared with others. Thus, "common faith" (Titus 1:4), "common salvation"

(Jude 1:3), refer to that in which the experience of all Christians unites and is identical: "**common**," because there is but one faith and one salvation (Eph 4:4-6). From this comes the derived meaning of **what is ordinary and, therefore, to be disesteemed**, as contrasted with what pertains to a class, and to be prized, because rare. This naturally coincides with OT exclusivism, particularity and **separation**. Its religion was that of a **separated** people, with a **separated** class as its ministers, and with minute directions as to distinctions of meat, drink, times, places, rites, vessels, etc. Whatever was common or ordinary, it avoided. The NT on the other hand, with its universalism of scope, and its spirituality of sphere, rose above all such externals. The salvation which it brought was directed to the redemption of Nature, as well as of man, sanctifying the creature, and pervading all parts of man's being and all relations of life. The antithesis is forcibly illustrated in Acts 10:14, 28, where Peter says: "I have never eaten anything that is **common** and unclean," and the reply is: "What God hath cleansed, make not thou **common**." ([Common - International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#))

**Hastings** - 'Common' (**koinos**, communis) is an honourable word in classical Greek = 'shared by the people.' In Hellenistic Greek, it has sometimes this same meaning (Acts 2:44; Acts 4:32, Titus 1:4, Judges 1:3), but sometimes a less honourable one (= Lat. vulgaris). This depreciation arose out of the transcendence of religion to the Eastern mind. **What was 'shared by the people' had become profaned for the god** (cf. the English word 'worldly,' meaning first secular, then unspiritual). We see the process with **koinos** in Hebrews 10:29 - 'counted the blood of the covenant a common [i.e. secular] thing.' In Revelation 21:27 we go a step further, and 'anything common' means the worldly, the unspiritual (cf. Jos. Ant. xii. ii.14, xiii.i. 1). Elsewhere '**common**' corresponds to positive, active uncleanness (Acts 10:14; Acts 10:28; Acts 11:8, Ro 14:14, 1 Maccabees 1:47; 1 Maccabees 1:62, Jos. Ant. XI. viii. 7; the verb (koinoo) is found in Acts 21:28, Hebrews 9:13). The distinction, 'clean' (katharos) and 'unclean' (**akathartos**), refers in the OT and primitive religions to definite departments of life, such as food, sanitation, contact with the dead, and marriage (Leviticus 11-15). In the OT it is mainly a common-sense distinction, made, however, from religious motives, and becoming part of the ritual of the Hebrews. It was thus a practical differentiation between them and surrounding peoples. **It arose out of a good idea, but when separated from this idea grew into a proud national badge.** Such national and religious customs, so long held, seem stronger than they are. One push of a new movement will often destroy, almost in a moment, the habits of centuries. We find this process to-day in the East. In the NT it may be seen in the case of Simon Peter; he combined Christian beliefs and Jewish distinctions without at first being willing to perceive their variance. His vision (Acts 10) woke him, and, though he relapsed for an instant (Galatians 2:9), the work was done; and when that generation passed away, the religious nature of these distinctions had gone from Christianity; cleanliness, instead of being godliness, was next to godliness. These details of conduct were left to the reason and the conscience. The transition stage, where some cling to the old laws and others obey the new spirit, with its problems of faith and charity, is treated in Romans 14. ([Clean, Unclean, Common - Hastings' Dictionary of the New Testament](#))

**Gary Hill** - Rabbinical (Jewish) laws often erred by imposing many regulations about what supposedly made certain types of cups, plates, etc., "**defiled**" (**koinos**). This bred much unwarranted legalism with the terrible result of calling all Gentiles "**unclean**" whom the Lord was calling to Himself. Because of this, the Jews missed out on their duty to evangelize. Example: If a Jewish person even touched an "**unclean** vessel," they could be barred from entering the Temple or synagogue. Much needless care was taken to keep all vessels "ceremonially clean" to meet rabbinical (man-made) standards about religious purity. Any contact (no matter how indirect) with something "**unclean**" required elaborate rituals of sacrifice (purification). Accordingly, the Pharisees meticulously followed religious formulas to clean vessels, strain wine, etc., in order to rid themselves of **supposed** defilement. The Jews become preoccupied with minors and missed the "majors" – like living in faith, hope, love (cf. Mt 23:23 with 1Cor 13:13). **Their greatest error in this regard was avoiding Gentiles supposedly to escape "defilement." The Bible itself never prohibited nor discouraged them from having contact with Gentiles (non-Jewish people)! Indeed, this was needed for the outreach God desired the OT saints to extend to all people!** See (athémitos = properly, not acceptable to the prevailing custom or ordinary practice (used only in Acts 10:28; 1Pet 4:3)). **The OT never prohibited Jews from eating with Gentiles, or coming in contact with them! This twisted idea, of "ceremonial defilement," (unfortunately) came from misguided rabbis....**The Pharisees in NT times were infamous for their distorted ideas about "ceremonial uncleanness," i.e. what was really "defiled" (**koinos**). Indeed, they often defined something as **koinós** ("defiled") which was morally neutral, or not "defiled" at all. They failed here by overly focusing on the physical, even petty things that supposedly made someone spiritually unacceptable to the Lord. Examples - The rabbis and Pharisees said touching a "**defiled**" plate made someone "**unclean**" if it had a rim. But touching a flat plate could not spiritually defile a Jew. So too, a person was supposedly defiled by touching an "unclean" object made of wood and metal – but the metal part could "not become unclean" or pass on impurity (Wm Barclay). Worse, they believed a person became "unclean" by standing in the shadow of an "unclean object" – another "holiness standard" defined by the rabbis (not the Bible!). (See excellent resource The Discovery Bible to enable deeper Word Studies = <http://www.helpsbible.org>)

#### Related Resources:

- [What does the Bible mean when it says something is unclean?](#)
- [What made some animals clean and others unclean \(Genesis 7\)?](#)
- [Clean and Unclean - Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible \(in depth article\)](#)

- [Common - Holman Bible Dictionary](#)
- [Common - Kitto's Popular Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature](#)
- [Clean, Unclean - Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#)
- [Unclean - Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature](#)
- [Unclean and Clean - Fausset's Bible Dictionary](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Common](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Clean, Unclean, Common Common](#)
- The Jewish Encyclopedia [Animals, Clean and Unclean Cleanness and Uncleaness Clean and Unclean Animals](#)

**Koinos** - 14x in 12v - NAS Usage: common(3), common property(1), impure(2), unclean(5), unholy(5).

Mark 7:2 and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with **impure** hands, that is, unwashed.

**Wuest** - Defiled" is **koinos**; the word refers to that which is **common** to everybody. In later Greek it came to mean what it means here, the profane as contrasted to the hallowed or the sacred. It was therefore applied to that which was ceremonially unclean. The washing of the hands here was not for purposes of cleanliness, but for ceremonial reasons. (Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament)

Mark 7:5 The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with **impure** hands?"

**Comment:** Why were their hands "**impure**?" Mk 7:4 explains that "when they come from the market place (agora from ageiro = to collect or gather), they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves." The Agora was a public forum where people gathered and because of the mixing of public resulted in inevitable ceremonial defilement. Meyer explains that the statement of the Pharisees comes from the fact that "before eating, they wash the hands always. When they come from market (agora) they take a bath before eating." Jewish ordinances required these "vessels" to be immersed. (Edersheim).

**William Barclay** - The Greek word in Mark 7:5 is **koinos**. Ordinarily, koinos means common; then it comes to describe something which is ordinary in the sense that it is not sacred, something that is profane as opposed to sacred things; and finally it describes something, as it does here, which is ceremonially unclean and unfit for the service and worship of God.

There were definite and rigid rules for the washing of hands. Note that this hand-washing was not in the interests of hygienic purity; it was ceremonial cleanness which was at stake. Before every meal, and between each of the courses, the hands had to be washed, and they had to be washed in a certain way. The hands, to begin with, had to be free of any coating of sand or mortar or gravel or any such substance. The water for washing had to be kept in special large stone jars, so that it itself was clean in the ceremonial sense and so that it might be certain that it had been used for no other purpose, and that nothing had fallen into it or had been mixed with it. First, the hands were held with finger tips pointing upwards; water was poured over them and had to run at least down to the wrist; the minimum amount of water was one quarter of a log, which is equal to one and a half egg-shells full of water. While the hands were still wet each hand had to be cleansed with the fist of the other. That is what the phrase about using the fist means; the fist of one hand was rubbed into the palm and against the surface of the other. This meant that at this stage the hands were wet with water; but that water was now unclean because it had touched unclean hands. So, next, the hands had to be held with finger tips pointing downwards and water had to be poured over them in such a way that it began at the wrists and ran off at the finger tips. After all that had been done the hands were clean.

To fail to do this was in Jewish eyes, not to be guilty of bad manners, not to be dirty in the health sense, but to be unclean in the sight of God. The man who ate with unclean hands was subject to the attacks of a demon called Shibta. To omit so to wash the hands was to become liable to poverty and destruction. Bread eaten with unclean hands was not better than excrement. A Rabbi who once omitted the ceremony was buried in excommunication. Another Rabbi, imprisoned by the Romans, used the water given to him for hand washing rather than for drinking and in the end nearly perished of thirst, because he was determined to observe the rules of cleanliness rather than satisfy his thirst.

That to the Pharisaic and Scribal Jew was religion. It was ritual, ceremonial, and regulations like that which they considered to be essence of the service of God. Ethical religion was buried under a mass of tabus and rules.

The last verses of the passage deal further with this conception of uncleanness. A thing might in the ordinary sense be completely clean and yet in the legal sense be unclean. There is something about this conception of uncleanness in Leviticus chapters 11 to 15, and in Numbers 19. Nowadays we would talk rather of things being tabu than of being unclean. Certain animals were unclean (Leviticus 11). A woman after child-birth was unclean; a leper was unclean; anyone who touched a dead body was unclean. And anyone who had so become unclean made unclean anything he in turn touched. A Gentile was unclean; food touched by a Gentile was unclean; any vessel touched by a Gentile was unclean. So, then, when a strict Jew returned from the market place he immersed his whole body in clean water to take away the taint he might have acquired.

Obviously vessels could easily become unclean; they might be touched by an unclean person or by unclean food. This is what our passage means by the washings of cups and pitchers and vessels of bronze. In the Mishnah there are no fewer than twelve treatises on this kind of uncleanness. If we take some actual examples we will see how far this went. A hollow vessel made of pottery could contract uncleanness inside but not outside; that is to say, it did not matter who or what touched it outside, but it did matter what touched it inside. If it became unclean it must be broken; and no unbroken piece must remain which was big enough to hold enough oil to anoint the little toe. A flat plate without a rim could not become unclean at all; but a plate with a rim could. If vessels made with leather, bone or glass were flat they could not contract uncleanness at all; if they were hollow they could become unclean outside and inside. If they were unclean they must be broken; and the break must be a hole at least big enough for a medium-sized pomegranate to pass through. To cure uncleanness earthen vessels must be broken; other vessels must be immersed, boiled, purged with fire—in the case of metal vessels—and polished. A three-legged table could contract uncleanness; if it lost one or two legs it could not; if it lost three legs it could, for then it could be used as a board and a board could become unclean. Things made of metal could become unclean, except a door, a bolt, a lock, a hinge, a knocker and a gutter. Wood used in metal utensils could become unclean; but metal used in wood utensils could not. Thus a wooden key with metal teeth could become unclean; but a metal key with wooden teeth could not.

We have taken some time over these scribal laws, this tradition of the elders, because that is what Jesus was up against. To the scribes and Pharisees these rules and regulations were the essence of religion. To observe them was to please God; to break them was to sin. This was their idea of goodness and of the service of God. In the religious sense Jesus and these people spoke different languages. It was precisely because he had no use for all these regulations that they considered him a bad man. There is a fundamental cleavage here—the cleavage between the man who sees religion as ritual, ceremonial, rules and regulations, and the man who sees in religion loving God and loving his fellow-men.

The next passage will develop this; but it is clear that Jesus' idea of religion and that of the scribes and Pharisees had nothing in common at all. (Mark 7 - William Barclay's Daily Study Bible)

Acts 2:44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in **common**;

**Comment:** The Lord challenged His disciples to share their possessions and thus build up treasure in heaven (Matt. 6:20; Luke 12:33; 14:33). Jesus was sustained by the generosity of women, who contributed to support Him and His disciples (8:1-3). Jesus taught, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35), a statement not recorded in the Gospels. (Detzler)

Acts 4:32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were **common property** to them.

Acts 10:14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything **unholy (koinos)** or unclean (**akathartos**)."

Acts 10:28 And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man **unholy (koinos)** or unclean (**akathartos**).

Acts 11:8 "But I said, 'By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or **unclean** has ever entered my mouth.'

Romans 14:14 I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is **unclean** in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be **unclean**, to him it is **unclean**.

Titus 1:4-**note** To Titus, my true child in a **common** faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.



**Comment:** Common faith" (Ro 1:12; 2Cor 4:13; 2Pet 1:1; Jude 1:3) in the sense of belonging to several, thus "held in common", open to all. Koinos means that which belongs to several, and thus is said of things had in common. Peter helps us understand this quality of faith, writing "to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours". (2Pe 1:1) This faith is the possession of all of God's people and not just a selected few. A T Robertson explains this faith as "**common** to a Gentile (a Greek) like Titus as well as to a Jew like Paul and so common to all races and classes". It is a faith of the same nature, kind, object, operation, and effect. All who share in this common saving faith also share in a "common (koinos) salvation..." (Jude 1:3)

**John Phillips** - Titus had been saved the same way anyone is-"after the common faith." The word translated "common" here is koinos, which indicates that the faith was one shared with others. We are all saved the same way: "By grace ye are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

Hebrews 10:29-**note** How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as **unclean** the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

**Comment: Koinos** refers to "defilement that results from disregarding what is set apart to God" in this case the blood of Jesus, the blood of the New Covenant.

**Wuest** - The word "unholy" (Unclean in NAS - Heb 10:29) is the translation of **koinos**, the fundamental idea of which is "shared by all, public." From this comes the idea of "not sacred" that is, "not set apart for God's use." The idea here is that the apostate regarded Messiah's blood as common, having no more sacred character or specific worth than the blood of any ordinary person. (Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament)

Jude 1:3-**note** Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our **common** salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

**Comment:** Here **koinos** refers to the gift of salvation shared in common by all true believers.

Revelation 21:27-**note** and nothing **unclean**, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

**Koinos** occurs 21 times in the **Septuagint (Lxx)** (**Ed:** But only 6 in the non-apocryphal Septuagint - Esther 5:1; Pr 1:14; 15:23; 21:9; 25:24). The dominant sense is "common, shared," for example, of common finances (Proverbs 1:14) or a shared house (Proverbs 21:9). Only in the apocryphal literature does koinos mean "unclean" (ritually; e.g., 1 Maccabees 1:47,62). ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**Detzler** gives several illustrations of **koinos** - Because early Christians had things in common and shared their possessions, many have mistakenly concluded that Communism is correct. They ignore three basic facts about this early Christian phenomenon. It was temporary, voluntary, and Christian. Communism in the Soviet sense is permanent, enforced, and atheistic. True sharing is seen best in marriage. The old wedding ceremony included this as part of the vows. As the couple exchanged rings they said: "With this ring I thee wed, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow." Now that quaint saying is seldom used, but the community of property is still a legal (and loving) fact of life. The same care for others is seen in the Christian church. One church on the west coast of America was known for the loving care which Christians exhibited toward each other. At one stage the pastor said: "When the offering plate is passed, if you wish to give, do so. If you have a need of \$10 or less, please feel free to take from the offering plate." Because of abuse, this had to be suspended, but the idea was good. On the subject of giving, Richard Braunstein said: "It is possible to give without loving, but it is impossible to love without giving." Peter Marshall, a late chaplain of the United States Senate, said: "Let us give according to our incomes, lest God make our incomes match our gifts." One evening a church member telephoned me in Bristol, England. "Pastor, what do you think of tithing?" he asked. Amazed by his question, I hastened to affirm that this was both a good idea and God's plan for our giving. A few weeks later the eager Christian told me that he and his family learned an age-old lesson: the Lord can make 90 percent go farther than we could ever make 100 percent go. You cannot out-give the Lord! ([Ibid](#))

**Spurgeon** - We must not violate our conscience. We may not do what we believe to be wrong because we see others do it. We must neither judge them nor excuse ourselves.

**In the Lord** - That is, it finds its source in the Lord, not merely in his reason. (Wuest)

**James Denney** - In principle, the Apostle sides with the strong. He has no scruples about meats or drinks or days ("nothing is



unclean in itself"). (The phrase **In the Lord Jesus** (means) it is as a Christian, not as a libertine, that Paul has this conviction; **in Christ Jesus** he is sure that there is nothing in the world essentially unclean; all things can be consecrated and Christianised by Christian use. ([Romans 14 - Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

When Paul says here that there is nothing unclean of itself, we must realize that he is speaking only of these indifferent (neutral or morally neutral) matters. There are many things in life that are unclean, such as pornography, suggestive jokes, PG and higher rated movies, etc. Paul's statement must be understood in the light of the context. Paul's point is that Christians do not contact ceremonial defilement by eating foods which the Law of Moses branded unclean.

Having been a **Pharisee**, a member of those well known for majoring on the minors, Paul doubtless had been extremely careful about what he ate and did not eat. But he now understood with absolute certainty the truth which the Lord declared to Peter three times in a vision: "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy" (Acts 10:15). That divine cleansing referred directly to the multitude of animals Peter was commanded to eat that were ceremonially unclean according to Mosaic law (Acts 10:12, 13). Indirectly, and in an even more important way, it referred to God's full and impartial acceptance of believing Gentiles into the church (Acts 10:28, 34). Jesus declared that "there is nothing outside the man which going into him can defile him" (Mk 7:15). The strong Christian is therefore entirely right in his conviction that he is at liberty to enjoy anything the Lord does not declare to be sinful. The weak Christian, on the other hand, is wrong in his understanding about some of those things. But he is not wrong in the sense of being heretical or immoral. He is wrong in the sense of not having complete and mature understanding, which causes his conscience to be unnecessarily sensitive.

**Morris** - To the believer, saved by grace through faith in Christ and His provision of full forgiveness and justification, all things are legal. Note such assurances as [Titus 1:15 1Co 10:23 Ga 5:1,4]. Nevertheless, since he should now desire to live and die as unto the Lord (Ro 14:8), this should clearly affect all his behavior and make him very different from those yet unsaved." ([Defenders Study Bible Notes](#))

**Stedman** adds that "**As one who is in the Lord Jesus**" that is, as one speaking as a Christian. What Paul really says is, "As one who has been taught by the Lord Jesus, no food is unclean in itself." The Lord Jesus did say that. It was he who said, "No food is unclean." He does not mean that all foods are good for you; some foods are not; some things you can eat are highly poisonous. Jesus does not mean that everything is all right to take in; he means that there is no moral question about food. It is never wrong, morally, to eat what your body may enjoy. Jesus taught that himself, and Paul says, "That is enough for me. That sets me free." But that is not the only problem involved. The conscience needs to be trained by this new insight into liberty. One person's conscience may move much slower than another's, therefore, we are to adjust to one another's needs along this line. (Read his full sermon - [The Right to Yield](#))

**Wiersbe** - What something does to a person determines its quality. One man may be able to read certain books and not be bothered by them, while a weaker Christian reading the same books might be tempted to sin. But the issue is not, "How does it affect me?" so much as, "If I do this, how will it affect my brother?" Will it make him stumble? Will it grieve him or even destroy him by encouraging him to sin? Is it really worth it to harm a brother just so I can enjoy some food? No!" ([Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary, 1989. Victor](#))

**BUT TO HIM WHO THINKS ANYTHING TO BE UNCLEAN, TO HIM IT IS UNCLEAN: di heautou, ei me to logizomeno (PMPMSD) ti koinon einai (PAN) ekeino koinon:**

- [Romans 14 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**But - term of contrast.** What is Paul contrasting?

If someone believes it is wrong, then for that person it is wrong. Paul is saying essentially "Don't violate your conscience." If a weak brother thinks it is wrong for him to eat pork, for example, then it is wrong. To eat it would be to violate his God-given conscience.

**MacArthur** - Not everyone can handle what is right. In 1 Corinthians 8:7 Paul says, "There is not in every man that knowledge [that an idol is nothing]; for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol, and their conscience being weak, is defiled." A godly person who understands his liberty in Christ should not be dissuaded from exercising it, but those who are ignorant of their liberties shouldn't be shown a pattern of behavior that will cause them to stumble. They shouldn't be encouraged to violate their conscience; they need an example of love that meets them on their own ground. ([Building Up One Another Without Offending, Part 1 - See dropdown list](#))

**Thinks** (3049) (**logizomai** from **lógos** = reason, word, account) means to reckon, compute, calculate, to take into account, to

deliberate, and to weigh. **Logizomai** refers to a process of careful study or reasoning which results in the arriving at a conclusion. **Logizomai** conveys the idea of calculating or estimating.

**Logizomai** is related to our English term **logic** (which deals with the methods of valid thinking, reveals how to draw proper conclusions from premises and is a prerequisite of all thought).

**Logizomai** means to think about something in a detailed and logical manner and to draw conclusions through the use of reason. This was a common secular term used in bookkeeping to describe an entry in an accounting ledger. The purpose of the entry was to make a permanent record that could be consulted whenever needed. In sum **logizomai** means to draw a logical conclusion from a given set of facts, as in Romans 6:11 (**see notes**) where one is commanded to continually (present imperative) draw the conclusion (based on the truths "enumerated" in Ro 6:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10-see notes) that we are "dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus". In the present context it pictures a weaker brother looking at the issues involved and arriving at the conclusion that the issues are "unclean". It is easy to see how this brother could become very judgmental of the stronger brother who considers the same facts but concludes they are not permissible to indulge in.

**Unclean (2839) (koinos)** means common, defiled, unclean, unholy, profane. **Koinos** was a technical term to express those customs and habits which, **although** "common" to the world, were forbidden to the pious Jew (see similar meaning in Mk 7:2, Mk 7:5, Acts 10:14, Acts 10:15, 10:28, 11:8, 11:9, Re 21:27).

**Denney - Koinos** is the opposite of *hagion* (holy), and signifies that which is not and cannot be brought into relation to God. **Who thinks anything to be unclean** - Though there is nothing which in itself has this character, some things may have it subjectively, i.e., in the judgment of a particular person who cannot help (from some imperfection of conscience) regarding them so; to him (*ekeino* = emphatic) they are what his conscience makes them; and his conscience (unenlightened as it is) is entitled to respect. ([Romans 14 - The Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

For various reasons, there are certain things that we all know are not sinful but that we do not feel comfortable in doing or even being near. And as long as we feel discomfort about any such thing, we should avoid doing it—even if it would not cause offense to other believers. If we ourselves consider anything to be unclean, then to us it is unclean.

**Stedman** - "I liken this to crossing a swinging bridge over a mountain stream. There are people who can run across a bridge like that, even though it does not have any handrails. They are not alarmed by it, they can keep their balance well. They are not concerned about the swaying of the bridge, or the danger of falling into the torrent below. That is fine; some people can do that. But others cannot. You watch them go out on a bridge like that, and they are very uncertain. They shake and tremble; they inch along. They may even get down on their hands and knees and crawl across. But they will make it if you just give them time, if you let them set their own speed. After a few crossings, they begin to pick up courage, and eventually they are able to run right across. It is like that with these moral questions. Some people just cannot see themselves moving in a certain area that they have been brought up to think is wrong; they have difficulty doing so. As in the case of the swinging bridge, it would be cruel for someone who had the freedom to cross boldly to take the arm of someone who was timid and drag them across, to force them to run across. They might even lose their balance and fall off the bridge and suffer injury. This is what Paul is warning about in [Ro 14:15]. (Read his full sermon -[The Right to Yield](#))

**MacArthur** - I don't believe Paul is teaching that sin is subjective-- that it is only what you think it is. Sin is explicitly defined in Scripture. But Paul is not talking about those things that are inherently sinful. If a person believes it is a sin to do something that isn't inherently sinful, yet does it, he will have a guilty conscience. One weakness I have is on how I spend my time. It's hard for me to relax. There are some days when I decide to do nothing for a couple of hours, but I can hardly get through those hours because I have such a guilty conscience. People around me will say, "Why do you feel guilty? Everyone is entitled to a few hours of breathing without being encumbered with some task." But that weakness in me shows me what the weaker brother's conscience is like. I overheard someone say, "I never miss a morning without having my personal devotions in the Word of God." Another individual replied, "You need to stop doing that so you can prove you're not a legalist. Skip a few days." And if I remember correctly, the person took that advice and suffered tremendously from a guilty conscience. Is it a sin not to have your morning devotions? Surely it isn't addressed as such in the Bible. But if your conscience tells you it is wrong not to have it, and you don't have it, then you will suffer with a guilty conscience....The Lord wants a clean conscience. You should never train yourself to violate or ignore your conscience. That would be training yourself to ignore the instrument through which the Spirit of God subjectively leads you. Desire to have a conscience void of offense toward God (Acts 24:16). When a stronger brother tempts a weaker brother to violate his conscience, the weaker brother will have painful, bitter sorrow in his heart. Instead of helping him grow in his spiritual life, the stronger brother has caused him to be even more afraid of his liberty. ([Building Up One Another Without Offending, Part 1 - See dropdown list](#))

**Steven Cole** - Love does not cause a weaker brother to violate his conscience (Ro 14:14). Romans 14:14: "I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean." "Nothing" here is limited by the context. Paul is not saying that you can do anything you feel like doing! The Bible gives clear,

absolute, binding moral commandments. To violate these commands is to disobey God and defile yourself. Paul is talking about non-moral matters, where Scripture is silent. He is especially talking here about the matter of eating or not eating certain foods. He is saying (and this was radical for a former Pharisee like Paul!) that the Old Testament laws for clean and unclean foods were no longer in effect.

Paul underlines what he says with strong conviction: "I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus." This could mean that the Lord had revealed these things directly to Paul, perhaps during his time in Arabia shortly after his conversion. Or, perhaps he knew what Jesus said (Mark 7:18-23), that it is not what goes into a man's mouth that defiles him, but what comes out of his heart that defiles him. Mark (7:19) adds his own editorial comment, "(Thus He declared all foods clean.)" God showed Peter the same truth through a vision before he went to preach the gospel at the house of the Gentile centurion, Cornelius (Acts 10:15), "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." Paul mentions the same thing in relation to food (1Ti 4:4-5), "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer." (See also 1Cor. 8:4-8.)

Okay, if Paul is so convinced that we're free to eat anything, then what's the big deal? Just eat what you want and don't worry about it! No, because Paul adds, "but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean." In other words, it is wrong to violate your conscience, even if your conscience is not completely in line with Scripture. God gave the conscience as an inner "faults alarm." It goes off when you think you're at fault. As Paul said (Ro 2:15), even the Gentiles who do not have the law of God have a conscience that either accuses or defends them. They will be guilty before God someday because when they violated their conscience, in their heart they were disobeying God.

Again, it's important to keep in mind here that the weaker brother is not a legalist who would never be tempted to do what he sees you doing as you exercise your liberty in Christ. To use the drinking illustration, the weaker brother is not the teetotaler who would never touch a drop of alcohol even if he was dying of thirst. Rather, it's the brother for whom to drink a beer would violate his conscience. He does not have the liberty in Christ to do what you are free to do. But he sees you drinking and it tempts him to join in, even though he thinks that he shouldn't. So out of love don't flaunt your liberty in front of him and cause him to sin.

But you may be thinking, "Don't I have a right to drink a beer or a glass of wine? Why should I have to limit my freedom because of the weaker brother's hang-ups? Why doesn't he just grow up?" ([Love Trumps Liberty Romans 14:13-16](#))

**Romans 14:15 For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. (NASB: Lockman)**

**Greek:** ei gar dia broma o adelphos sou lupeitai (3SPPI) ouketi kata agapen peripateis (2SPA1): me to bromati sou ekeinon apollue (2SPAM) huper ou Christos apethanen (3SAA1)

**Amplified:** But if your brother is being pained or his feelings hurt or if he is being injured by what you eat, [then] you are no longer walking in love. [You have ceased to be living and conducting yourself by the standard of love toward him.] Do not let what you eat hurt or cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died! ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.

**NLT:** And if another Christian is distressed by what you eat, you are not acting in love if you eat it. Don't let your eating ruin someone for whom Christ died. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** If your habit of unrestricted diet seriously upsets your brother, you are no longer living in love towards him. And surely you wouldn't let food mean ruin to a man for whom Christ died. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** For, if because of food your brother is made to grieve, no longer are you conducting yourself according to love. Stop ruining by your food that one on behalf of whom Christ died.

**Young's Literal:** and if through victuals thy brother is grieved, no more dost thou walk according to love; do not with thy victuals destroy that one for whom Christ died.

**FOR IF BECAUSE OF FOOD YOUR BROTHER IS HURT : ei gar dia broma o adelphos sou lupeitai (3SPPI)**

- 1Co 8:9 10 11
- [Romans 14 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**For (gar)** - As always it is a good habit to pause and ponder this **term of explanation**, asking at least what is the author explaining?

**Henry Alford - Of food**, barely put, to make the contrast greater between the slight occasion, and the great mischief done. The mere **hurt** of your brother, is an offence against love: how much greater an offence then, if this **hurt** end in ruining (causing to act against his conscience, and so to commit sin and be in danger of quenching God's Spirit within him) by a meal of thine, a brother, for whom Christ died! "*Do not make more of thy food than Christ did of Hi life*" Bengel. See an exact parallel in 1Co 8:10, 11. ([Romans 14 Commentary](#))

**Spurgeon** - You have liberty to do as you please, but do not use that liberty if it would be mischievous to your brother in Christ. If your action, though right in itself, would have a tendency to destroy his soul, deny yourself for love's sake.

**Hodge** - The sense obviously is, 'Though the thing is tight in itself, yet if indulgence in it be injurious to our Christian brethren, that indulgence is a violation of the law of love.' This is the first consideration which the apostle urges, to enforce the exhortation not to put a stumbling block in our brother's way. ([Romans 14 - Hodge's Commentary on Romans](#))

**Hurt** - "The contrast to this is **joy** in Ro 14:17" (Bengel)

**Hodge on hurt** - It is a moral grievance of which the apostle speaks, a wounding of the conscience. ([Ibid](#))

**Vincent** - The close connection with destroy indicates that the meaning falls short of be destroyed, but is stronger than made to feel pain. It is a hurt to conscience, which, while not necessarily fatal, may lead to violation or hardening of conscience, and finally to fall. Compare 1 Cor. 8:9–12. ([Romans 14 Word Studies in the New Testament](#))

**Hurt** (3076) (**lupeo** from **lupeo** = sorrow) signifies pain, of body or mind and means to cause one to experience severe mental or emotional distress or physical pain which may be accompanied by sadness, sorrow or grief.

The King James' translation of **lupeo** as **grieved** parallels our colloquial sayings like -- "*It weighs heavy on my soul*" or "*My soul is weighed down with affliction.*" or "*My soul is so burdened.*"

**Lupeo** has the basic meaning of causing pain, distress, or grief and is used by John to describe Peter's reaction when Jesus asked Peter "the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was **grieved** because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep." (Jn 21:17).

**Lupeo** is used of the Holy Spirit, Who is grieved when we sin "and do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (Ep 4:30-note).

**Lupeo** - 26 uses in the NT -

Mt. 14:9; 17:23; 18:31; 19:22; 26:22, 37; Mk. 10:22; 14:19; Jn. 16:20; 21:17; Ro 14:15; 2Co. 2:2, 4, 5; 6:10; 7:8, 9, 11; Eph. 4:30; 1Th 4:13; 1Pet. 1:6

It is wrong to hurt our brother over such trivial matters. It is not loving to force people to move at your pace. To refuse to indulge a freedom that you have for the sake of someone else, to adjust to their pace, is surely one of the clearest and truest exercises of Christian love. Is there some non-essential ("food") I need to give up for the higher interest of my brother (that's what agape love does)?

**MacArthur** - How would a weak brother be grieved? Simply by seeing a strong Christian do what he felt was wrong. If you are strongly convinced that something is wrong, and you see a strong believer do it, you will be grieved over his seeming abuse of liberty. But in the context of Romans 14, I think Paul is saying that the weaker brother is grieved not just because of that, but because he thinks he must follow suit. But by following the instruction or example of the strong believer, he does what he believes is wrong and has to live with the remorse and guilt of his conscience. He forfeits the peace and joy of his Christian walk. ([Building Up One Another Without Offending, Part 1 - See dropdown list](#))

**William MacDonald** - "When I sit down to eat with a weak brother, should I insist on my legitimate right to eat Crab Louis or Lobster Thermidor, even if I know he thinks it is wrong? If I do, I am not acting in love, because love thinks of others, not of self. Love foregoes its legitimate rights in order to promote the welfare of a brother. A dish of food isn't as important as the spiritual well-being of one for whom Christ died. And yet if I selfishly parade my rights in these matters, I can do irreparable damage in the life of a weak brother. It isn't worth it when you remember that his soul was redeemed at such a towering cost—the precious blood of the Lamb." ([MacDonald, W & Farstad, A. Believer's Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson](#))

## YOU ARE NO LONGER WALKING ACCORDING TO LOVE: ouketi kata agapen peripateis (2SPA1)

- [Romans 14 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**What is walking in love?** Not all believers are mature, and love demands that the mature members of the family defer to the immature. Love (agape) protects people and gives them a chance to grow up. People may be (will be!) difficult, but we are to accept them in love for the Lord's sake.

**MacArthur** - You need to set your life on a path that will not grieve others--that will not make them follow you into something their conscience tells them not to. That means you have to get close enough to each other to know where you stand on those issues. You have to know the hearts of the people around you so you can be sure to have an unselfish **love** for them. ([Building Up One Another Without Offending, Part 1 - See dropdown list](#))

**Walking** (4043)(**peripateo** from **peri** = about, around + **pateo** = walk, tread) means literally to walk around, to go here and there in walking, to tread all around and figuratively refers to living or passing one's life, signifying the whole round of the activities of the individual life, whether of the unregenerate, (Ep 4:17) or of the believer (1Co 7:17; Col 2:6). The 39 uses of peripateo in the Gospels always refer to literal, physical walking. Seven of the 8 uses in Acts are also in the literal sense (except Acts 21:21). (See Spurgeon's comments on what it means **to walk**)

Paul uses **peripateo** only in the metaphorical sense (32 times in his Epistles -Ro 6:4; 8:4; 13:13; 14:15; 1Co 3:3; 7:17; 2Co 4:2; 5:7; 10:2, 3; 12:18; Ga 5:16; Ep 2:2, 10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15; Php 3:17, 18; Col 1:10; 2:6; 3:7; 4:5; 1Th 2:12; 4:1, 12; 2Th 3:6, 11) meaning to conduct one's life, to order one's behavior, to behave, to make one's way, to make due use of opportunities, to live or pass one's life (with a connotation of spending some time in a place).

Some lexicons state that Paul used peripateo in the Hebraic sense of living, regulating one's life or conducting one's self.

**NIDNTT** - **peripateo** (Aristophanes onwards) is found in classic Greek only with the literal meaning of strolling, stopping, (e.g. while one walks here and there in the market, Dem., Orationes 54, 7); the figurative meaning of walking, with reference to conduct, is lacking. Only in Philodemus (1st cent. B.C.) does one find the meaning to live (De Libertate 23, 3)... In the LXX peripateo is found in only 33 passages, of which more than half come from Wisdom literature... Only occasionally does peripateo denote in the figurative sense way of life (2Ki 20:3; Eccl 11:9). ([Brown, Colin, Editor. New International Dictionary of NT Theology. 1986. Zondervan](#))

**Ray Stedman** comments on **walk** writing - That (**Ed**: In context Pastor Stedman is referring to the truth in Col 3:1, 2, 3, 4) is the true basis for living a Christian life. Scripture calls it "walking with the Lord." I like that figure because a **walk**, of course, merely consists of two simple steps, repeated over and over again. It is not a complicated thing. In the same way, the Christian life is a matter of taking two steps, one step after another. Then you are beginning to walk. Those two steps follow in this passage. Paul describes them as, "Put off the old man" (Col 3:5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 see **note**) and "put on the new." (see specific attitudes and actions in [Col 3:12-4:6](#)) Then repeat them. That is all. Keep walking through every day like that. That is how Scripture exhorts us to live." [Click](#) for Pastor Stedman's message on [True Human Potential](#)

In the figurative sense, **peripateo** refers to one's manner of life, to one's habitual way or bent of life, to one's life-style. For example, Luke describes Zacharias and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist, as being "righteous in the sight of God, **walking** (living, conducting himself) blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord." (Luke 1:6).

In contrast, **Paul** counseled the Ephesian believers to "**walk** no longer just as the Gentiles (in context a description of all the unsaved) also **walk**, in the futility of their mind" (Eph 4:17-note).

In **Romans Paul** explains how it is possible to no long walk as the Gentiles writing (speaking of our spiritual baptism into Christ)

we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might **walk** (peripateo - Paul's first use in the NT canon) in newness (a brand new kind of life never possible before) of life. (Ro 6:4-note)

(God condemned sin in the flesh of His Son) in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not **walk** (peripateo) according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (Ro 8:4-note)

Let us **behave** (peripateo) properly (fitting or becoming in a manner of behavior) as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. (Ro 13:13-note)

Some uses of **peripateo** in **Corinthians**...

For (explaining why they still need milk and cannot take solid food) you (babes in Christ) are still fleshly. For



since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not **walking** like mere men? (1Cor 3:3)

for we **walk** by faith, not by sight (2Cor 5:7)

For though we **walk** in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh (2Cor 10:3-see note)

I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Titus did not take any advantage of you, did he? Did we not **conduct** ourselves in the same spirit and **walk** in the same steps? (2Cor 12:18)

**Paul** charges believers to "**walk** (present imperative = command to make this one's lifestyle) by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. (Gal 5:16-note)

**Paul's** classic description of unbelievers in Ephesians "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly **walked** according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. (Eph 2:1-2-See notes Ep 2:1; 2:2)

**Paul's** contrasting description of believers "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should **walk** in them. (See note Ep 2:10)

After describing the wealth (in Christ Jesus, in the heavenly places) of believers in the first three chapters of Ephesians, **Paul** proceeds to exhort us to **walk** accordingly (note the concentration of **peripateo** in the second half of Ephesians)...

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to **walk** in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, (See **note** Ephesians 4:1)

and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. (See note Ephesians 5:2)

for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; **walk** (present imperative = command to make this one's lifestyle) as children of light (See note Ephesians 5:8)

Therefore be careful how you **walk**, not as unwise men, but as wise, 16 making the most of (redeeming, buying up every second) your time, because the days are evil. (See note Ep 5:15; 5:16)

Here are a few of **Paul's** uses of **peripateo** in other epistles...

Brethren, **join** (present imperative = command to make this one's lifestyle) in following my example, and **observe** (present imperative = command to make this one's lifestyle pay attention to, implying mental concentration regarding) those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. (See note Php 3:17) 18 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, (See note Php 3:18)

Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may excel still more. (See note 1Th 4:1)

**John** uses **peripateo** in the figurative sense affirming that, "if we **walk** in the light as [God] Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin ([1Jn 1:7](#))

**J Vernon McGee** adds the practical comment that - **Walking** is not a balloon ascension. A great many people think the Christian life is some great, overwhelming experience and you take off like a rocket going out into space. That's not where you live the Christian life. Rather, it is in your home, in your office, in the schoolroom, on the street. The way you get around in this life is to walk. You are to walk in Christ. God grant that you and I might be joined to Him in our daily walk. ([McGee, J V: Thru the Bible Commentary: Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#))

**Strong believers** (Ro 15:1) must not insist on their liberty in the presence of those whose consciences would be offended. if a "weaker" Christian is distressed by what you eat, you are not acting in love if you eat it. Stott says, "Love never disregards weak consciences". To the one who loves, a weak brother's spiritual well-being is always more important than indulging the right to eat whatever one likes.

A weak Christian (Ro 14:1, 2, 3) can be hurt or distressed from watching another Christian say or do something he considers sinful. The hurt is deeper if the offending believer is admired and respected by the weaker one. A weak Christian also can be hurt when, by word or example, he is led by a stronger brother to go against the convictions of his own conscience. That is by far the greater offense. Being upset over what another Christian does can certainly hurt, but that hurt is not nearly so severe and damaging as the

hurt of a believer's conscience over what he himself has done. He suffers feelings of guilt, and forfeits much of his peace of mind, his joy, his witness, and perhaps even his assurance of salvation. A Christian whose careless use of his liberty causes such hurt to other believers is no longer walking according to love.

**Love (26) (agape)** is unconditional, sacrificial love and Biblically refers to a love that God is (1Jn 4:8,16), that God shows (Jn 3:16, 1Jn 4:9) and that God by His Spirit enables His children to bear (see note on fruit of the Spirit Gal 5:22- note).

It is not surprising that Greek literature throws little light on its distinctive NT meaning. Biblical **agape love** is the love of choice, the love of serving with humility, the highest kind of love, the noblest kind of devotion, the love of the will (intentional, a conscious choice) and not motivated by superficial appearance, emotional attraction, or sentimental relationship. **Agape** is not based on pleasant emotions or good feelings that might result from a physical attraction or a familial bond. **Agape** chooses as an act of self-sacrifice to serve the recipient. From all of the descriptions of **agape** love, it is clear that true **agape** love is a sure mark of salvation.

**Agape** is volitional

**Phileo** is emotional

**Agape** love does not depend on the world's criteria for love, such as attractiveness, emotions, or sentimentality. Believers can easily fall into the trap of blindly following the world's demand that a lover **feel** positive toward the beloved. This is not **agape** love, but is a love based on impulse. **Impulsive love** characterizes the spouse who announces to the other spouse that they are planning to divorce their mate. Why? They reason "I can't help it. I fell in love with another person!" Christians must understand that this type of impulsive love is completely contrary to God's **decisive love**, which is decisive because He is in control and has a purpose in mind. There are many reasons a proper understanding of the truth of God's word (and of the world's lie) is critical and one of the foremost is Jesus' declaration that

"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have **love** (agape) for one another." (John 13:35).

**F B Meyer** has the following description of agape **love**...

**Wherever there is true love, there must be giving, and giving to the point of sacrifice** Love is not satisfied with giving trinkets; it must give at the cost of sacrifice: it must give blood, life, all. And it was so with the love of God. "He so loved the world, that He gave his only-begotten Son." "Christ also loved and gave Himself up, an offering and a sacrifice to God." (Ep 5:2-note)

**We are to imitate God's love in Christ.** The love that gives, that counts no cost too great, and, in sacrificing itself for others, offers all to God, and does all for His sake. Such was the love of Jesus--sweet to God, as the scent of fields of new-mown grass in June; and this must be our model.

Not to those who love us, but who hate; not to those who are pleasant and agreeable, but who repel; not because our natural feelings are excited, but because we will to minister, even to the point of the cross, must our love go out. And every time we thus sacrifice ourselves to another for the sake of the love of God, we enter into some of the meaning of the sacrifice of Calvary, and there is wafted up to God the odour of a sweet smell. ([Devotional Commentary on Ephesians](#))

**DO NOT DESTROY WITH YOUR FOOD HIM FOR WHOM CHRIST DIED: me to bromati sou ekeinou apollue (2SPAM) huper ou Christos apethanen (3SAAI):**

- [Romans 14 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

For through your knowledge he who is weak is **ruined** (**apollumi**), the brother for whose sake Christ died (1Co 8:11)

**Jamieson** - Whatever tends to make anyone violate his conscience tends to the destruction of his soul; and he who helps, whether wittingly or no, to bring about the one is guilty of aiding to accomplish the other. ([Romans 14 - Bible Commentary](#))

**Do not destroy** - The Greek combination of a negative ("**me**" = not) plus the present imperative (command) can be translated "**stop destroying**" (indicating that this was already being practiced by believers in Rome) your brother over these non-essential issues of what you eat, etc. To act this way is to practice love with hypocrisy (Ro 12:9-note).

This is **NOT** being "devoted to one another in brotherly love" and is **NOT** giving "preference to one another in honor" (Ro 12:10-note).

It is **NOT** owing "nothing to anyone except to love one another" for clearly "Love does no wrong to a neighbor" (Ro 13:10-note).



In sum, this type of behavior is **NOT** walking according to love. If we are to live a life of consideration for our neighbor then we must learn that even though there are things we feel we biblically may do, many of those same things, for the sake of the body of Christ, we should not do. Agape love lays down its rights, seeking the highest good of the other person.

**McGee** - Since Christ was willing to die for that weak brother (Ro 5:8, Jn15:13, Isa 53:6, 1 Pet 3:18, 1 Jn 3:16, 4:9,10), certainly we ought to be willing to refrain from eating something or doing something that would hurt him in his Christian walk.

**MacArthur** - Food was emblematic of their liberty. Paul was talking to a liberated Jew who would flaunt a pork chop in the face of a newly converted Jew, or a liberated Gentile who would eat meat offered to idols in front of a newly converted pagan who just came out of an idolatrous system. Why let something as unimportant as food do something as awful as causing spiritual loss for a weaker brother or sister?

**To destroy** (622) (**apollumi** is derived from **apo** = away from + **olethros** =state of utter ruin) pertains to destruction but not annihilation and basically has to do with that which is ruined and is no longer usable for its intended purpose. It does not refer to the loss of being, but loss of well-being.

The KJV sometimes translates it **damnation** but in the context of Ro 14 **apollumi** does not mean that one brother can cause the **damnation** of another brother to the lake of fire, but it does indicate that one can seriously derail and ruin the offended brother's spiritual growth "in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18, 1Cor8:11, Ro14:20).

**Apollumi** means to destroy utterly but not to annihilate. It can also mean to perish (as in Mt 8:25)

**Apollumi** means to ruin so that the thing ruined can no longer serve the use for which it was designed. The gospel promises everlasting life for him who believes. The failure to possess this life will involve the utter ruin of those that perish. Apollumi then has to do with that which is ruined and is no longer usable for its intended purpose.

**Apollumi** is the term Jesus used to speak of those who are thrown into hell (Mt 10:28). As He makes clear elsewhere, hell is not a place or state of nothingness or unconscious existence, as is the Hindu Nirvana but is the place of everlasting torment, the place of eternal death, where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt 13:42, 50).

**Apollumi** is used some 265 times in the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT (Septuagint - LXX). In Psalm 1 we read that

the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will **perish** (Lxx - apollumi) (Ps 1:6-note)

Jesus used **apollumi** to remind His disciples what happened when men "**put new wine** into **old wineskins**" for they knew that this would make "the **wineskins burst**...and the **wineskins** are **ruined** (apollumi)". (Mt 9:17). The point is that these wineskins did not cease to exist but they did cease to fulfill the function for which they were created. In short they were rendered useless. In a similar way, the noun form, **apoleia**, is used to describe the reaction of the disciples when they saw the woman anointing Jesus' head with "**costly perfume**" (Mt 26:8). They became "indignant when they saw this and said "Why this **waste** (noun form = **apoleia**)" In essence they were asking Jesus why are You letting the precious oil perish and be rendered useless? The ointment did not go out of existence, but was used for what they judged to be a useless purpose (were they ever wrong!). In a similar way all men and women are created by God for fellowship with Him and for His glory (cf Isa 43:7), but when they individually refuse to come to Him for salvation they lose their opportunity for redemption and for becoming what God originally created them for. Their lives are wasted and useless (eternally)! They are fit only for everlasting condemnation and destruction away from the presence and the glory of the Father. This is the awful picture of what it means to "**perish**". This is not the desire of God for as Peter writes

Jesus used **apollumi** with a meaning similar to Paul here in Romans 14. In Mt 18:14 Jesus referred to nonpermanent ruin or loss. When Jesus said, "It is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish [**apollumi**]" (Mt18:14), the context makes clear that "these little ones" are believers. They have been "converted and become like children" (Mt18:3) and "believe in Me" (Mt 18:6). Jesus was not concerned about their **loss of salvation** but about their **loss of spiritual well being**, which, although not an eternal loss, is an injury the Lord considers to be extremely grave.

A brother's "**ruin**" is a serious consequence that I fear most believer's (including myself) do not fully comprehend.

Paul does not want the church to underestimate the significance of the non-essentials in the overall spiritual vitality of the body of Christ, for "if one member suffers, all the members suffer" (1Co 12:26) and on a given day yet future we will ALL (each one individually) give an accounting of how we dealt with our brethren regarding the "externals" (Ro 14:10,12, 2Cor 5:10, Mt 12:36; 16:27; 1Pet 4:5). (Don't misunderstand - Jesus paid for our sins as believers - our judgment will be in relation to rewards as Paul described in 1Co 3:11, 12, 13, 14, 15)

**John** gives us sage advice - "And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming....We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him

just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." (1Jn 2:28, 3:2,3)

**John MacArthur** on "**for whom Christ died**" - Paul concludes by telling the strong not to plunge the weak, "for whom Christ died," into spiritual devastation (Ro 14:15). That's a virtual repetition of 1 Corinthians 8:11. How could a strong believer treat in a loveless way someone **for whom Christ died** in an act of supreme love? What a contrast! Since Christ, the perfect Son of God, loved that weaker brother enough to die for him, shouldn't the strong believer, who is to emulate Christ, love his brother enough not to devastate his spirituality by insisting on his own liberty regardless of the circumstances? Paul calls us to build one another up by not causing each other to stumble, to grieve, or to suffer spiritual loss....When we read Romans 14:15 and realize that the weak believer is devastated by our exercise of liberty and our failure to love him, we are reminded that he was one for whom Christ died. We are to build up our brother in love by not causing him to stumble, grieve, or be devastated by falling into sin. ([Building Up One Another Without Offending, Part 1 - See dropdown list](#))

**Beware** - Be aware (beware, be wary) that some commentators interpret this verse to mean that a person can lose their salvation. Even the generally conservative College Press NIV Commentary has a note on the Romans section written by Jack Cottrell (Ph.D. Cincinnati Bible Seminary) with which I strongly disagree. Cottrell seems to imply in his comment that a believer can lose his salvation. Cottrell writes "I must conclude, though, that this strong warning does imply that the careless and unloving exercise of Christian liberty can lead to **actual loss of salvation** for a weak brother. Apollumi is frequently used in the sense of eternal destruction in hell (Mt 10:28; Lu 13:3, Jn 3:16, Ro 2:12)." (College Press NIV Commentary) **We must be Bereans!** (Acts 17:11 - see note;)

**MacArthur** on **Pondering the Principles** - Pondering the Principles 1. Are you in danger of abusing your liberty to the point of hurting yourself? Review the section on abusing Christian liberty (see pp. 2- 4). Be honest in your evaluation as you answer the following questions: Are you using your freedom to cloak any evil you might be practicing? Are you participating in any activity that is either potentially harmful to your health or to your ministry? Are you involved in anything to the point that you have become a slave to it? Are you doing anything that might result in your being torn down spiritually? If you answered yes to any of those questions, you are abusing your liberty in Christ. Stop your involvement in those things. Limit your liberty for your own sake. 2. Are there people in your fellowship you may have hurt by exercising some of your freedoms in Christ? Have you caused a brother to stumble, to grieve, or to suffer spiritual loss? If so, then you need to show him your love by limiting your liberty. What kinds of things can you do to reach down to him at his level of maturity? Only when you see things from his level can you begin to encourage him through Scripture to release some of his inhibitions in exercising his freedoms in Christ. But be cautious. Don't encourage him beyond what he is able to handle. Better you should love him where he is at than force him beyond his secure position. ([Building Up One Another Without Offending, Part 1 - See dropdown list](#))

**Steven Cole** - Love does not insist on its rights to the point of damaging a weaker brother's walk with God (14:15). Romans 14:15: "For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died." The argument here is, "If Christ loved this brother enough to die for him on the cross, then don't you think that you should love him enough to be willing to give up your ham sandwich (or glass of wine) so that you don't lead him into sin?" In other words, get some perspective: Your sacrifice of some liberty is nothing compared to Christ's sacrifice of His very life! Since Jesus called us to love one another as He loved us, the least you can do is to give up your right to certain liberties for the sake of your weaker brother.

But what does Paul mean when he talks about destroying your brother? He uses the same Greek word (translated "ruined") in 1Cor. 8:11: "For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died." It's a very strong word, used most often to refer to eternal damnation. Paul uses it this way in Romans 2:12, "For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law ...." It's also translated "perish" to refer to damnation in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

Because of this, a number of scholars who believe in the eternal security of believers nonetheless argue that Paul is saying that if you cause a weaker brother to sin by violating his conscience, you could cause his damnation. They explain this by saying that if the weaker brother falls away so as to perish, then he was a "brother" in name only, not in actual fact. Also, since Jesus will not lose any of His sheep for whom He laid down His life (John 10:28-29; 17:2, 12), they have to say that Christ didn't actually die as a substitute for this so-called brother. It only appeared for a while that this weaker brother was one of God's elect. But his falling away proves that he was not.

Also, they explain that God uses severe warnings in Scripture to cause the elect to persevere. For example, Paul says that Christ has reconciled you and will present you holy and blameless before God (Col. 1:23), "if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel ...." The warning passages in Hebrews sound as if true believers could perish, but the severity of the warnings causes true believers to turn from sin and continue in the faith.

One example of this use of means to accomplish God's promises is when Paul was on the boat about to be shipwrecked. The angel

of the Lord appeared to him and promised that none on the ship would perish. But a short time later when the sailors tried to escape on the ship's small boat, Paul told the centurion that unless these men remained on board the ship, the centurion and his men would not be saved (Acts 27:22-24, 31). Paul's warning was heeded, the sailors stayed on board, and all were saved.

While I greatly respect these scholars who say that the word destroy here means eternal destruction and I agree with some of the arguments that they put forth in other contexts, it seems to me that the context here overrides the usual meaning of the word and that here Paul means that flaunting your liberty will damage your brother's walk with God, not that you will cause a professing believer to go to eternal damnation. It's still a serious matter—we shouldn't minimize how bad it is to hurt a brother's walk with God. But I think that it goes too far here to insist on the usual meaning of destroy. Here are some reasons why I think as I do:

First as **John Stott** says, (pp. 365-366, cited by [Sam Storms- Liberty, Legalism, and Love \(4\)](#)), "Are we really to believe that a Christian brother's single act against his own conscience—which in any case is not his fault but the fault of the strong who have misled him, and which is therefore an unintentional mistake, not a deliberate disobedience—merits eternal condemnation? No, hell is reserved only for the stubborn, the impenitent, those who willfully persist in wrongdoing." Granted, perhaps this act of violating his conscience could lead to further violations, until finally he makes shipwreck of his faith (1Ti 1:19). So if we've caused a brother to stumble, we need to do all that we can to restore him. But our one sin that resulted in our brother's sin does not cause him to perish.

Also (as Martyn Lloyd-Jones argues, Romans: Liberty and Conscience [Banner of Truth], p. 191 -Ed: see also [Romans- An Exposition of Chapter 14-1-17, Liberty and Conscience By D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones](#)), the ultimate destiny of another soul is never in our hands. If we could cause anyone to be eternally lost, then our power would be greater than God's, who alone is able both to save and to keep us for eternity (Rom. 8:31-39). Also (Lloyd-Jones, p. 192), if sinning against our conscience results in perishing, we all would perish, because we've all sinned in this manner. But the Lord promises that those to whom He gives eternal life can never perish (John 10:28).

The practical application is that we should be very sensitive about not doing anything that might cause a weaker believer to violate his conscience. If we have sinned in this way, we should do all that we can to help get him back on track with the Lord. Love does not insist on its rights if doing so would damage a weaker brother's walk with God.

Thus love does not judge others on non-essential matters, but rather determines not to put a stumbling block in a brother's way. Love does not cause a weaker brother to violate his conscience. Love does not insist on its rights to the point of destroying a weaker brother's walk with God. ([Love Trumps Liberty Romans 14:13-16](#))

## The Separate Life Johannes Vos, 1903-1983

An essay against binding the conscience with regard to practices which cannot be proved from Scripture.

The question of the separated life is a very important one, not only because it is a practical question which must be faced by every thoughtful Christian, but also because of the doctrinal ramifications that it has. Insistence upon the obligation to live what is called "the separated life" is very prevalent in some circles of earnest Christians today. The details of the separation demanded vary greatly; practices which are tolerated by some groups — are denounced by others as inconsistent with Christian duty and fellowship, and vice versa.

In general, "the separated life," as the term is commonly used, may be understood to be a life which is separated not only from what can be proved by Scripture to be sinful, but also from various other practices which may be indifferent in themselves; and this separation is regarded as binding on the conscience of the Christian, and is sometimes made a term or condition of ecclesiastical or even of Christian fellowship.

This problem is far more important than is at first apparent. It is far more important than the mere question whether Christians ought to participate in or to abstain from certain particular kinds of conduct. Other problems of the greatest importance are involved. If we give a wrong answer to the question, "What is the Bible doctrine of the separated life?" then we are certain to fall into serious errors in other doctrines. Using the term "separated life" in the Biblical, not the popular, sense — we may say that the separated life is an ethical implication of the covenant of grace and is related to the doctrine of sanctification as the latter deals with the nature and place of good works in the Christian life. The other doctrines which are involved in the question of the separated life are:

- (1) Christian liberty in the use of things indifferent;
- (2) liberty of conscience from the commandments of men;

(3) the sufficiency of Scripture as the standard of faith and conduct;

(4) the nature and limits of the authority of the Christian church.

The purpose of the present paper is to set forth the teaching of Scripture concerning the separated life, and then to show how erroneous teaching about the separated life affects the four doctrines enumerated above.

### **I. Separation from SIN**

Separation from sin is required of the Christian by the covenant of grace. The conditions of the covenant of grace are repentance and faith. The repentance which contemplates continuance in sin is not true repentance, but a mere feigned or hypocritical repentance. When a particular course of conduct is demonstrated to be sinful, that is, contrary to the moral law of God — then separation from such conduct is required of the Christian by God himself. The moral law of God binds all of Adam's posterity to personal, entire, exact and perpetual obedience (Westminster Confession of Faith, XIX.i). That God requires separation from sin, is the consistent teaching of all Scripture. Romans 6:1-2 may be cited as an example: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. We who died to sin — how shall we any longer live therein?"

That the Christian may continue in sin in order that grace may abound, is Antinomianism — which is one of the most harmful of all heresies. We may confidently assert that Scripture requires the separated life, in the sense of separation from sinful conduct, of every Christian — indeed, of every human being.

### **II. Separation from OCCASIONS of Temptation to Sin**

The Christian is required to separate not merely from sin itself, but also from known occasions of temptation to sin. It is not a sin to be tempted; the Lord Jesus Christ was tempted by the devil — yet He was wholly without sin. It is, however, a sin deliberately to place ourselves in the path of temptation to sin. In the Lord's Prayer we use the petition, "Lead us not into temptation." Concerning this the Larger Catechism, no. 195, states: ". . . that we, even after the pardon of our sins, by reason of our corruption, weakness, and lack of watchfulness — are not only subject to be tempted, and forward to expose ourselves unto temptations; but also of ourselves unable and unwilling to resist them, to recover out of them, and to improve them . . ."

Christians are here said to be forward to expose themselves unto temptations, and doubtless this forwardness is itself sinful, inasmuch as it proceeds from our corruption of nature. Christians, therefore, instead of being forward in exposing themselves to temptations to sin — ought to separate themselves from such temptations and those things which are known to be occasions thereto.

This is substantially taught in the words of Christ in Matthew 5:29-30: "And if your right eye causes you to stumble — pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish, and not the whole body be cast into Hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble — cut it off, and cast it from you; for it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish, and not your whole body go into Hell."

Of course these words are not to be understood literally; the Lord does not intend us to attempt to avoid sin by actually mutilating our bodies. The real meaning is that the Christian is bound to cut off occasions of temptation to sin. A hand or an eye is not sinful in itself; they are here used metaphorically for occasions of temptation, which may be quite harmless in themselves, but which for various reasons cause the Christian to stumble. The Lord's command is to cut them off, even though they may be harmless in themselves.

It will be noted that the command is conditional: "If your right eye causes you to stumble," etc. Therefore no universal rule can be made in this matter, for what is an overwhelming temptation to one person — may be no temptation at all to another person.

For a Chinese just converted from heathenism to keep a small brass image of the Buddha in his house, would be to tolerate a serious occasion of temptation to sin. For him the only safe course, even the only right course, is to get rid of the abomination as soon as possible.

For a retired missionary living in America to have an image of the Buddha in his house as a curio cannot possibly be an occasion of temptation to him or to anyone else; to dispose of such an object in order to avoid temptation would be absurd. The image itself is "nothing in the world" (I Corinthians 8:4); it is simply "a piece of brass" (II Kings 18:4); but to the man just saved from paganism, it is a symbol of all the abominations of idolatry and a constant invitation to return to the old ways.

We should always remember that in reality all temptation is so dangerous because of the corruption of man's sinful heart — and not because of the inherent nature of any material thing. The truth is elementary, but it is constantly being overlooked or misunderstood, not only by earnest Christians but even by popular religious teachers of the present day.

Since the real menace of temptation comes from the corruption of the human heart, not from the material things which surround us or the situations in life with which we are confronted — we see how false the doctrine is, which would formulate hard and fast rules about separation from occasions of temptation to sin. Since, in the very nature of the case, that which tempts one man does not affect another — such formulations ought not to be made; and if made, they ought to be rejected by all Christian people who value their freedom of conscience.

Beyond question it is a duty to separate from occasions of temptation to sin; but just what constitutes an occasion of temptation to sin — no man can authoritatively say for another so as to bind the other's conscience; much less can any man or church formulate universal regulations binding upon all men in such matters as these.

### III. Separation from the WORLD

In addition to the obligation to separate from sin and from occasions of temptation to sin — there is a sense in which Scripture requires of the Christian separation from the world. In the original languages of Scripture, various terms are used which are translated "world" in the English Bible, and these are used with various meanings. In the New Testament the words *aion* and *kosmos* are frequently used, the latter being much more common. The latter term is used in the New Testament with at least two entirely distinct meanings, of which examples may be cited as follows:

1. The World of Men, Regarded as God's Property. Matthew 13:38: "And the field is the world . . . ." Romans 5:12: "Through one man sin entered into the world . . . ." I Corinthians 7:31: "Those who use the world, as not using it to the full . . . ."

2. The Sinful World, Regarded as Satan's Kingdom. I John 2:15: "If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him . . . ." John 14:30: "The prince of this world comes, and he has nothing in me . . . ." Ephesians 2:2: "According to the course of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air . . . ."

That the Christian is not required to separate from human society or from the world itself, is proved by I Corinthians 5:9-10, "I wrote unto you in my epistle to have no company with fornicators: not at all meaning with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous and extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must you needs go out of the world."

Mediaeval monasticism was an attempt to separate from the world itself, an attempt to escape corruption by abstaining from all association with the corrupt. The Apostle Paul, in the text cited above, rejects this as an absurdity. The Christian is not required to separate from all association with unregenerate and sinful men; he is permitted to have civil association, even with fornicators, covetous, extortioners and idolaters; but he is forbidden to regard such as within the pale of Christian or ecclesiastical fellowship.

The Christian is, however, required to separate from all participation in the sins of the world. This is taught by II Corinthians 6:17-18 and I Timothy 5:22, "Therefore come out from among them, and be separate, says the Lord — and touch no unclean thing; and I will receive you, and I will be to you a Father, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty." "Neither be partaker of other men's sins — keep yourself pure."

In this sense, separation from the world — is the same thing as separation from sin. It simply means separation from those things, sinful in themselves, which specially characterize the world regarded as Satan's kingdom.

The Christian is also bound to witness against the world as Satan's kingdom. Jesus Christ was a witness against the world in this sense, as shown by John 7:7, "The world cannot hate you; but it hates me — because I testify of it, that its works are evil."

The Christian must follow the example of Christ, and testify of the world, that its works are evil. The Christian must maintain a consistent testimony against the world, and this involves separation from all conduct inconsistent with that testimony. This kind of separation from the world is required of Christians in Revelation 18:4, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues . . . ."

Even in the legitimate use of the world considered as God's possession, the Christian must be moderate, as is shown by I Corinthians 7:29-31, "What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away."

The Christian is a stranger and pilgrim on the earth (Hebrews 11:13). His citizenship is in Heaven (Philippians 3:20), where he already is in the person of his representative, Christ (Colossians 3:1). The present world, even regarded apart from sin, as God's creation and possession, is only temporary, a mere preparation for the eternal order of things (Hebrews 13:14). Therefore the Christian must abstain from everything inconsistent with his position as a stranger and pilgrim — that is, from all inordinate use of the world.

The expression "not using it to the full" might be paraphrased "not using it too intensely." In this matter, as in the case of occasions

of temptation to sin — it is obviously impossible to formulate specific rules; each case must be decided on its own merits by the person concerned, acting in accordance with a conscience enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

#### **IV. The Separated Life and the Use of THINGS INDIFFERENT**

Scripture recognizes a classification of things or actions which are commonly called adiaphora — or "things indifferent." This term must not be misunderstood. It does not mean that a Christian, in performing any particular act, can be regarded as himself morally neutral or indifferent, or that the Christian can at any time take a moral holiday and concern himself wholly with things morally indifferent.

Man is a moral agent and is always accountable to God for the state of his heart and for his every thought, word and deed. Everything that the Christian is and does, always has moral significance. This is shown by Colossians 3:17 and I Corinthians 10:31: "And whatever you do, in word or in deed — do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." "Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatever you do — do all to the glory of God."

**No matter what he does, the Christian is always either living for the glory of God — or else sinning against the glory of God.** "Whatever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). A Christian performing any particular act under any particular set of circumstances, must be either glorifying God or else committing sin — there can be no third possibility.

This does not mean that there are no adiaphora or things indifferent in themselves; it simply means that the right use of things indifferent, that is, the careful, temperate, God-fearing and conscientious use of or abstinence from them — is for the glory of God. Whereas the wrong use of things indifferent, that is the abuse of them, is contrary to the glory of God and therefore sinful.

**But while the Christian himself is never morally neutral, still there are certain things and practices which, considered in themselves, are morally indifferent.** This cannot be denied for it is clearly taught in Scripture, especially in such passages as Romans 14:1-23, I Corinthians 8:1-13 and I Corinthians 10:23-32.

**One part of Christian liberty consists in the conscientious free use of or abstinence from things indifferent, that is, things which are not in themselves unlawful.** In this category Scripture includes such practical matters as what we shall eat and drink (Romans 14:2-3, 6, 14, 17, 21; I Corinthians 8:8, 10:25-26), the observance of certain days (Romans 14:5-6), and such matters as marriage and celibacy (I Corinthians 7:28).

- What is the duty of the Christian with respect to things indifferent?
- Should he abstain from all conduct which might offend any Christian?
- If so, what are the proper grounds for this abstinence?
- Or should the Christian assert his freedom by the free use of things indifferent before the eyes of men?

The teaching of Scripture on these and related questions may be summed up as follows:

##### **1. Things indifferent, can never be sinful in themselves.**

To classify something as indifferent, and then regard it as sinful in itself — is to become involved in a contradiction in terms, as if one were to speak of an honest thief, or a truthful liar. It is true, of course, that the use of things indifferent may, under certain circumstances, be sinful — but this is very far from implying that things indifferent can be sinful in themselves.

When we affirm that a particular thing or act is sinful in itself, we mean that it is inseparable from sin, and therefore cannot possibly, under any circumstances whatever, be done without sin.

For example, adultery is sinful in itself; under no possible circumstances can it be committed without sin. Its sinful character is not contingent upon special circumstances, but is inherent in its very nature and inseparable from it.

Playing on the piano, on the other hand, is in itself morally indifferent. Just because it is a thing indifferent, it can never be sinful in itself. But there may exist circumstances in which such an act is sinful. If a child has been forbidden by its parents to play on the piano at a particular time, but does so anyway, then under those circumstances playing on the piano is sinful. The sin committed, however, is not the sin of piano playing — but the sin of disobedience to legitimate parental authority.

Again, if a person develops such a consuming passion for piano music that he devotes to this pursuit practically all of this time and strength, and makes it the supreme business and chief aim of his life, even above worshiping God and seeking his kingdom and righteousness — then in such a case and when carried to such an intemperate extreme, playing on the piano is sinful. The sin committed, however, is not the sin of piano playing but the sin of idolatry.

Thus we see that while certain circumstances may render the use of adiaphora sinful by a particular person at a particular time, or

under certain circumstances — still this is very different from affirming that the things in question are sinful in themselves.

Let us assure ourselves, then, once for all, that Scripture does really teach that certain things or actions are not sinful in themselves, but morally indifferent. If this fact be denied or ignored — then only confusion and error can result.

If any of our readers are disposed to deny that Scripture teaches the existence of adiaphora, we can only entreat them to make a more careful study of the fourteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. This doctrine is proved by Romans 14:14 and I Corinthians 10:23. "I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean." "All things are lawful — but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful — but not all things edify."

There can be little doubt that certain groups among American Fundamentalists have to a considerable extent revived the ancient Gnostic doctrine that material things can be sinful in themselves. It is not difficult, however, to show how contrary this conception is to the Biblical doctrine of sin.

According to Scripture, the seat of sin is the corrupt heart of fallen man — not any material thing or impersonal matter. This is shown by our Lord's words in Mark 7:21-23, "For from within, out of the heart of men, evil thoughts proceed, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetings, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, railing, pride, foolishness: all these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man."

Scripture also teaches that sin has an absolute character — even the slightest sin is a violation of the whole moral law of God and brings on the sinner the sentence of eternal separation from God (James 2:10-11; Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23). If the use of any material thing is sinful in itself, then that use partakes of the absolute character of sin and brings upon the user a deserved sentence to eternal punishment.

Thus, if the use of any material things is sinful in itself — then such use is sinful regardless of the degree of use. In that case, even the slightest possible use is an offence against the righteousness of God which brings His deserved wrath upon the user (Romans 1:18).

This may be illustrated as follows: Beyond doubt it is sinful to commit suicide by drinking carbolic acid. This, however, is not because the use of carbolic acid is sinful in itself, but because it is used with suicidal intent. In such a case, the sin committed is the sin of suicide — not the sin of drinking carbolic acid. Carbolic acid being a material thing cannot be sinful in itself. If its use were sinful in itself, that use would be sinful regardless of the quantity used. If one drop of carbolic acid were to be dissolved in a thousand gallons of water, and one drop of the resultant solution drunk, the drinking of that one drop would be a sin deserving the punishment of eternal death, provided the use of carbolic acid is sinful in itself.

Let no one say that this is simply a *reductio ad absurdum* and therefore not worthy of serious consideration. Scripture does teach that sin has an absolute character — and that any sin, even the least, is a violation of the whole moral law and therefore deserving of the judicial sentence of eternal death. This being the teaching of Scripture, it follows necessarily that if the use of material things can be sinful in itself — then the slightest such use is deserving of the judicial sentence of eternal death.

The absurdity is in the notion that sin can be inherent in the use of any material thing — not in the Scripture doctrine that even the least sin has an absolute character. It is extremely important at the present time to defend the proposition that things indifferent cannot be sinful in themselves, for this proposition is widely denied in some Fundamentalist circles today. A return to the teaching of Romans 14 and I Corinthians 8 would be a most beneficial thing in the life of many churches today.

## **2. The Christian is free to use or abstain from things indifferent.**

Since things indifferent are not sinful in themselves — the Christian is free to use them except when there is some special reason for abstinence from them. Scripture expressly uses the word "liberty" (I Corinthians 8:9; 10:29) in dealing with this matter. The Christian's freedom to use or abstain from things indifferent is also brought out by Romans 14:5 and 22: "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind." "Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves."

Since the Christian is declared to be free to use or not use things indifferent — then it follows that any abstinence from things indifferent must in the nature of the case be voluntary, and not obligatory. This is brought out by Romans 14:21, "It is good not to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor to do anything whereby your brother stumbles."

The word translated "good" is *kalon*, which means "pleasant," "lovely," or "seemly," but cannot possibly mean "obligatory." The same Greek word is used in Mark 9:5, where Peter, speaking of the Mount of Transfiguration, says to the Lord, "It is good for us to be here." This should be sufficient to show that Romans 14:21 cannot possibly be interpreted as a divine prohibition of the use of any material thing.



### **3. It is not of the essence of Christian liberty, that it must be exercised in the sight of men.**

Scripture teaches, rather, that it is to be exercised in the sight of God, and that God holds the Christian accountable for his use or abuse of this freedom. This is proved by Romans 14:22, 6, 12, "The faith which you have — have you to yourself before God." "He who regards the day, regards it unto the Lord: and he who eats, eats unto the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who eats not, unto the Lord he eats not, and gives God thanks." "So then, each one of us shall give account of himself to God."

A corollary of this truth that the Christian is responsible to God for his use or abuse of Christian liberty, is the command to refrain from judging others for their conscientious use of things indifferent, as shown by Romans 14:4, 10, 13, "Who are you that judge the servant of another? to his own lord he stands or falls . . ." "But you, why do you judge your brother? or you again, why do you set at nothing your brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God." "Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another."

These texts speak of individual judging of individuals. The judicial function of the church in these matters will be dealt with in a subsequent section of this paper. As to individual judging, can there be any doubt that uncharitable and presumptuous judging of others for their legitimate and conscientious use of things indifferent, is exceedingly common at the present day?

### **4. The Christian must take care take he does not cause others to stumble.**

The Christian is accountable to God to take care that in his use of things indifferent, he does not cause others to stumble or be offended. The Christian is his brother's keeper, and has a responsibility for his brother's welfare. He should therefore deny himself and voluntarily abstain from the use of particular things which are in themselves indifferent — when a brother would be offended or caused to stumble by their use.

This is shown by Romans 14:7, 13, 15, 21, "For none of us lives to himself, and none dies to himself." "Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way." "If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating, destroy your brother for whom Christ died." "It is good not to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor to do anything whereby your brother stumbles."

In this connection, it must be repeated and emphasized that, so far as the Christian's relation to his brethren is concerned, the abstinence spoken of in these texts is voluntary and not obligatory abstinence. It should be carefully noted that Romans 14, I Corinthians 8 and I Corinthians 10:23-32 are definitely addressed to the individual Christian — and not to church assemblies or judicatories. The singular number is used throughout. These passages, therefore, present principles for the guidance of Christians in regulating their personal conduct — not principles for the guidance of church assemblies in formulating conditions of church membership.

A Christian may feel that it is his duty, before God, to abstain from a particular thing which is in itself indifferent — while yet realizing that, so far as others are concerned, it is not mandatory upon him to abstain. In such a case, abstinence is obligatory so far as the relation between the Christian and God is concerned — but voluntary so far as the relation between the Christian and his brethren is concerned. Abstinence can be truly voluntary, only when it is a matter between the Christian and his Lord; when it is made mandatory by ecclesiastical enactment — then it ceases to be voluntary and becomes obligatory.

This would seem very clear from the texts above cited, taken in their context, yet it has been repeatedly claimed that Romans 14:21 contains a divine prohibition of the use of certain material things. If that is the true meaning of Romans 14:21, then all the rest of the chapter is without point and its teaching is utterly obscure.

### **5. In abstinence from things indifferent, the Christian's conscience is free.**

Abstinence from things indifferent, while it may proceed from consideration for the weak conscience of a brother — can never proceed from our own conscience, except in the indirect sense that our conscience requires us to be considerate of the weaknesses of fellow Christians; for if a thing is regarded as indifferent — then how could the use of it be sinful in itself, or how could we abstain because of our own conscience?

The relation of Christian liberty to the conscience is proved by I Corinthians 10:25-29, "Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, 'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it.' If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if anyone says to you, 'This has been offered in sacrifice,' then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake — the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience?"

The closing words of the above citation need to be emphasized today: "For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience?" Why should my liberty, in those things in which Christ has left me free — be subject to the judgment of an individual

brother's conscience, or to the collective judgment of the conscience of a church assembly or judicatory?

Let us ask ourselves in all seriousness: what right has any person or power on earth to bind the conscience of the Christian in matters in which Christ has declared that conscience to be free under God? The very heart of the Scripture teaching concerning the use of things indifferent — is that the Christian is free to use or to abstain from using such things, according to his own conscience, and that for his use or abuse of this freedom he is accountable to God.

The moment that specific rules are made by men concerning things indifferent, the moment that any man or body of men requires of the Christian abstinence from things indifferent for religious or moral reasons — at that moment liberty has become bondage; and the conscience, left free by God as to things indifferent — has become enslaved to the commandments of men. At that moment, abstinence ceases to be voluntary and becomes obligatory — and the entire Scripture teaching on this subject is utterly convoluted.

#### **6. A matter must be regarded as indifferent in itself — until proved sinful by scripture.**

The question may be raised, How are we to decide whether or not a particular matter belongs in the category of things indifferent? In this, as in all other questions of faith and conduct — the Word of God must be our chart and compass. A matter must be regarded as indifferent — until proved to be sinful, not vice versa. A man is regarded as innocent until proved guilty.

Nothing could be more false and dangerous, than the contention of some religious teachers that a matter must be regarded as sinful — until proved to be indifferent. When there is any doubt that the matter is sinful in itself — then it must be left to the individual conscience. If the teaching of Scripture about a particular matter appears to be doubtful or obscure, or even seems to be contradictory — this is all the more reason for church assemblies not to make authoritative pronouncements or laws about such a matter.

What God has clearly revealed — let the church confidently enforce. What God has not clearly revealed — let the church not presume to determine. God grant that we may be preserved from trying to have a clearer standard — than the Bible; or a more complete set of moral laws — than that contained in the Word of God!

Beyond question a great deal of the present insistence on the obligation to live what is called the separated life proceeds from misunderstanding of the Scripture passages dealing with the use of things indifferent. When groups of earnest Christians demand separation from particular things, in themselves indifferent, as the condition of Christian fellowship — then they set up a false and unwarranted standard of fellowship, and become guilty of presumption by judging their brethren in those things in which Christ has left them free under God.

#### **V. The Separated Life — and the Sufficiency of Scripture**

The principle of the sufficiency of Scripture as the standard of faith and conduct, is involved in the problem of the separated life. Separation from certain things is sometimes demanded — which Scripture does not declare or imply to be sinful. Sometimes the attempt is made to show that some of these things or practices are sinful by bringing in a secondary authority, such as experience, physical science, the so-called Christian consciousness.

Experience or science may show good reasons for abstaining from certain acts or habits — but experience or science can never of itself be binding on the conscience of man.

Moreover, those who wish to introduce science as an additional authority — always speak as if it were a very simple matter to ascertain what science has to say on any particular question. They always speak as if somewhere there were a sort of scientific pope who could utter *ex cathedra* the final, united, unquestionable voice of science. They seem to presuppose that the voice of science can be heard, speaking with authoritative accents, by simply consulting a few volumes in the public library.

The truth is, however, that "science" is an abstraction. There is in the world today no such thing as the voice of science; there are only the voices of a multitude of scientists, and they are anything but agreed among themselves. Now who is to decide which of these many voices is to be accepted as the authoritative voice of science?

One scientist, a professor in a great university, states that years of research have failed to demonstrate that a certain practice shortens life. Another scientist, of equal scientific standing, maintains the contrary position. Who is to decide which represents the authoritative voice of science? All too often those who wish to place science alongside of Scripture as a standard of faith and conduct — wish at the same time to be the judges of what is science; those who hold certain views, they regard as scientists; all others, they reject as being prejudiced or otherwise untrustworthy.

Can any pope or church assembly decide just what kinds of science — the opinions of just which scientists — are authoritative and therefore, along with Scripture, binding on the conscience of man? No! In matters of science, every person must decide for himself. And even if certain scientific theories are believed to be true — they cannot be binding on the conscience.

We must beware of the sin mentioned in the Larger Catechism, no. 105, of "making men the lords of our faith and conscience." All human authority, however expert or learned — is fallible, and therefore cannot bind the conscience. Science may show that certain things are harmful to the body — but science can never show that anything is sinful.

Scripture alone can show that anything, for example a particular course of conduct, is sinful. It is true that the light of nature, or the moral law written on the heart of man (Rom 2:14-15), shows that certain acts, such as murder, are wrong; but the light of nature does not tell us anything about morality — in addition to what is revealed in Scripture. Scripture is a fuller revelation than natural revelation, and includes all of the latter and much besides; therefore when Scripture does not declare or imply that a certain practice is sinful — we cannot turn from Scripture to natural revelation for fuller light on the matter.

(In this connection it may be remarked that the modernist notion that all human knowledge and science is a divine revelation in the same sense that Scripture is a divine revelation — is utterly false and destructive. Natural revelation is a provision of God by which the heathen, who do not have the light of Scripture, may know something of His power, divinity and moral law. Natural revelation is insufficient for salvation — but leaves men without excuse and provides a standard by which those who lived and died without the light of special revelation shall be judged. Romans 1:18-20; 2:12-16.)

Scripture of course teaches that it is ordinarily the duty of Christians to abstain from what is harmful to the body. This is not always the duty of Christians, for there may be circumstances when loyalty to Christ requires that our own physical welfare be disregarded — or even that, rather than deny the Lord, we suffer martyrdom and allow the body to be entirely destroyed.

The sixth commandment, "You shall not kill," is stated by the Shorter Catechism to forbid "the taking of our own life, or the life of our neighbor, unjustly, or whatever tends thereunto" (no. 69). This commandment is binding on every man, and the interpretation of it given in the Catechism is doubtless the correct one. It thus becomes binding on the conscience of the Christian to abstain from that which tends toward the unjust destruction of his own life, or that of his neighbor — that is, from that which is harmful to the body.

But we should note that the decision whether a particular act is harmful, must be made by the individual concerned. Science is never infallible — it cannot bind the conscience. Therefore the individual Christian must judge of the statements of science — but the statements of science must not judge the Christian! To deny this, means to make science, instead of God — the Lord of the conscience. No alleged "findings" of science can be formulated into an authoritative list of harmful things or acts. The relation between the sufficiency of Scripture as the standard of faith and conduct and the problem of the separated life, must be summarized as follows:

1. The Christian is required by God to separate from what is sinful.
2. Scripture alone can demonstrate that a given course of conduct is sinful.
3. Natural revelation cannot be regarded as a fuller revelation than Scripture, or as equivalent to Scripture in any sense whatever.
4. It is possible that science or experience may show that certain conduct is harmful.
5. Science or experience can never show that anything is sinful.
6. Scripture teaches that what is really harmful, is ordinarily sinful.
7. The decision whether science or experience shows that particular conduct is harmful — must be made by the individual concerned, not by other people.
8. Church assemblies may not issue authoritative regulations based in whole or in part — on any other standard than Scripture.

To depart from these principles, is to deny the sufficiency of Scripture as the standard of faith and conduct — and to elevate experience or science to the position of an additional authority coordinate with Scripture. This may be illustrated as follows:

Science, let us say, has demonstrated that in certain conditions the eating of large amounts of certain foods is harmful to the body; this does not prove that the use of those foods is sinful in itself. Science, moreover, cannot tell precisely where the border line between harmless use and harmful use lies. Scripture requires abstinence from that which is harmful, but teaches that no material thing is sinful in itself (Romans 14:4). In the very nature of the case, the individual concerned must be the judge of the extent of legitimate use in such a case, so far as his conscience is concerned.

Some may say that the individual's physician is the proper judge in such a case — but even so, judgment is still left with the individual; he is free to follow or to reject his physician's advice, and also free to change or dismiss his physician.

For an ecclesiastical judicatory to assert that science declares the matters in question to be harmful — therefore they are sinful

under all circumstances — amounts to denying the sufficiency of Scripture and making human science an additional, equivalent authority.

If a Christian suffering from some bodily pain, takes more aspirin than is good for him — he may by this do something which is harmful to the body. He may even be doing something which, though not sinful in itself — is in that particular instance a sin against God. But the fact that it is possible for a person to commit sin by excessive use of aspirin — by no means warrants a church assembly in enacting a rule limiting or prohibiting the use of aspirin by church members; because the use of aspirin is in itself morally indifferent. In the nature of the case, the extent of legitimate use is a matter between the person and his Lord.

No third party can be admitted to determine the question, so far as the morality of the matter is concerned. A physician may give good advice concerning the care of the body and the proper dosage of medicines — but he has nothing to do with the consciences of his patients. No fellow Christian, no bishop, no pope, no ecclesiastical assembly — can step in and say: "So-and-so many grains of aspirin constitute a legitimate medicinal dose, provided you have so-and-so many degrees of headache. At that precise point, aspirin ceases to be morally indifferent — and its use becomes sinful."

Many people today are ready to take the real or alleged "findings" of science (or rather of certain scientists) — that certain material things or certain habits are harmful to the body; and on this basis alone, to affirm confidently that those things or those habits are necessarily sinful in themselves. To do this is not only to fall into Gnostic error — but to repudiate the sufficiency of the Word of God as the authoritative standard of morality — and to make fallible, human knowledge, an authoritative standard of conduct.

## **VI. The Separated Life, and the Nature and Extent of the Authority of the Christian Church**

In the formulation of creedal doctrine — the Christian church is strictly limited by Scripture. The church has the right to require of her officers and members assent to everything that can be shown to be taught or implied in Scripture — but the church does not have the right to add anything to what is contained in Scripture.

The authority of the church is ministerial and declarative — not legislative. It is derived from Christ — not original in the church itself. It is no an absolute authority — but one limited and regulated by a definite revelation, the Scriptures.

From these considerations, it follows that the church has no right to go beyond Scripture and compile lists of specific things or acts, in themselves indifferent, which experience or science propose to show to be harmful — and which are therefore alleged to be wrong for the Christian to use or to do.

There are some Christian denominations which actually single out certain specific acts, in themselves indifferent — and require of church members abstinence from those things as a condition of membership. In some cases this requirement of abstinence is written into the denomination's creedal doctrine, and members are not merely required to abstain from the particular things involved — but are also required to express their assent to the rightfulness of this requirement of abstinence.

This tendency, which assumes various forms in various circles, is a very unhealthy one — for it tends to give people the notion that the church can, by its own authority — legislate for the lives of its members, and even go beyond Scripture in requiring of them, abstinence from particular things which are in themselves indifferent.

Of course the church may and should require its members to abstain from everything that can be proved by Scripture to be sinful. The breach of such abstinence can be justly censured by ecclesiastical judicatories, when the fact is proved. But the church has not authority to require abstinence from things indifferent. The church has no authority to usurp the functions of the individual Christian conscience — and decide for her members, concerning the use of things indifferent.

For the church to censure her members for doing that which cannot be proved from Scripture, without the use of any additional authority, to be sinful — is to exceed the limits of legitimate church authority. At the point where a secondary authority becomes necessary — the matter automatically passes from the church, to the court of the individual conscience, precisely because God alone is Lord of the conscience, and human authority cannot bind the conscience. Let all church courts beware of committing the sin which Spurgeon described as "violating the crown rights of God who alone is Lord of the consciences of men."

Even though a church member may have committed an act which in the opinion of the members of a judicatory would be sinful if committed in like circumstances by themselves — still the judicatory has no right to censure such a person unless it can be proved from Scripture that the act was sinful. Just as in criminal law, a jury may be of the opinion that a defendant has committed a wrong — but has no right to convict him unless the evidence proves that he has violated the law of the land. A church judicatory may not decide cases by opinion, but must decide according to the law and the evidence.

It will be seen to follow from the foregoing, that just as the church has no authority to go beyond Scripture in legislating concerning particular things which are in themselves indifferent — so the church has no authority to censure her members for any use of things indifferent — unless that use can be proved to involve the violation of an express or implied command of Scripture.

It is not sufficient to show that a command of Scripture may have been violated — or that an act has been committed which might, under some circumstances, involve the violation of a command of Scripture. To be justly liable to ecclesiastical censure — a church member must be charged with a particular act, committed at a particular time and place, and concerning this act, two things must be proved:

- (1) it must be proved that the act was actually committed by the person, and at the time and place specified in the charge;
- (2) it must be proved that the act, in the circumstances under which it was committed, involved the violation of a command of Scripture, that is, that it was sinful.

Church discipline must always deal with real offenses — not with the legitimate and conscientious use of things indifferent. Its function is to remedy actual wrongs already committed — not to prevent the commission of wrongs by enforcing abstinence from things which are in themselves not sinful but indifferent.

## **VII. The Work of the Holy Spirit, Versus the Doctrines and Commandments of Men**

Those who wish to add to what God has spoken in Scripture, certain man-made regulations concerning things indifferent, often take this position because they believe these rules are necessary in order to prevent various evils. They assume that unless a rule is made — then a particular evil will exist unchecked. So a church in China makes a rule against the use of opium by church members — and a church in Mexico a rule against the use of marijuana. In each case, the motive is a laudable one — namely to prevent church members from becoming addicted to certain drugs. Nevertheless, a careful study of the problem leads us to the conclusion that the enactment of such regulations — proceeds from false assumptions, is ineffectual for the intended purpose, and is very dishonoring to the Holy Spirit.

For a church judicatory to enact a rule prohibiting the use of opium by church members, for example — shows a presupposition that such a rule is necessary. Clearly the assumption is that, unless such a rule is made — some church members will use opium. And it seems to be assumed that some church members will abstain from the use of opium because of a church rule — who would not abstain if there were no such ecclesiastical regulation.

Now those who advocate man-made regulations concerning things indifferent, reason — as though the Holy Spirit did not dwell in the hearts of the Lord's people, as though there were no such thing as sanctification by the Holy Spirit, and as though Christian people were the same as the children of the world. They fail to take the power of the Holy Spirit into their reckoning.

How are the members of the church to be kept from using opium or marijuana? The only way they can think of, is to make a rule prohibiting the use of these things by church members. What a confession! What ignorance concerning the nature and power of the Holy Spirit's work. What an admission concerning the spiritual state of the church members for whom the rule is made!

Church members are supposed to be Christian people. If they are not Christian people — then they really have no right to be church members at all. This does not mean that church officers can examine people's hearts and admit to membership only those who are truly regenerate, for they cannot. It does mean, however, that in a church where the gospel of Jesus Christ is faithfully proclaimed, where a credible profession of faith is required of those admitted from the world, and where the discipline of the Lord's house is faithfully administered — the hypocrites will be very few. Such a church will be made up of regenerate Christian people.

Now the Word of God teaches us that every Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and that if any person does not possess the Holy Spirit — then he is not a Christian at all (Romans 8:9). The Holy Spirit is God — He is omnipotent, and He carries on in each of God's children the work of sanctification, until each is made perfect in the likeness of Christ.

Therefore, where the gospel is faithfully preached and taught, there will be no need to go beyond Scripture and add the doctrines and commandments of men concerning things in themselves indifferent. The Spirit of God will work true holiness in the hearts and lives of the people, their consciences will be enlightened, and their walk consistent.

Long ago the Apostle Paul warned the Colossians against all such man-made rules, as we read in Colossians 2:20-23, "Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!'" These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence."

From this we learn that man-made regulations about things indifferent are ineffectual: "they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence." Whatever men may say about such rules and regulations, the Holy Spirit here tells us that they are useless as a means of restraining sensual indulgence. In another place, the Holy Spirit has given us through the Apostle Paul the true secret of overcoming the fleshly lusts, as we see in Galatians 5:16, "But I say, Walk by the Spirit — and you shall not fulfill the lust of the

flesh."

The whole passage, Galatians 5:16-24, is a radical antidote for the false belief that man-made rules and regulations can curb the sinful tendencies of the Christian's old nature. Many of those who today are so zealous for human ordinances about things indifferent, fall into the error of the Galatians, who supposed that the Christian life is begun in the Spirit — but perfected in the flesh (Galatians 3:3); begun by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit — but completed by human efforts, actions and abstinences.

Someone may object that opium and marijuana, for example, are not indifferent — but sinful in themselves. We have already shown that no material thing can be sinful in itself. Now if opium, marijuana or any other particular material substance is to be regarded as an exception to this principle — then the problem is raised as to what authority is competent to decide which substances are exceptions to the principle that no material things can be sinful in itself.

There is, no doubt, general agreement among Christian people that such substances as opium and marijuana, for example, are so dangerous and harmful, that they should not be used at all. This general agreement is, however, no proper ground for church judicatories authoritatively pronouncing such substances sinful in themselves, or declaring their use to be sinful per se. The Word of God, not the so-called Christian consciousness — is our only infallible rule of faith and conduct. What authority is competent to determine the harmfulness and on this basis, to infer the inherent sinfulness of the use of a particular material substance — making this inference binding on the consciences of the Lord's people? Are church judicatories qualified to issue authoritative pronouncements on such matters? By what right does a synod or assembly composed of ministers and elders decide questions concerning the physiological action and toxic properties of various narcotic drugs?

If we grant to ecclesiastical bodies the right to decide concerning opium and marijuana — do we not thereby concede the entire principle that the church may legitimately decide for its members concerning the use of things indifferent? And if so, could we consistently object, for reasons of principle — if a church judicatory were to enact a rule prohibiting the use of tea or coffee?

We are far from holding that it is legitimate for Christians to use dangerous drugs. What we are contending for, is not license to use poisonous drugs — but freedom under God to decide for ourselves what material substances we ought to leave alone. We would keep the consciences of Christian people free from what Dr. Machen called "the tyranny of the experts."

We maintain that the individual Christian — and not the church — must pass judgment on the pronouncements of experts concerning such things, so far as questions of morality are concerned. We are far from holding that it is "all right" to use opium, marijuana or a great many other material substances — but if the question as to the sinfulness of the use of these things is to be decided for us by a synod or pope — then our freedom of conscience is destroyed, and our soul reduced to bondage to the commandments of men!

If the thing is indifferent in itself, whatever it may be — then the individual Christian, not the church, has the God-given right to decide ethical questions concerning its use. We fully agree with the general opinion of Christian people that such substances as opium and marijuana should not be used at all, except possibly by a physician's orders; but we claim the God-given right to make this decision ourselves, and not to have it made for us by an ecclesiastical judicatory.

The conscience of each and every one of the Lord's people is enlightened by the Holy Spirit. To require Christian people to accept ecclesiastical regulations on such matters, is akin to the "implicit faith, and absolute and blind obedience" which is required by the Church of Rome!

In a previous section of this discussion, we made the statement that "Since things indifferent are not sinful in themselves, the Christian is free to use them — except when there is some special reason for abstinence from them." Lest this statement be misunderstood, we would add that the reference is to things indifferent as a class, not to every specific adiaphoron individually. We do not mean that the Christian is free to use every indifferent thing, except when there is some special reason for abstinence — but rather that, of the whole class of things indifferent, the Christian is free to use any specific things, except those in the case of which there exists some special reason for abstinence.

If a particular material substance is known to be a dangerous, habit-forming narcotic drug — then that is certainly a valid special reason for abstinence from that particular substance. But the decision that a consistent Christian walk requires abstinence from that particular thing — must be made by the individual Christian, not by the church. If it be alleged that this position fails to safeguard the members of the church against harmful and dangerous habits — then we reply that the contrary position dishonors the Holy Spirit and minimizes His work.

Regeneration of the heart, sanctification of the life and enlightenment of the mind and conscience of Christian people by the Holy Spirit — are realities, and we for our part believe they are far more powerful and effective than any man-made rules and regulations revised to supplement the Word of God.

Having stated and defended the foregoing principles, we wish to add three qualifying statements in order to avoid any possible misunderstanding:

1. Though it is not proper for ecclesiastical bodies to legislate concerning things indifferent — it is sometimes entirely legitimate for the civil government to do so. Civil legislation does not purpose to bind the conscience — but only to control the conduct of citizens.

2. While it is not proper for church judicatories to make rules concerning opium or marijuana, for instance — it may be perfectly legitimate for a church session to reject an applicant for membership who uses one of these things, not because the use of these or any other material thing is sinful in itself, but because, in the particular case under consideration, the church session may decide that the degree, manner and circumstances of the use of a particular thing are such as to involve the actual commission of sin of such a nature as to render the applicant's profession incredible.

3. While it is not proper for church bodies to make rules concerning the use of things indifferent, it may be perfectly legitimate for a church judicatory to censure a church member for the use of something which is not sinful in itself — when it is proved that in the particular case in question, the use really involved the commission of sin. It is one thing to administer church discipline if and when real scandal occurs — and quite another to attempt to prevent its occurring by binding a universal man-made rule upon the consciences of the Lord's people.

### **CONCLUSION: The True vs. the False Doctrine**

In conclusion, then, we may say that there exist both a true and a false doctrine of the separated life. The Christian life must be a separated life, in the sense in which Scripture uses the term "separate." But this by no means implies that all that is meant by the separated life in common speech today, is mandatory upon the Christian so far as his relation to his brethren is concerned. The differences between the true and false conceptions of the separated life, may be shown by the following comparative table:

1. The Biblical Conception:

Obligatory separation from conduct which is sinful in itself.

The Popular Conception:

Obligatory separation from conduct which is sinful in itself — and from certain conduct not sinful in itself.

2. The Biblical Conception:

The seat of sin is the corrupt heart of fallen man; the use of no material thing can be sinful in itself.

The Popular Conception:

Sin is inherent in the use of certain material things — as well as in the corrupt heart of fallen man.

3. The Biblical Conception:

Conscientious free use, under God, of things indifferent. The conscience free from the commandments of men.

The Popular Conception:

Human prohibition of things indifferent. The conscience enslaved to the traditions and commandments of men.

4. The Biblical Conception:

Scripture is the only standard of faith and conduct that can bind the conscience.

The Popular Conception:

The sufficiency of Scripture is denied — other authorities are added and regarded as binding the conscience.

5. The Biblical Conception:

Ecclesiastical legislation concerning things indifferent is limited by Scripture.

The Popular Conception:

Ecclesiastical legislation concerning things indifferent extends beyond what Scripture warrants.

Departure from what Scripture teaches concerning the separated life, is fraught with peril to the Christian church. The notion that sin is inherent in the use of material things is widespread in American fundamentalism today. The doctrine that the church has the right to decide for her members concerning the use of or abstinence from things indifferent, appears to be very widespread, and very seldom challenged at the present day. People who have the courage to publicly oppose these two false doctrinal tendencies, are likely to be attacked as being opposed to holiness and in favor of sinful license.

The practice of ecclesiastical assemblies issuing authoritative pronouncements on all sorts of questions which Scripture places in the sphere of the individual Christian conscience — has become a notorious evil. Many in their zeal to have the church "take a stand" on this, that or the other evil — quite forget that in some matters the Christian is responsible, not to his brethren, but directly to his Lord, to whom alone the conscience can be subject.



It is imperative that the churches rethink this whole problem and return to the solid rock of Scripture, and build solidly thereon. The alternative is a Gnostic doctrine of sin and a tyrannical, totalitarian church which destroys the God-given Christian liberty of her members. Our appeal is to the Word of God. Popular conceptions and ecclesiastical traditions, are of no weight whatever — in determining what we should believe and how we should live.

Many earnest Christian people are strongly opposed to the doctrines set forth in this article, and people who proclaim these doctrines are likely to suffer considerable criticism, misunderstanding and reproach — but these consequences are of little importance. Let us lay aside all prejudices, and search the Scriptures to see whether these things are so.

We may safely take our stand with Matthew Henry who wrote, commenting on Proverbs 12:19, "Be it observed, to the honor of truth, that sacred thing — that, if truth be spoken, it will hold good, and whoever may be disobliged by it, and angry at it, yet it will keep its ground. Great is the truth, and will prevail; what is true, will be always true. We may abide by it, and need not fear being disproved and put to shame."

The truth of the Lord endures forever, and that truth is sure to prevail over error in the end.