

Not letting others fall over.

RO 14:1 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

What a great term – disputable matters. Paul seems to think that some things are arguable. Discussable – disputable.

One of these issues was about food.

1-4 The word "eat" characterizes this section. Diet practices differ, and these differences can easily become a basis of disagreement. Paul terms overscrupulous believers as those who are "weak in faith," meaning that the faith of such persons is not strong enough to enable them to perceive the full liberty they have in Christ. They are plagued by doubt as to whether it is right for them to eat certain foods (cf. v. 23). The injunction to those who do not share this weakness is to "accept" them warmly (v. 1) and not to pass judgment on them. Weak Christians must not be made to feel inferior or unwanted.

1 Corinthians shows us some issues with food laws.

1CO 8:4 So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. ⁵ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), ⁶ yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

Paul continues the process by dealing with another disputable issue.

The Sabbath. Or holy days (Festivals and feasts ??)

Does this refer to Sabbath observance or to special days for feasting or fasting? The answer is not easily determined. Since the early church in Jerusalem almost certainly observed the Sabbath and did not want to offend non-Christian Jews, and since the Roman church presumably had a good-sized minority of Jews, it is not impossible that Paul has the Sabbath in mind. But the close contextual association with eating suggests that Paul has in mind a special day set apart for observance as a time for feasting or for fasting. The important thing is that one should "be fully convinced in his own mind" as to the rightfulness of his observance. More important still is the certitude of the individuals involved that their motivation is their desire to honor the Lord in what they are doing. It is possible for the observant and the nonobservant to do this, as illustrated by the giving of thanks at mealtime (cf. 1Ti 4:5). The one partaking can give thanks for the meat before him, while the one abstaining from meat can give God thanks for his vegetables. The latter should be able to do this without resentment toward his brother who enjoys his meat.

But this has nothing to do with us. Oh yes it does. If we look at issues such as alcohol consumption, smoking, playing sport on Sunday, business liaisons with non-Christians, gambling, political involvement. These are disputable things. And the list could go on into our theological thought processes.

Predestination, the Second coming, inerrancy of Scripture, creation and evolution, church governance, the list goes on. All disputable.

This is not just about food and days off, it is about a couple of things.

1. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

Know what you believe. Understand what it is you believe.

The different pastors and missionaries who come to this church and I will have slightly differing theologies. Partly because of where we studied, and partly because we have worked things through from our own situations in life. To me, that is helpful to me to get different perspectives. We don't argue. The basics of our faith are the same. Jesus came, died rose again so that we could have a relationship with Him. We aren't going to disagree on that. But other things are disputable. Good – it means that we can continually work out what we believe. Head towards being fully convinced.

2. The second point is vital if this process of discussion is to continue.

RO 14:13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Now, others don't pass judgement on my sermons too much, as far as I know. This is for all of us. Stop judging something if it doesn't really matter. It doesn't matter if we disagree. Be convinced in your own mind and leave it at that. It is so easy to become dogmatic about things that are not important. When I was a kid churches wouldn't let my brother play his drums in church, they were the instrument of the devil, I was asked to play an acoustic guitar because the electric guitar incites people to dance, and our singer was asked to stand still.

Here is something bizarre. In 870 AD the harp was banned from church service because it was the instrument of the devil, drums were excluded because they incited people to dance and people were not to sway in time to the music.

Music is very inconsequential in the scheme of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is His people. Music is just a tool but we have argued over it for 2000 years. If someone likes a different sought of music – fine – just get on with concentrating on God.

3. Look at the rest of that verse. **Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.**

It really is not about what we want. It is about what is best for the other people. No stumbling block means nothing that makes them fall over. Nothing that upsets someone's relationship to Jesus. Your like or dislike of something should not come between that person and God. That is why passing judgement is out. It hampers the spiritual building up process. Criticism is rarely part of the building up process. Let's be realistic, judging someone is not encouraging, loving nor positive. No obstacles are allowed. In other words we are to clear the way as best as possible for someone's relationship to Jesus to develop.

4. Notice verse 19

RO 14:19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Edification means to build up and kind of like enhance. So we are to be at peace with each other – even if we disagree, and to enhance each others relationship to Jesus. We cant do that and be critical.

These are practical expressions of the love concept we have spoken about over the last few weeks.