

RELATING TO WEAKER BROTHERS

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INTRODUCTION

Relating to other believers in Christ would be easier if we were all at the same stage of growth in understanding and virtue, and if we all understood things the same way. But, we are not equally strong and do not see things alike. We must make allowance for differences to *“keep the unity of the faith in the bonds of peace”* and to avoid stumbling and discouragement.

New Testament passages that deal with weaker-brother situations:

Romans **14:1-15:9**

1 Corinthians **8:1-11:1**

Galatians **6:1-2**

Ephesians **4:13-16**

1 Thessalonians **5:14**

I. COMPONENTS OF WEAKER-BROTHER SITUATIONS

A. Issue

1. Something not wrong in itself

Right and wrong on these matters we determine by . . .

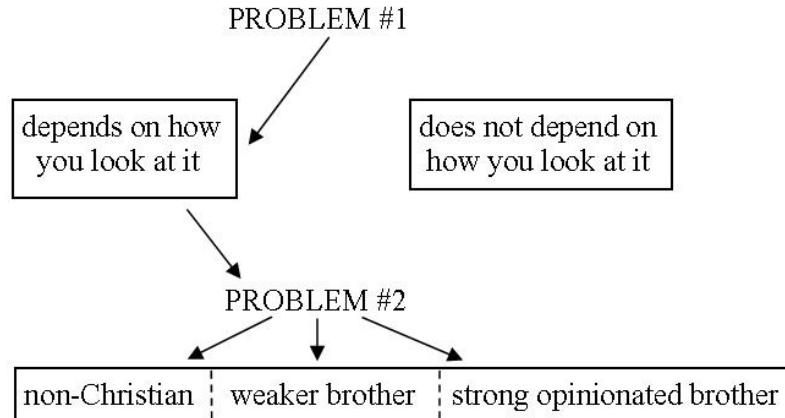
how things are <u>perceived</u>	(perception)
how something is <u>meant</u>	(motivation)

New Testament examples

- a. Eating meat in an idol's temple (1 Corinthians **8:10**)
- b. Eating shamble meat (1 Corinthians **10:25**; 1 Corinthians **10:14-11:11**)
- c. Vegetarianism (Romans **14:2-3**)
- d. Holy days, festival cycle (Romans **14:5**)
- e. Drinking wine (Romans **14:21**)
2. A particular matter, not necessarily weaker in general
3. Limits to things not included in weaker-brother situations
- a. Not a matter of confirming people in their weaknesses
- b. Forbidding to marry (1 Timothy **4:3**)
- c. Forbidding to eat meat (1 Timothy **4:3**)
- d. Foolish questionings (Titus **3:9-10**)
- e. Allowing to cause division

f. Forcing opinion on others (Romans 14:1)

We are all weaker on some issue(s). That fact should help us respond to people we regard as weaker. We can map out a process for approaching the issue.



Problem #1 calls for a distinction between issues that are affected by perception and motive *vs.* issues of specific commandment to everyone, so motivation does not make a difference.

Problem #2 observes that how we handle a circumstance may depend on who we are dealing with and what kind of attitude that person takes on the issue.

II. RESPONSES TO WEAKER-BROTHER SITUATIONS

A. Responses we are tempted to make

1. To look down on or feel superior to
2. To criticize or condemn
3. To become impatient
(1 Thessalonians 5:14)
4. To invoke freedom and authority to be tolerant.
5. To avoid and exclude

NOTE PROBLEM: in a narrower-*vs.* broader viewpoint, it is not as possible for the narrower viewpoint

B. Appropriate responses

1. Concentrate on our own behavior, not on the other's state.
2. Practice love (Romans 14:15).

This is another way to express love (1 Peter 2:16-17).
The guiding principle: doing what will build another person up
(1 Corinthians 8:1)

3. Accept such people as relatives in Christ (Romans 14:1).
4. Refrain from what they find objectionable when they are around.

Not because we fear that we may succumb to whatever evil might be possible

Not because we fear guilt by association or approval by presence

III. PRINCIPLES AT WORK IN WEAKER-BROTHER SITUATIONS

- A. Not all acts are matters of right or wrong.
- B. Motives and circumstances can make actions wrong (Romans 14:14).
- C. Responsibility for the weak lies with the strong.
- D. Personal and social we cannot separate in behavior (Galatians 6:1-5).
- E. Horizontal and vertical we cannot separate in behavior (Romans 14:7).

“I have sinned against heaven and in your sight” (Luke 15:18, 21).

IV. MISUSES OF THE WEAKER-BROTHER ISSUE

A. To force a doctrinal position on other people. Sometimes the non-instrument practice is advocated this way. The instrument question is one in which those who refrain may want to press the narrower position on the larger group. Weaker brother situations do not include trying to prohibit what scripture does not prohibit. Not wanting to use a mechanical instrument to accompany worship does not relate to a weaker brother but to a stronger brother that has a different belief. An alternate person's practice will not lead such a person into apostasy.

B. As an excuse for lack of further development by someone with the weakness. Such people may be trying to exercise control over other people.