SMITH FOR CHRIST PUBLISHING · BEREAN DASHBOARD STUDY

Romans 14

The Weak, the Strong, and the Lord — O·I·A, integrated with the Deep Dive

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION · 2026-11-09 · NASB 1995

"Seeking God diligently — examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." — Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

Where the Bible leaves a matter open, I receive my brother instead of judging or despising him, because Christ is his Lord and mine and we will both answer to God. My liberty is real, but love decides how I use it — and I never act against a conscience I have not yet settled in faith.

00 The Text

ROMANS 14 (NASB95), MARKED

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED — God — His character & actions · Command / instruction · Key repeated word · Sin / warning · Promise / blessing · Time / place / contrast

1 Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.

2 One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only.

3 The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.

4 Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

5 One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.

6 He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.

7 For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself;

8 for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

11 For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD."

12 So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

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.

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.

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.

16 Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil;

17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

18 For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.

19 So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

20 Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense.

21 It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.

22 The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

Marked in the text

- **v1** "accept the one who is weak in faith" — Command / instruction
- **v2** "he who is weak eats vegetables only" — Time / place / contrast
- **v3** "regard with contempt" — Sin / warning
- **v3** "for God has accepted him" — God — His character & actions
- **v4** "he will stand" — Promise / blessing
- **v5** "Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind" — Command / instruction
- **v8** "whether we live or die" — Promise / blessing
- **v9** "Christ died and lived again" — God — His character & actions
- **v10** "we will all stand before the judgment seat of God" — Time / place / contrast
- **v11** "EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME" — God — His character & actions
- **v12** "each one of us will give an account of himself to God" — Time / place / contrast
- **v13** "not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way" — Command / instruction
- **v14** "nothing is unclean in itself" — Time / place / contrast
- **v15** "you are no longer walking according to love" — Sin / warning
- **v15** "Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died" — Command / instruction
- **v16** "do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil" — Command / instruction
- **v17** "the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking" — Time / place / contrast
- **v17** "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" — Promise / blessing
- **v18** "acceptable to God and approved by men" — Promise / blessing
- **v19** "pursue the things which make for peace" — Command / instruction
- **v20** "Do not tear down the work of God" — Command / instruction
- **v21** "It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine" — Command / instruction
- **v22** "Happy is he who does not condemn himself" — Promise / blessing
- **v23** "whatever is not from faith is sin" — Sin / warning
- **v3** "judge" — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v4** "Lord" — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v10** "brother" — Key repeated word (every occurrence)

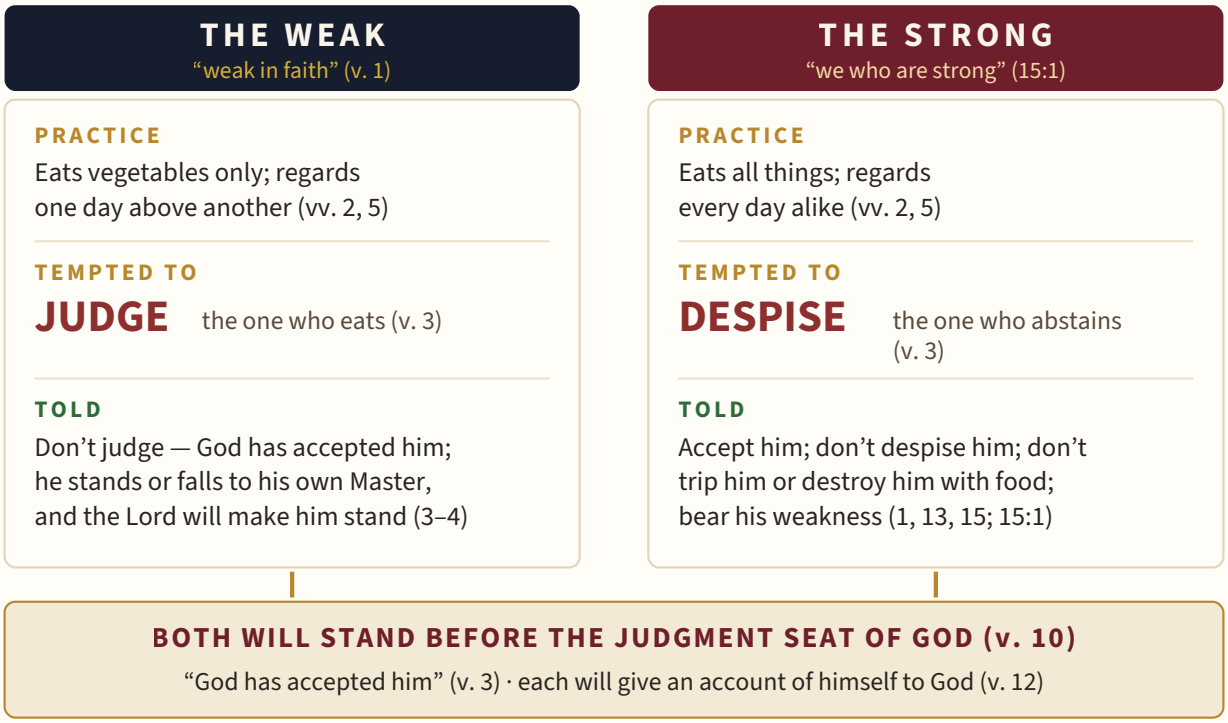
01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · ROMANS 14:1

"Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions."

FIGURE · WEAK AND STRONG



Read across: each side has its own practice, its own temptation (judge or despise, v. 3) and its own instruction — and both end up before the same judgment seat.

Setting. Romans 12–13 have told the church how to live as a living sacrifice and how love fulfills the law. Chapter 14 lands on a real quarrel in the Roman congregation: some believers eat "all things," others eat "vegetables only" (v2); some regard one day above another, others regard every day alike (v5). The argument runs on to 15:13 — "we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength" (15:1).

Structure:

- vv1–4 — **receive the weak.** Accept him, but not to pass judgment on his opinions (v1). The eater must not regard the abstainer with contempt; the abstainer must not judge the eater — "for God has accepted him" (v3). Who are you to judge another man's servant? "He will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (v4).
- vv5–9 — **fully convinced, and for the Lord.** Days: "Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind" (v5). Whoever observes, eats or abstains does it "for the Lord" and gives thanks (v6). No one lives or dies for

himself; living or dying, "we are the Lord's" (vv7–8) — because Christ died and lived again to be Lord of dead and living (v9).

- vv10–12 — **the judgment seat.** Why judge? Why despise? "We will all stand before the judgment seat of God" (v10). Isaiah 45:23: every knee will bow (v11). "Each one of us will give an account of himself to God" (v12).
- vv13–18 — **don't trip your brother.** Stop judging one another; determine instead not to put a stumbling block in a brother's way (v13). Nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean to the man who thinks it is (v14). If food hurts him, you are no longer walking in love — don't destroy him for whom Christ died (v15). The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (v17).
- vv19–23 — **build up; act from faith.** Pursue peace and building up (v19). Don't tear down God's work for food (v20). It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother stumble (v21). Keep your faith as your own conviction before God (v22). He who doubts is condemned if he eats; "whatever is not from faith is sin" (v23).

Repeated words, with counts (NASB95, counted in the text):

- **eat / eats / eating** ×14 — vv2 (2), 3 (4), 6 (3), 17, 20, 21, 23 (2). The quarrel's word.
- **Lord** ×10 — vv4, 6 (3), 8 (3), 9, 11 ("THE LORD"), 14. The chapter's answer.
- **God** ×10 — vv3, 6 (2), 10, 11, 12, 17, 18, 20, 22.
- **judge / judgment** ×6 — "passing judgment" v1; judge vv3, 4, 10, 13; "judgment seat" v10. Plus condemn (v22) and condemned (v23).
- **live / lives / lived** ×6 (vv7, 8 ×3, 9, 11) and **die / died** ×6 (vv7, 8 ×3, 9, 15).
- **brother** ×5 — vv10 (2), 13, 15, 21.
- **faith** ×5 — vv1, 2, 22, 23 (2): the chapter opens and closes on it.
- **unclean** ×3 (all in v14); **food** ×3 (vv15 ×2, 20); **accept** ×3 (vv1, 3, 18 "acceptable"); **day** ×3 (vv5 ×2, 6).
- **contempt** ×2 (vv3, 10); **stumbl-** ×2 (vv13, 21); **convinced** ×2 (vv5, 14 — Paul's conviction and ours); **gives thanks** ×2 (v6).

Contrasts: the one who eats ⟷ the one who does not (vv2–3, 6). Contempt (the strong) ⟷ judging (the weak), v3 and again v10. One day above another ⟷ every day alike (v5). Live ⟷ die; dead ⟷ living (vv7–9). "Judge one another" ⟷ "determine this" (v13, the same Greek verb). Clean in itself ⟷ unclean to him who thinks it so (v14, v20). Eating and drinking ⟷ righteousness, peace, joy (v17). Build up ⟷ tear down (vv19–20). Fully convinced (v5) ⟷ he who doubts (v23).

Shape of the chapter: a welcome (1–4), a confession of whose we are (5–9), a courtroom (10–12), a warning about a brother's footing (13–18) and a rule for the conscience (19–23). It begins with "weak in faith" and ends with "not from faith."

Chapter theme (my words): In matters God has left open, the strong must not despise and the weak must not judge. Christ is Lord of both, each will answer for himself, and love will set down a liberty rather than ruin a brother Christ died for.

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · ROMANS 14:23

"But ⚠he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and ⚠whatever is not from faith is sin."

FIGURE · A DECISION GRID FOR DISPUTABLE MATTERS



Start at the gate: only if Scripture leaves a matter open do the four questions of Romans 14 apply — and a single "stop" answer is enough to hold back.

Who are "the weak" and "the strong"? Not the careless and the careful. The weak is the stricter believer — the one who eats only vegetables (v2), probably to avoid meat from pagan sacrifice or to keep the food laws, and who still honors certain days (v5). Guzik: they "were weaker because of their legalistic attitudes and lack of love towards others." Sproul: they "did not understand the fullness of the biblical concept of Christian liberty." Henry: the Roman weak erred from weakness, not from the willfulness of the Galatian teachers who made such things necessary for salvation. Paul counts himself among the strong (15:1) — and gives the strong the heavier load.

What kind of matters? "Opinions" (v1, *dialogismoi*) — things Scripture neither commands nor forbids. Sproul's word is *adiaphora*, "that which has no inherent ethical bearing." This is the line that keeps Romans 14 from being misused. Guzik: rebuke belongs to "clear Scriptural principles"; doubtful things call for advice, never judgment — and conscience is never "an excuse for obviously sinful behavior." Sproul: "There is no occasion where it is okay for the weaker brother to be involved in adultery." Paul had settled drunkenness one verse earlier (13:13).

Alcohol — where this chapter speaks and where it doesn't. Wine is named in v21 as a disputable matter: a believer may be free to drink it. Drunkenness is not disputable (Eph 5:18; Gal 5:21). For a man in recovery, the first drink is not a question of liberty but of mastery: "I will not be mastered by anything" (1 Cor 6:12). Romans 14 then speaks to both men at the table. To the strong: "It is good not to … drink wine … by which your brother stumbles" (v21). Spurgeon's picture is the cliff at Dover — he could stand on the ledge, but not with his sons beside him; "Let us treat men as we would treat our sons." To the sober man: do not judge the brother who drinks without sin — "God has accepted him" (v3). Sproul guards the other edge: he faulted an institution for turning one trustee's abstinence into a rule, and a hostess who refused a cocktail with "We're Christians." Scruples are to be respected, not imposed.

The days (v5). Sproul: "Paul is not talking here about the Sabbath, but about certain holy days that were observed among the Jews." Henry: Jewish festivals, while all Christians kept the Lord's day. Guzik draws the wider lesson — Paul is "talking more about principles than specific issues." Colossians 2:16–17 is the parallel: feasts and Sabbaths are "a mere shadow … but the substance belongs to Christ."

"Fully convinced" (v5) and "for the Lord" (vv6–9). *Plērophoreisthō* — filled with assurance — each in his own mind. Henry: "First be persuaded that what you do is lawful, before you venture to do it." The test is not my preference but my Master: whoever eats or abstains does it for the Lord and gives thanks. Christ died and lived again to be Lord of dead and living (v9) — Henry: "Christ is the centre, in which all the lines of life and death do meet."

The judgment seat — of God or of Christ? (v10). NASB95 and SBLGNT read "of God"; the KJV's text reads "of Christ" (as in 2 Cor 5:10). Spurgeon: "Paul did not say 'Christ,' but 'God,' but by that word he meant the same person" — the passage is a testimony to Christ's deity. The teachers differ on what the seat is: Guzik, quoting Smith, reads the believers' *bema*, concerned "with a Christian's rewards and position in the kingdom, not with his salvation"; Spurgeon preaches one universal, personal, divine judgment of all men, saints and sinners, and closes with "you must either break or bow." All agree on the point Paul makes: each gives account of himself — Spurgeon adds, "We shall then have to give an account of our judgments of others."

What does "stumble" mean here? Not merely "annoy" or "offend." In this chapter the brother stumbles when your example draws him to do what his own conscience condemns — "he who doubts is condemned if he eats" (v23). That hurts him (v15) and can ruin him (v15, "destroy"). Guzik adds a limit: Paul "speaks about the stumbling of a sincere heart, not catering to the whims of someone's legalism" — Paul would not circumcise Titus under pressure (Gal 2:3–5).

Conscience (vv14, 22–23). Nothing is unclean in itself — Paul is sure of it "in the Lord Jesus" — yet to the man who thinks it unclean, it is. Sproul quotes Luther: "To act against conscience is neither right nor safe" — and adds that a clean conscience is not an infallible guide, for "Our consciences … can be seared." Henry on v22: the faith in view "is not meant of justifying faith" but of "a knowledge and persuasion of our Christian liberty in things disputed." "Whatever is not from faith is sin" (v23) — Guzik: "If we are troubled by something, it likely isn't *of faith* and likely *is sin* for us."

The kingdom (v17). Food and drink are real questions, but they are not what the kingdom is made of. Henry: "As to God, our great concern is righteousness"; "As to our brethren, it is peace"; "As to ourselves, it is joy in the Holy Ghost." Sproul: "The goal of the Christian life, beloved, is righteousness."

Text notes. v4: "the Lord is able" (SBLGNT *kyrios*, NASB95) — "God is able" in the KJV's text. v21: many later manuscripts (KJV) add "or is offended, or is made weak." After v23 many later manuscripts place the doxology of 16:25–27; NASB95 and KJV print it at the end of chapter 16.

Word study (Greek):

- **accept — *proslambanō* (G4355):** to take to oneself, welcome into one's company (vv1, 3; 15:7).
- **passing judgment — *diakrisis* (G1253):** a sifting, deciding — "not for disputes" (v1).
- **opinions — *dialogismos* (G1261):** reasonings, scruples (v1).
- **regard with contempt — *exoutheneō* (G1848):** to treat as nothing — the strong man's sin (vv3, 10).
- **judge — *krinō* (G2919):** to pass sentence — the weak man's sin (vv3, 4, 10, 13); "determine this" in v13 is the same verb.
- **stand — *stēkō* (G4739) / *histēmi* (G2476):** the servant stands, and the Lord makes him stand (v4).
- **fully convinced — *plērophoreō* (G4135):** fully assured, filled with conviction (v5).
- **be Lord — *kyrieuō* (G2961):** to rule as owner — Christ over dead and living (v9).
- **judgment seat — *bēma* (G968):** the magistrate's raised platform (v10).
- **give praise / confess — *exomologeō* (G1843):** to acknowledge openly (v11; Phil 2:11).
- **obstacle — *proskomma* (G4348):** a thing to strike the foot on (vv13, 20).
- **stumbling block — *skandalon* (G4625):** the trap-stick, a snare (v13).
- **unclean — *koinos* (G2839):** "common," not set apart (v14; Acts 10:14).
- **hurt — *lypeō* (G3076):** to grieve (v15). **destroy — *apollymi* (G622):** to ruin (v15).
- **kingdom — *basileia* (G932):** the reign of God (v17).
- **approved — *dokimos* (G1384):** tested and genuine (v18); **approves — *dokimazō* (G1381)** (v22).
- **pursue — *diōkō* (G1377):** to chase (v19). **building up — *oikodomē* (G3619)** (v19). **tear down — *katalyō* (G2647)** (v20).
- **stumbles — *proskoptō* (G4350):** strikes his foot (v21).
- **doubts — *diakrinomai* (G1252):** to waver, be divided in mind (v23). **is condemned — *katakrinō* (G2632)**, perfect tense (v23).
- **faith — *pistis* (G4102):** here, settled conviction before God (vv22–23).

Key insights to carry (from the Deep Dive):

1. **The weak brother is the strict one** — and the strong carry the greater burden (15:1).
2. **Two temptations, two sins.** The strong despise; the weak judge (v3, v10).
3. **Romans 14 is for disputable matters, not clear sin.** Drunkenness was settled in 13:13.
4. **"Of God" or "of Christ"** (v10) — Spurgeon: the same Person.
5. **The teachers read the judgment seat differently** — Guzik the believers' bema; Spurgeon a universal judgment — but both say it ends our judging now.
6. **"Judge this rather"** (v13) — turn the verdict on your own path.

7. **To act against conscience is neither right nor safe** (Luther, in Sproul).
8. **The kingdom has three marks** — righteousness toward God, peace toward brethren, joy within (Henry).
9. **Love may set down what liberty may pick up** — Spurgeon on the cliff edge.
10. **Doubt is a stop sign** (v23).

Cross-references: Rom 13:13–14; 15:1–7 · 1 Cor 8:9–13; 10:23–33; 6:12 · Gal 2:3–5; 5:13, 19–21 · Col 2:16–17 · 2 Cor 5:10 · Eph 5:18 · Isa 45:23; Phil 2:10–11 · Mark 7:19; Acts 10:14

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · 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."

FIGURE · WHERE ROMANS 14 APPLIES

DISPUTABLE MATTERS Romans 14 applies — "opinions" (v. 1)	WHAT GOD HAS NAMED SIN Romans 14 does not apply — obey
• Meat from the idol market, or vegetables only (v. 2) • Keeping one day above another (v. 5) • Wine for a man who is free to drink it and stay sober (v. 21) • Today: diet, holidays, music styles, entertainment the Bible doesn't name	• Drunkenness — "do not get drunk with wine" (Eph 5:18; Rom 13:13) • Sexual immorality, idolatry, strife, envying (Gal 5:19–21) • Anything God's Word plainly forbids • Conscience is never "an excuse for obviously sinful behavior" (Guzik)

FOR THE MAN IN RECOVERY

The first drink is not a "liberty" question for him — "I will not be mastered by anything" (1 Cor 6:12).

The strong brother at his table puts the glass down: "It is good not to … drink wine" (v. 21).

And the sober man doesn't judge the brother who can drink: "God has accepted him" (v. 3).

Romans 14 governs the left column only; the right column was settled before the chapter began (13:13). Wine sits on the left for a man free to drink it — not for a man it has mastered.

Command to obey — "Accept the one who is weak in faith" (v1). I want to name the brothers I hold at arm's length over things the Bible leaves open — how they keep the Lord's day, what they eat, what music they play, whether they'll take a glass of wine at dinner. I'm told to receive them, not to cross-examine them.

Sin to confess — I have done both of verse 3. When I feel strong I roll my eyes at the stricter brother; when I feel strict I sit in judgment on the freer one. And sometimes I've dressed up a plain sin as "my liberty." Romans 14 doesn't cover that. Conscience is never an excuse for what God has named.

A word for the men I walk with in recovery — I won't treat the first drink as a "disputable matter" for a man whose life it has already mastered. "I will not be mastered by anything" (1 Cor 6:12). If I'm the strong brother at that table, verse 21 tells me what love does: the glass stays down, and I don't make a speech about it. And if I'm the sober man, verse 3 tells me not to set myself up as judge over the brother who can drink without sin. God has accepted him too. We'll both stand before the same seat.

Promise to trust — "He will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (v4). I don't have to hold my brother up by my rules, and I don't have to hold myself up by my record. Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's (v8).

Example to follow — Christ "died and lived again" (v9) — and He died for the brother I'm tempted to despise (v15). If He gave His life for that man, I can give up my steak dinner. Spurgeon would not stand on the cliff edge with his sons beside him; I can choose the safe ground for the sake of the men following me.

Questions for the table (from the Deep Dive):

1. Which comes more naturally to you — despising the brother who is stricter than you, or judging the brother who is freer than you? Where did you last do it? *(14:3; 14:10)*
2. What is one matter you have treated as clear sin that Scripture actually leaves open — and one you have treated as "liberty" that Scripture actually names as sin? *(14:1; 13:13)*
3. "Each one of us will give an account of himself to God." How would it change your next conversation about a brother if you believed that literally? *(14:10–12)*
4. Is there something you are free to do that you should quietly stop doing because of a particular brother at your table? *(14:15; 14:21)*
5. For a man in recovery, is the first drink a "disputable matter"? What does verse 21 ask of the strong brother beside him — and what does verse 3 ask of the recovering man toward the brother who drinks? *(14:3; 14:21; 1 Cor 6:12)*
6. Where are you acting while doubting — doing something you have not settled before God? *(14:5; 14:22–23)*

Worship. Every knee will bow to Him, and every tongue will give praise to God (v11). I'd rather bow now, gladly, than argue with my brother now and bow later ashamed. The kingdom I belong to is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit — not a menu.

Prayer. Lord Jesus, You died and rose to be Lord of the living and the dead, and You are my Lord. Forgive me for despising the brothers who are stricter than me and judging the brothers who are freer. Teach me where Your Word is plain and where You have left me free, and give me the love to lay my freedom down for any man who could fall. Guard the men in recovery around me, and make me a safe place for them. Let nothing I do be done in doubt; let all of it be done for You, with thanks. Amen.

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