

You Can't Do That! - Introduction

YOU CAN'T DO THAT! IT'S WRONG!

At what point must a Biblical Christian modify his own behavior because someone else thinks that what he is doing is wrong?

I'm not talking about the black and white issues where God has clearly spoken... I'm talking about the "gray" areas that the Bible does not directly speak to. Sometimes, committed Christians study the same Bible, but come to completely opposite conclusions about the morality of a particular activity.

When that happens, does the one who doesn't conclude that an activity is wrong have a moral obligation before God to refrain from that activity because the other believes that it is? There are three different options in response:

1. Refrain completely, at all times.
2. Refrain while that person's presence.
3. No obligation to refrain at all.

Of course, one may decide to refrain out of *deference* to someone else, or to avoid conflict, but that is at the sole option of the individual, and not a matter of *moral obligation*.

DOESN'T THE BIBLE TEACH US TO DO THAT?

Well... that is the question... *Does the Bible teach us to refrain from certain behaviors around others whose beliefs about right and wrong differ?*

And, like many questions, the answer is, "*It depends.*" If it truly is a "gray issue," then the answer to what a Biblically faithful believer must do is dependent upon the context and the people involved.

Interestingly enough, the Bible *IS* pretty clear about what our response should be, depending on the various people and contexts. Or to put it another way... ***The Bible is black and white about "gray areas"!***

The problem arises when someone tries to enforce *their own* views about gray areas upon others. Is there any Biblical justification for that?

That question is my real target for this series of posts. In the process of answering it, I will show what the Bible really teaches on the topic I raised above.

THE PASSAGES IN QUESTION

I will be addressing three primary Scriptural commands that are frequently used by some to impose their own view of "gray areas" on others:

The "Appearance of Evil"

[1 Thes. 5:22 \(KJV\)](#) ***"Abstain from all appearance of evil."***

The “Weaker Brother” (Causing to Stumble & Giving “Offense”)

[Romans 14 \(NASB\)](#) *“It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.” (v21)*

[1 Cor. 8 \(NASB\)](#) *“But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.” (v9)*

For “Conscience’ Sake” (Meat offered to Idols)

[1 Cor. 10:23-33 \(NASB\)](#) *“But if anyone says to you, “This is meat sacrificed to idols,” do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience’ sake;” (v28)*

These are the passages that are frequently misinterpreted and misapplied.

If we desire to be truly Biblical Christians, we need to avoid that mistake.

You Can't Do That! - Part 1: *The "Appearance of Evil"*

"YOU SHOULDN'T DO THAT!!"

Those of us who have been Christians for a lot of years have undoubtedly been told that there are certain things that we must not do... not because they are wrong in and of themselves, but because people might see us and *think* that we are doing something wrong.

"The Bible tells us to avoid even the appearance of evil!" They would say...

And... well, it *is* right there in [1 Thes. 5:22](#)... in the *King James Version* at least.

So, we've been taught that if "most people" associate an activity with sin, that we should simply abstain from participation... because of the "appearance of evil."

This is what we were told about rock music... and playing cards... and dancing... and alcohol... and movies...

BUT IS THAT RIGHT?

That's a very important question! If what we were told is correct, then we need to apply that passage to our lives exactly that way. So, let's take a closer look at the text. Let's see if this really is about "appearances."

Here is the passage in multiple versions:

1 Thessalonians 5:22

KJV ***"Abstain from all appearance of evil."***

NKJV ***"Abstain from every form of evil."***

NASB ***"Abstain from every form of evil."***

NIV ***"Avoid every kind of evil."***

Amp ***"Abstain from evil [shrink from it and keep aloof from it] in whatever form or whatever kind it may be."***

The underlined words above are each translated from the Greek word, ***eidōs*** ([G1491](#)). It is defined in Strong's Concordance as "the external or outward appearance, form figure, shape" or "form, kind." It actually refers to something *visible*... in other words, it is something actually *appearing*.

IS "APPEARANCE" JUST ABOUT "HOW THINGS APPEAR" (BUT AREN'T REALLY)?

The word "appearance," as we use it in English, has the connotation of something which "appears" to be something when in fact it is not. And that's exactly how it's been applied to various issues like those I listed above.

But the only English translation that seems to support that idea is the KJV... all of the others seem to go out of their way to *avoid* wording that leads to that understanding. It's as if the translators knew that

the KJV's rendering led to a faulty idea about "appearances" so they translated it in a way that show the actual meaning is to avoid *real evil*, not just something that might be thought by others to be evil.

I would restate Paul's words this way:

- "Avoid evil, wherever it **appears**."

or (to use the KJV's word)

- "...wherever evil makes an **appearance**, abstain from it."

DANGEROUS APPLICATION...

But what if someone else *really believes* an activity is sinful? Are we morally obligated to refrain from an activity that we know to be morally pure (or neutral) because someone else *thinks* it's wrong?

Let's put it in more stark terms... *Does the Bible teach that we are obligated to follow the moral standards of other?*

Well, that can't be what [1 Thes. 5:22](#) means... *Jesus Himself didn't practice it!*

- Religious people of Jesus' Day considered it "evil" to work on the Sabbath. They had a long list of things which constituted "work." Jesus was well aware of their list, but did some of those things which had the "appearance of evil" anyway: He allowed His disciples to pick grain ([Mark 2:23-24](#)). He healed people ([Luke 14:1-6](#)). He told a man to carry his bedroll on a Sabbath ([John 5:5-11](#)). When the Pharisees "reminded" Jesus that it was forbidden (read, "sinful"), He rebuked them and rejected their standard of behavior. *And He did the "forbidden" thing anyway!*
- Religious people of Jesus' Day knew that it was "evil" to be associated with "sinners." Jesus knew of their standards yet He spent time directly with "evil" tax-collectors ([Matthew 9:9-13](#)) and adulterous women ([Luke 7:36-39](#)).
- Religious people of Jesus' day would never allow themselves to become defiled by touching anything that was "evil" and "unclean." Yet Jesus touched the dead ([Luke 8:40-42,49-54](#), [Luke 7:11-15](#)). He touched and healed lepers ([Luke 5:12-13](#)). And rather than rebuke an unclean (bleeding) woman for mixing with the pressing crowd without announcing her uncleanness, He praised her for her faith expressed through her desire to *touch Him* ([Luke 8:43-48](#)).

Why didn't Jesus avoid the "appearance of evil"? He knew exactly what the religious leaders of His day thought was right or wrong... *Why did he blatantly violate their standards?*

The answer, of course, is that ***Jesus was not obligated to follow other peoples' ideas about right and wrong.***

And neither are we.

AVOIDING REAL EVIL

As all the versions besides the KJV show, we are to avoid *real evil*. In other words, our measure is not others' opinions, it is God's Word alone.

And there *are* things that are truly wrong...

- Premarital sex is wrong ([Excellent Biblical treatment of this issue](#)).
- Adultery is wrong. ([Exodus 20:14](#))
- Homosexuality is wrong ([Lev. 18:22](#), [Rom. 1:26-27](#)).
- Lust is wrong ([Exodus 20:17 "covet"="lust"](#), [Prov. 6:25](#), [Matt. 5:28](#)).

As biblically faithful Christians, we must not participate in or condone behaviors that are clearly contrary to God's Word. At the same time, true Christlikeness means that we are willing to be criticized and persecuted for participating in activities that may "appear evil" to other Christians.

You Can't Do That! - Part 2a: *The "Weaker Brother"*

ARE WE REALLY ALLOWED TO DO THAT??

So, what about the "weaker brother"? What about Paul's instructions that we should not eat meat offered to idols because it could cause a brother to stumble?

There are several passages that Paul wrote dealing with this issue. We're going to look at them in two sections, starting with the passages from [Romans 14](#) and [1 Cor. 8](#).

CAUSING A "WEAK" BROTHER TO "STUMBLE"... GIVING AN "OFFENSE."

In that heading, I've captured three of the primary terms used by Paul.

The phrase "*weaker brother*" comes from [Romans 14:1-2](#), where Paul tells us how to treat "gray" areas when we are with someone who is "weak in faith."

Twice in [Rom. 14](#), Paul mentions "*stumbling*"... that is, putting an "obstacle or a stumbling block" in a brother's way or doing something by which a brother "stumbles" ([Rom. 14:13,21](#))

Finally, there's a mention about giving "*offense*" ([Rom 14:20](#)).

The parallel passage in [1 Cor. 8](#) also talks about a brother that is "weak" and causing him to "stumble."

DEFINE THE TERMS!

If we really want to know what Paul means in order to know how to apply this in our lives, we must know what Paul meant by these terms... and what he *didn't* mean.

I'm not going to quote and explain the entire passage here, but I will give the definitions that are easily discernable from the text. I encourage all my readers to study the passages for themselves to see that I'm not just twisting it to my own preferred meaning.

Here are the significant terms:

"Weak"

- In [Rom. 14:2](#) and in [1 Cor. 8:7,10](#), we can see that the "weak" brother is one who believes that something is wrong when in fact it is not (this, too, Paul makes clear – [1 Cor. 8:8](#)).
- But it's more than just that; the true symptom of his "weakness" is that he is susceptible to influence from others to violate his own conscience by doing that thing which he still believes is wrong.

"Stumble"

- In [Rom. 14:14, 22-23](#) and in [1 Cor. 8:8-9](#), to "stumble" is a euphemism for participating in an activity in violation of one's own conscience.

"Stumbling block"

- in [Rom. 14:13,20-21](#) and in [1 Cor. 8:9-10](#), the "stumbling block" is the action of the "stronger" brother who has freedom before God to participate in an activity, but when it is seen by the "weaker"

brother, that brother decides to go ahead and participate, violating his conscience.

“Offense”

- In [Rom. 14:10](#), we can see that it is an “offense” to cause a weaker brother to stumble. It is literally a sin against him.

WHAT THE WORDS *DON’T* MEAN!

The definitions above are easily discernable from the passage itself (please check my conclusions). These are the *only* things that these words mean in these passages, but just to be clear, let’s point out some things that these words *don’t* mean... although there are a lot of people that seem to think they do:

- “Weak” does *not* mean that someone simply believes an activity is wrong. The person who strongly renounces you for doing something is not “weak,” he’s actually *strong!* That individual would steadfastly refuse to participate with you in the activity he’s condemning! As Paul said in [Rom. 14:5](#)... he’s “fully convinced in his own mind.”
- “Stumble” does *not* mean that a person is startled, surprised, bothered, uncomfortable, or affronted by your participation in a “gray” activity. Nor is it when they chose a sinful response to what you did (more on that in *Part 2b* below)
- “Stumbling block” is *not* the “drama” that can arise when one person does something that another person thinks is wrong.
- “Offense” is *not* a person “taking offense” that you would “dare do such a thing.” It is not when a person feels insulted by your actions or words (compare [Luke 11:37-54](#) and [Matt 15:11-12](#)).

WHAT PAUL REALLY MEANS:

When we really understand the definitions of the terms as Paul uses them, it’s easy to see what Paul is trying to communicate. Let me summarize:

If you have freedom to do something but your brother does not, if you can discern that he just might go ahead and participate in the activity if he sees you doing it, defer to your brother and don’t do the activity in his presence so that he won’t be tempted to join you in that activity in violation of his own conscience.

The “weaker” brother will not be the one spouting off about how wrong an activity is. In fact, the weaker brother *may say nothing at all*. It will take alertness, discernment, and an understanding of that brother’s spiritual maturity to detect when an activity should be avoided.

WHAT PAUL *DIDN’T* MEAN:

One time, I had a brother who confronted me about my involvement in a “gray area” activity. At one point, he actually told me that I should refrain from it because I should consider HIM to be the “weaker brother.” In other words, he was attempting to use this passage to place restrictions on my behavior in my own home (he lived in a different state!). This is an egregious abuse of Paul’s teaching. The “weaker brother” can never presume to attempt control of others’ behavior based upon this passage.

It also doesn’t mean that whenever people look at us and condemn our actions because they are “offended” by them, we must stop. We might *choose* to stop out of politeness or deference, but that’s very different than someone demanding that we abide by *their* moral convictions.

MAKING THE “WEAK” STRONG.

Finally, Paul didn’t intend that the stronger brother should never talk about, defend, promote, or even mention the activity in question.

If Paul describes someone as “weak,” what would be his expectation of the “strong” person?

Well, certainly, he expects the strong brother to voluntarily restrict his own activities while a weak brother cannot yet participate with a clear conscience.

But at the same time, it would be ludicrous to suggest that the “weak” brother has the “right” to *remain weak*... that he must never be challenged to become stronger regarding what is truly right or wrong.

The strong brother should be prepared to walk a weak brother through the process of reexamining his convictions to ensure that they are based upon truth rather than impressions, misconceptions, or cultural norms.

As the writer of Hebrews indicates in [Heb. 5:14](#), mature (strong) believers will train their consciences to correctly discern what is truly right and what is truly wrong. As a “weak” brother gains strength and matures, this should be happening in his life.

As Biblical Christians, we must be alert to the spiritual maturity of those who look to us for guidance... careful to avoid moving beyond their readiness, but discontent to leave them weak.

You Can't Do That! - Part 2b: *The "Weaker Brother," Incorrectly Applied*

CAUSING A BROTHER TO "STUMBLE"

As we saw in the previous section (*Part 2a*), Paul's instructions to us in [Romans 14](#) and [1 Cor. 8](#) both tell us to be alert to someone who does not have freedom in their spirit to engage in an activity even the we ourselves *do* have the freedom from God to do.

To "stumble" means that a brother (or sister) decides to do something in violation of his own conscience because he or she saw someone else (probably another Christian they *respect*) doing that thing.

That's *all* it means.

But that's not how a lot of people invoke this teaching. In fact, you almost *never* hear Bible teachers or preachers explain Paul's words that way... you almost always hear it applied a very different way.

DOES "CAUSING A SINFUL RESPONSE" EQUAL "CAUSING A BROTHER TO STUMBLE"?

The way we usually hear the admonition to "not cause a brother to stumble" is that we are told to avoid doing something because someone else may exhibit a sinful response to seeing us doing it.

Perhaps the most common case has to do with the false standards of "modesty" that are taught in the church today. It goes like this:

- Women are told that they need to "dress 'modestly' so ***you don't cause a brother to stumble.***"

Right away, it is easy to see that this does not fit what Paul was trying to teach!

- Women are *not* being told that if they dress immodestly, all those "weak" men will start *dressing the same way...* in violation of their own consciences!

But *that's* the biblical meaning of "causing a brother to stumble"!!

No, what they are trying to say is that if women dress a certain way, and men see them, those men will not be able to control themselves. Instead, they'll find themselves fighting mental battles against lust in their hearts. They will simply be unable to avoid thinking (and perhaps acting) in impure ways.

BUT ISN'T THAT A VALID BIBLICAL REASON TO NOT DO SOMETHING?

One might suggest that since all those men with raging hormones will "go bonkers" if they see too much female flesh, asking the ladies to "keep covered" will help the men control themselves and avoid fits of lust. *Wow! How can anyone argue with that?*

Well... *I can.* Here's why.

- First of all, man-made rules for righteousness are *totally* useless for restraining sensual indulgence. Paul's words in [Col. 2:20-23](#) are so powerfully on point that I don't need to spell it out here. Just read that scripture passage. ***To even suggest that the modesty rule helps curb lust at all is to fly directly in the face of God's revealed truth.***

- God *never* established clothing to abate lust in men or women. If He intended that we use clothing for that purpose, He would have said so... and told us exactly which body parts needed to be covered to get the job done (See [The Biblical Purpose of Clothing](#), particularly *Part 7*).
 - It doesn't work, anyhow... a man can lust after a fully dressed woman, too.
- God *never* puts the blame for a man's lust on a woman's shoulders! Why do we?
 - Lust, on the man's part, is ALWAYS his own sinful choice!
 - Male Medical doctors are *expected (!!!)* to treat their female patients with the utmost respect, dignity, and professional decorum. Not a one is ever permitted the excuse of "*I saw her naked, so I couldn't help myself.*"
- Nothing outside of us going into us can ever cause a sinful responses. **Ever!!** (See [Mark 7:14-22](#)). So when anyone has a sinful response to someone else... it's *always* a revelation of the impurity that's already in their heart. It is *never* something that the other person *caused*.
 - Did any of the hateful mistreatment to which Jesus was subjected cause Him to have a sinful response? Why not? Simply because *there was no impurity in Him!*
- "Self-control" is a fruit of the Spirit inside us ([Gal. 5:22-24](#)), not the fruit of others' "modesty."

So, are "hormones" or "sex drive" adequate "excuses" for a man to look lustfully upon a woman? *No*.

Does the amount of "skin" showing provide an acceptable "excuse" for a man to look lustfully at a woman? *No*.

Is the woman *ever* responsible *at all* for a sinful response in a man? Think for a moment here... Jesus is our measure of righteousness; Could Jesus could look upon her without lust (regardless of what she's wearing or her motives)? *That* must be the measure of expectation and responsibility that we hold every man to. So... again, the answer is *No*.

(This is not to excuse a woman for dressing provocatively. That too is wrong, but she can still only reveal the impurity in a man, never cause it.)

JESUS DID NOT LIVE THAT RULE.

We have so thoroughly (though incorrectly) applied the "stumble" principle to how women dress, that we've redefined what "stumble" even means. Satisfied with that application, we have not bothered to look into Jesus' life to see if He applied the "stumble" principle the same way in His own life.

We have plenty of occasions where Jesus' actions "caused" sinful responses in those who observed Him.

The Pharisees didn't like Jesus (most didn't, anyway). The more they heard Him, the more they hated Him. The more they watched Him, the angrier they became. The more he openly defied them, their authority, and their teaching, the more they wanted to murder Him. Finally, they did.

Didn't Jesus have it in his power to act differently? Couldn't he have chosen His words so as not to anger the Pharisees? What if He had avoiding locations where the Pharisees exerted their own authority and influence? He could have completely avoided causing all those Pharisees to "stumble" into hatred and murder.

But He didn't.

Was Jesus responsible for the Pharisees' sinful responses to Him? *No, not at all.*

All of that pride, envy, and lust for position and power was already in their hearts; Jesus' words and actions only exposed it. He could have acted in such a way that they wouldn't have had that response, but the truth is, *God wanted it to be exposed!!* Jesus was obeying God; Jesus did *not* base His actions on whether or not someone would respond sinfully to Him.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US

- If someone's words, actions, or attire incite a sinful response from or in me, *I alone are responsible for that sin.*
- If my words, actions, or attire incite a sinful response from or in someone else, *they alone are responsible for that sin.* (Even if what I did was sin, they are responsible for their own sin... I did not *cause* it).

HERE'S THE SUMMARY:

If I am doing something in righteousness, I have *absolutely no obligation to stop doing it simply because someone else observes me and responds sinfully!*

It is an abuse of Scripture to use the "stumbling brother" argument to tell anyone that they must stop what they're doing simply because someone else responds sinfully.

(For more on "Stumbling," see the Addendum to this document.)

You Can't Do That! - Part 3: *For "Conscience" Sake*

FOR CONSCIENCE' SAKE??

This phrase comes from [1 Cor. 10:23-30](#)...

It's similar to the passages about "stumbling," but in this case, the other person is *not* a follower of Christ.

HERE'S THE CONTEXT:

Often, animals that had been offered as sacrifices to pagan idols would then be taken and the meat sold in the market. You could very likely wind up purchasing some meat that been "offered to idols" without actually knowing it.

Paul says that's no problem... just don't ask ([v25](#))... *for conscience' sake*.

The next point Paul makes is that if you're having dinner at the home of another person, who is not a believer, then here again, don't ask... just eat what you're served. *BUT*... if the guy *tells* you that it was offered to an idol, *then* don't eat it... *for conscience' sake* ([v28](#)).

But here's the key point... Paul is not talking about our own consciences here, he's talking about the *other guy's* conscience ([v29a](#))!!

Paul is telling us here that refraining from eating "meat offered to idols" was not a moral absolute, but a contextual decision... and a voluntary one, at that! *Act in deference towards others*, he seems to be teaching.

A PRINCIPLE TO GRAB HOLD OF!

And then comes a most surprising yet very relevant statement by Paul... a clear principle that we can apply to a *LOT* of different situations

...for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? ([v29b](#))

Just in case someone might want to say, "*You can't do that, other people believe that it is wrong,*" Paul states it pretty plainly... ***My freedom before God to do something is NOT determined by other peoples' faulty consciences about it.***

A GOOD PLACE TO CLOSE

Whether it's "The appearance of evil," "causing to 'stumble,'" or a matter of "conscience," acting in deference towards others is a good thing, but allowing other peoples' moral standards to dictate what we do and do not have freedom before the Lord to do... *that is something else*.

If anyone attempts to twist Paul's words in order to make them say, "***You can't do that!***"... we need to respond with Paul's very clear and *un*-twisted rhetorical question:

Why is my freedom judged by another's conscience?

Rest assured... it *isn't*.

BACK TO MY OPENING QUESTION

In the Introduction to this series, I asked this question:

At what point must a Biblical Christian modify his own behavior because someone else thinks that what he is doing is wrong?

I mentioned that there were three different options in response:

1. Refrain completely, at all times.
2. Refrain while that person's presence.
3. No obligation to refrain at all.

The answer, according to Paul, is actually #3. At the same time, he encourages us to be alert to contexts where deference towards others would be better than simply expressing our freedom, but that only applies to those who are not believers or who are weak in their faith... never the ones who do nothing more than condemn us.

You Can't Do That! - Addendum: *More on "Stumbling"*

There are a couple of other passages that reference "stumbling" that we should take a look at.

CAUSING A CHILD TO STUMBLE

Jesus also made reference to the kind of "stumbling" that may come to some people's minds, thinking it applies to the "causing a brother to stumble" concept that we have been discussing. However, Paul's teaching in Romans 14 and 1 Cor. 8 are much more central to those ideas. And as we've seen in this article, we cannot be held responsible for the sinful responses people chose to have when they see us living our lives in righteousness, else we would have to conclude that Jesus was responsible for the Pharisees' wicked response to Him.

But let's look at what this passage says... in context:

"Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me;

"And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

"Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!

"If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.

([Matthew 18:3-9](#) NASB)

You can see first of all that Jesus is talking about how we need to come to Him... with the faith of a child. He's talking about faith for salvation. A child easily and simply believes in Christ's love and forgiveness.

Then Jesus transitions to talk about "Stumbling Blocks," but remember that the context is still *salvation*. Unlike Paul, Jesus is not referring to the "stumbling block" of a questionable activity.

In Jesus' use of the term, "stumbling" means "keeping someone from making it to heaven." This can be seen in the next paragraph where Jesus states that you should not allow your eye or hand to cause you to "stumble." The consequence if you do not guard against such "stumbling"? It is *"Eternal fire."* Jesus said it would be better to have only one eye or hand than to go to hell.

This is not about "I just committed a sin with my eye or my hand." This is about the importance of entering heaven and avoiding hell... and if you "stumble," you're on your way to hell.

Causing someone to "stumble,"—according to Jesus' use of the word—is to cause them to "be cast into fiery hell."

Doesn't that fit the context of Jesus' warning about causing a child to stumble? One who causes one of these "little ones"—children... or anyone prepared to respond with childlike faith—to "stumble" is one worthy of severe punishment.

This makes perfect sense; if someone interferes with a child's opportunity to express saving faith, or who dissuades that child from expressing saving faith, that person has just put a "stumbling block" between that child (or any person) and their salvation. This explains why Jesus declares such a severe curse on that person.

MISGUIDED DEFINITIONS

Paul used "stumbling" one way. Jesus used it another. It might be tempting to assume that they were using it the same way, but the context makes it clear that they were not.

Sadly, however, many people hear the word "stumble" in the Bible and they assume a meaning that does not match how Paul *OR* Jesus used it. Instead, they assume a definition that is foreign to both texts but they use that inaccurate definition to interpret both texts. Their interpretation in both cases is wrong so their application is also wrong. Instead of submitting to God's Truth, they find themselves laboring to submit themselves to a lie... to a man-made rule.

It is critically important that we understand the actual meaning of the words we read in Scripture. When we don't, we risk missing something that God intended for us to know, or worse... believing that God has said something that he really hasn't.

Now let's look at one final passage.

I'LL NEVER EAT MEAT AGAIN.

"Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble." ([1 Cor. 8:13](#) – NASB)

The context is about being careful for brothers with "weak consciences" who—if they were to eat meat offered to idols—would be drawn in their hearts back into idol worship, even though such meat cannot actually hurt the one who eats it. In that case—when we can discern that weakness in a brother—we should abstain from eating the meat, harmless though it may be in itself.

So is Paul saying that he simply will never eat meat no matter what because someone might have a problem? I don't think that's the force of his words. I believe that he's saying two things:

- *I don't mind giving up the meat for a brother with a weak conscience.*
- *If that were to mean that I'd never ever get to enjoy a steak on the grill again, I'm still ok with that!*

Note the word "IF" in Paul's words. His decision to not eat meat is—and always will be—*conditional*. It is not a once-and-done decision to go vegan.