

Romans 14:1~12, part 2

There are some things we know are wrong, because the Bible clearly condemns them. Other's we know are right, because the Bible clearly commends them. But what about those areas which the bible is not so clear on? What about the things that the bible either doesn't speak to at all, or speaks very little to, leaving us to wonder whether it's right or not? If you've been a Christian very long, you realize that there's a lot of these "gray areas." And depending on who you ask, determines whether or not it's wrong.

Is it right for a Christian to...play cards...to play pool...go to the movies...to play bingo...to smoke...to eat in a restaurant that sells alcohol...to work on Sunday...for women to wear pants... The list goes on and on. Issues that have resulted in believer's being deeply divided. So much so, that I'm convinced this plays a major part of why there is so many different denominations. People could not agree, so they split up and started another church. It's one thing to be divided over "Doctrinal" issues (which we should if it is not according to scripture) but quiet another if it is over these "gray areas," things where the bible is simply not clear on.

So what do we do? When it comes to areas that are not clearly defined in Scripture, what do we do? Paul's answer... "*Follow your convictions.*" He simply says...*if you think its wrong to eat meat, don't eat it, and if it doesn't bother you to eat meat, then go ahead and eat it.* Follow your convictions. When it comes to matters not specifically commanded or forbidden in Scripture, it is always wrong to go against your conscience, because our conscience represents what *we actually believe to be right*. To go against our conscience, therefore, is to do that which we believe to be wrong. And although an act or practice in itself may not be sinful, it is treated as sinful for those who are convinced in their own minds that it is wrong, and produces guilt.

The believers in Rome were divided over special diets and special days. Some of the members thought it was a sin to eat meat, so they ate only vegetables. Other members thought it a sin not to observe the Jewish holy days. These two men see the matter completely differently; they stand at opposite ends of the spectrum on this issue. But Paul's council is, they are not to despise the other or judge the other based on their personal convictions. Because each man is following his own convictions in the matter, trying to please God, which is acceptable to God.

³*Let not him that eats despise him that eats not; and let not him which eats not judge him that eats: **for God hath received him.***

God is pleased with both men; on the basis that they both are doing what they truly believe is right and pleasing to God! So don't judge other Christians...that's not our place...

⁴*Who art thou that judge another man's servant? to his own master he stands or falls. Yea, he shall be held up: for God is able to make him stand.*

Who are we to judge another man's servant? *Who died and made us boss?* That brother is living his life in efforts to please God just like you are, so don't condemn him based on your take of the matter. If he is wrong, God will show him. Let him be, *he is answerable only to Christ...not you.*

(Vs 5) ⁵*One man esteems one day above another: another esteems every day alike.*

It almost seems certain to me that Paul is referring to the different perspectives between Jews and Gentiles in this section. Esteeming one day above another seems to be suggesting the Sabbath day. A day that the Gentiles never observed. He also might have in mind, other Jewish Holy days, they celebrated throughout the year. Either way, there was some who felt that "Certain days" should be highly esteemed, days which should be honored. While others disagreed, and saw every day as the same.

An example of this might be Easter... I'm getting to where I despise what Easter has turned into, as with many of the holidays. As you well know, very rarely will I conform and preach on the holiday. Several times I have preached where I was in the text, rather than seeking an "Easter sermon." Reason being, I celebrate Easter every day!

Either way...whether you esteem one day above another, or see them all the same, just make sure you do what "You Think" is right. That's what Paul is saying in the latter part of verse five.

...(5b) *Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.*

Paul says, "Whatever you decide to do, just make sure you don't have any doubt about it."

Why do you think Paul would say that? Because you would "feel guilty" if you did. Hence the principle found in verse 23.

²³And he that doubts is damned if he eat, because he eats not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

...**damned if he eat**...means he feels guilty for eating it, he feels condemned! His conscience "eats him up" while he eats!

How many times have you partook in something that you weren't quiet sure about, but you did it anyway, and then ended up feeling guilty for doing it?

Or how many times have you made a choice to do something (*out of personal desire*) over what you knew in your heart to be the right thing to do?

What always happens when you do that? You feel guilty, your *conscience* eats you up...

Our conscience is that *little voice* inside our heads that constantly regulates what we do and what we say. Anytime we do contrary to what we know or believe to be right, our conscience condemns us... Its like an ALARM clock in your head.

(Illustration: Alarm Clock) Our conscience is well illustrated by that of an alarm clock. The alarm clock being the conscience, and the alarm time set point representing what we know to be true or believe to be true. What ever it is "*set for*" will be when it goes off. The alarm clock is triggered by these "*set points*," which in this case refers to our knowledge of right and wrong.

Which serves well to explain the differences among believers on certain matters. The "*weaker*" brother here, who has trouble with meat, who "*esteems certain days*" above others, reveals that, his conscience is still subject to his previous beliefs before coming to Christ. His conscience is yet affected by his orthodox upbringing. While the "*stronger*" brother has had his mind "*transformed*" by the teachings of Christ, as a result, he's changed his way of thinking on some things. Now that his mind has been changed towards these things, his conscience no longer bothers him, it no longer goes off when he partakes in them...The alarm clock of his mind, (the conscience) used to go off when he was offered meat to eat, because in his mind, it was wrong. But now that he has come to the knowledge of the TRUTH, knowing that there is nothing wrong with it...*he can eat in quietness.*

The "*stronger*" brother represents the believer who has been "*set free*" from a lot of "*former beliefs*" that weren't true. He has been set free by truth..."*the truth shall set you free...*" While the "*weaker*" here represents the believer who is still in bondage! He is in bondage to his past, his upbringing, his religious beliefs, bottom line, there's a lot things that are still very much ingrained in him, things which keep him from enjoying the same liberty that the stronger brother enjoys.

In this case, the question looms, which one is right?

(Vs 6) Well, according to Paul, they both are! Each man is doing what he “*thinks*” is right before God “*in his own mind!*”

⁶*He that regards the day, regards it unto the Lord; and he that regards not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he that eats not, to the Lord he eats not, and gives God thanks.*

Both men, though at opposite ends of the spectrum, are doing what they “*Think*” is right!
Both men are doing what they feel is pleasing to the Lord.

- *He that regards the day, regards it unto the Lord...*
- *He that regards not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it...*
- *He that eats, eats to the Lord... (for he gives God thanks)*
- *He that eats not, to the Lord he eats not... (and gives God thanks.)*

Either way... God is pleased with them both... because their minds are being held subject to doing what they think is pleasing to the Lord!

Each man, in his own way, is fulfilling the first and great commandment...

“*Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all your heart, soul, **MIND** and strength!*”

T: Both men are honoring the Lord with their lives, living in a way that is pleasing to God, by having their “*thoughts*” subject to God!

What they feel convicted is wrong... they do not do. And what they are convinced is not wrong, or displeasing, they do. Every thing they do is determined by whether or not it is pleasing to God!

Paul is defining the very essence of the meaning of “*Lordship*.” This is what it means to serve Jesus Christ as Lord! Obedience to God is not defined by the mere physical keeping of the Law, such as abstaining from adultery, or stealing, or killing, etc... True Obedience to God is not defined by “*external*” keeping of God’s commandments. True obedience to God is that of “*Internal obedience*” to God, when we subject “*our thoughts*” to God, living our day to day lives in efforts to abstain from anything we feel is not pleasing to the Lord, and doing the things that we feel are pleasing to the Lord.

At times when we all struggle with *what to do* in a particular situation, we often use the phrase, “*Follow your heart*.” Or we might say, “*follow your instincts...*” But the reality is, what we are really referring to in both cases is the conscience. Which is great advice, because our conscience is a good guide. It is not influenced by emotions; nor by feelings, but simply responds to a situation based on the data or knowledge that it contains! The conscience evaluates a situation through the light of truth, and makes an unbiased decision based on the facts.

The *conscience* is something that God instilled in man, to help guide us from wrong, and lead us into right. The conscience never leads us to do what is wrong, it never encourages us to do evil, but the contrary, and it *sounds the alarm* in both cases! Think about that, what a confirmation that is to the “*validity*” of the bible. The bible teaches that we have a “*Sin nature*” in us, what Paul calls the “*flesh*.” It is this flesh that tries to lead us in wrong; the flesh tries to pull us to evil... But all the while it does so, we have our conscience that is warning us to stay away, and not do it. (*Hence the picture of the “little angel” and “Satan” sitting on the shoulder trying to persuade us...*) The flesh is sinful, and evil and contrary to God, while the conscience is pure, and innocent and good, because it only responds what it knows to be true! Thus the struggle... Those of this world, more than not follow the flesh, and its desires. Even when they do submit to their conscience, it is void of many of the truths of scripture. But we who follow Christ,

are constantly filling our minds with the truth of God, and denying the desires of the flesh to live to the convictions of our conscience.

Paul says if we'd just follow our conscience, we'd live a life that is pleasing to God! But many, who love sin, who love darkness rather than light, reject those convictions of the conscience so that they can follow the lust of the flesh! Paul describes this as they have "*Seared their consciences as with a hot iron.*" Meaning they have suppressed their conscience so much, that it has become thickened and dull, no longer sensitive. It's as if they have taken a hot iron and seared it to the point there is no feeling left in it. That helps to understand how people can do some of the things they do, with seeming no remorse! It doesn't bother them because over time, gradually they have seared their conscience to the point, little bothers them.

But for those of us who follow Christ, our conscience becomes our guide! We seek more and more to be sensitive to it. By submitting to it, we grow in confidence towards God. If you're here this morning, and you are walking in submission to your conscience, you are walking before God in peace. But if you're here, and there's some things going on that you "*know*" are not pleasing to God, maybe your not doing what you "*know*" you should be doing...then *you feel guilty*. If you feel guilt this morning, its because you are guilty. It's telling you that you aren't living in a way that's pleasing to God, by not living to what you are convicted to be true. To which there are two things you can do, ignore it time and time again until it doesn't bother you, or repent, by changing our lifestyle to quiten the conviction...

All of this passage can be summed up by the "*Lordship of Christ.*" From verses 5~9, Paul mentions the word LORD 8 times. Here he is establishing what true obedience to God is. The man who is right with God is the man who lives in submission to his conscience, serving God with our MIND!

In verses 7~9, Paul tells us, it is to this end that Christ died and rose again so that he might be *Lord of Men's' lives!* That what men do and don't do would be done out of respect and reverence for the Lord.

We no longer need the Law because everything we do, we do in efforts to please our Lord. Whether we "*eat*" or don't eat...whether "*we esteem one day above another*" or not... is determined by whether or not we think it is pleasing to God!

Is Jesus Christ the Lord of your Life? That is determined by whether you live your life to please Him...or to please your self. Which one will be determined when each of us stands before the Lord at the judgment seat to give an account of our life.

(Vs 10~12) ¹⁰*But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. ¹¹For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. ¹²So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.*

Paul says, we are not to Judge, criticize or despise our brothers and sisters in Christ, in regards to these "*gray areas,*" areas that the bible is either not clear on, or things which we lack a complete understanding. We are to leave judging our brothers to God, ours is simply to love each other. We will not be called by our Lord to give an account of the sins and shortcomings of others... Thus instead of judging other Christians, *we had better judge our own lives* to be sure we are being obedient to Christ or not...

...Because each one of us shall give an account of himself to God...