

# ROMANS

## 14:1-23

### Romans 14:1-23

Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 28th May 2023 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

**Reading:** Romans 14:1-23

### Introduction

We have got as far as Romans chapter 14, and in the prior 2 chapters Paul has been giving the Christians in Rome — and us — practical instruction on how to live, behave and conduct ourselves as followers of Christ. That we might grow up in the faith and be mature Christians. That we might be pleasing to God in all that we do. Part of that, is how we conduct ourselves in our relationship toward each other. And last week we read that along with loving God, the commandments are summed up in saying *“you shall love your neighbour as yourself”*.

But the problem we face is that not everyone is the same as us. There are differences of opinion, differences of experiences that each of us have gone through, and differences in background that each of us come from. Different hurts, different fears, different areas that God is working on in each of us. There are folks here now or have been part of this church in the past from Anglican, Baptist, Pentecostal, Methodist, Brethren and Free Church backgrounds. There are those who have spent time as Jehovah's Witnesses, Roman Catholics, and Atheists.

We've had people from various walks of life, and from various countries; from the US to the Ukraine, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Germany, the Netherlands and France. Even from as far away as Wales. And of course the combination of all those things *and more* leads to who we are as individuals. Some of that is good. But it can also give opportunity for division. Indeed, between the extremes whereby everything is seen as permissible or nothing is, we often find much wrangling about the right thing to do.

So what are we to do? Well, it is summed up in Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

#### **Ephesians 4:1-6**

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

We are to endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Where does that unity come from? It can't be our background, culture or experience. It can only come from us all growing in the knowledge and wisdom of the Word of God, for when we each do that we will grow *towards* one another, and not apart. How does that happen? Paul says later in Ephesians chapter 4:

#### **Ephesians 4:11-16**

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head —Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

So God uses those that He calls into specific ministry to equip the saints, that we may *all* serve in ministry, that we may encourage one another and come to unity in what we believe about Christ and His Word. As such, there are non-negotiables. We believe that God created all we see, that it was good, but man rebelled in sin. We believe that God called Abraham by faith, that He established Israel as His people, and through them sent His Son, Jesus, to die to pay for our sin, and raised Him from the dead that we might also walk in newness of life. And we believe that Jesus will soon call His church to heaven, and then return with His saints as Israel cry out for Him as their Messiah. And that God will make all things new — both Heaven and Earth — and will wipe away every tear.

Of course, you are free to believe what you want. But if you believe something different to those things then you can't call it Christianity. As far as the Bible is concerned, these matters are not up for debate. Indeed just 2 chapter from now, as Paul closes this very letter he will write:

### Romans 16:17

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.

That is, the ones who are divisive are not those who hold fast to the Bible, but those who teach or walk contrary to Biblical doctrine.

Now, along with Biblical *doctrine* — that is what we believe — there is also Biblical *instruction*, in which there is no ambiguity, no room for manoeuvre. The Bible doesn't say love some, but love all. It doesn't say only be faithful in marriage unless such and such happens. And it doesn't say don't get drunk except on special occasions.

In these and many other matters the Bible is abundantly clear, and to go against the plain commands of scripture is to go against God. And we have looked at such commands in chapters 12 and 13 — such as presenting our bodies a living sacrifice, serving God, praying to Him, showing hospitality to one another, living peaceably with others, submitting to government, and paying our taxes. As well, of course, as not avenging ourselves, nor committing adultery, murder, or theft, nor lying or coveting.

However, what Paul will address in this chapter are not matters of doctrine, or of specific instruction. But matters of conviction and conscience — where two believers can come to a different conclusion about what they should do. In other words, he will address those topics where scripture gives freedom to do something, but the individual Christian may choose *not* to because of their personal convictions, and as such, doing so would go against their conscience. And furthermore, he'll address our attitude toward others in such matters, explaining that we should be considerate.

To do this, he'll use 2 issues as examples — which are eating meat versus abstaining from it. And whether we set aside a specific day each week for the Lord or not. But as we consider these examples, don't lose sight that what Paul is teaching are the principles with which we are to approach *all* issues of conviction and conscience.

## Overview of chapter fourteen

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- **v1-13** — Conviction & conscience
- **v14-23** — Consideration for others

So then, as we get into this chapter, we'll find two logical sections. The first 13 verses will deal with how we are to approach matters of conviction and conscience. And verses 14-23 will further deal with how we are to show consideration to others in such matters, putting others before self.

## Chapter fourteen

In verse 1 we read:

### **Romans 14:1**

Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

We are, then, to gladly accept into our fellowship those who are *in* the faith, even if they are *weak* in it. What does it mean to be weak in the faith? Well, we'll get to that in a moment. But we are to welcome them in without wrangling and disputing about the personal convictions they have that differ from our own. Indeed, we are not to exclude them from fellowship — for *that* is reserved for those who live contrary to *doctrine* or clear matters of *instruction*, such as the man noted in 1 Corinthians 5 who was sleeping with his step-mother.

So, what kind of things are personal convictions? Paul gives his first example;

### **Romans 14:2**

For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.

Hmm. Does Paul have an issue with vegans? Not so much. Let's get some scriptural understanding about eating food...

Right at Creation God said to Adam and Eve *"I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food."* Why no meat? Because there had been no death — indeed this was still before the fall. But after the fall where sin and death entered the world, and after the flood, God said to Noah *"Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood."*

And we see Jesus Himself say in Mark 7 *"Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?"* Then, in Acts chapter 10, we see Peter's vision recorded where God used food to demonstrate that the gospel would go to the gentiles as well as the Jews, and we read:

### **Acts 10:10-16**

Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, *"Rise, Peter; kill and eat."*

But Peter said, *"Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean."*

And a voice spoke to him again the second time, *"What God has cleansed you must not call common."* This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

So given these things, why would a Christian object to eating meat? Well, a few possible reasons. One of which was the pagan practice of offering meat to idols — whether before selling meat in the marketplace, or in dedication to a false God at the dinner table. Paul addresses this in his first letter to the Corinthians, saying in chapter 10 *"Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; for 'the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness.'"* — that is, you don't have to check if your butcher was offering the meat to a false God when preparing it.

However, he goes on to say *"If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. But if anyone says to you, 'This was offered to idols,' do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for 'the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness.'"*

Therefore, if you go to dinner with a friend, or a BBQ at work and someone stands up before serving and says *this meat is offered in honour of and worship to Allah or Lucifer or a Hindu god* — then you are not to eat it. Not because it will do you harm, but because your witness as a Christian is more important than your appetite as a carnivore.

Now, fellow burger lovers, you might be thinking "Great! That sort of thing never happens around me, so let's get the BBQ out and get some meat sizzling away". Not so fast. Not that it's wrong to have a BBQ — if it were, we certainly wouldn't have church BBQs — but there's another matter to consider, and that is consideration itself.

Among those in the early church were undoubtedly many who had grown up eating meat offered to idols, perhaps having even offered it directly themselves. And now they had come to know the Lord, and they wanted nothing of their old lives. Even though the Bible gave full permission to eat meat, they couldn't reconcile in their hearts that meat offered to idols (even without their explicit knowledge) could actually be consumed by them now that they had given their whole selves to Christ. Because of this, Paul wrote in chapter 8 of 1 Corinthians:

#### **1 Corinthians 8:7-13**

However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

So while we *can* eat meat, it doesn't mean that we *should* eat meat. And in fact, if there's a chance we could trip up a fellow believer who struggles with this or another matter because of their background or convictions, then we should be *willing* to give up anything for them (this is something that we'll come back to later in this chapter this morning).

But for now, you might be wondering *"Does that mean we should all convert to a vegetarian or vegan diet?"* No. And in fact Paul says no-one should legislate that you do that. We read in Colossians chapter 2:

#### **Colossians 2:16-17**

So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

And then a few verses later:

### **Colossians 2:20-23**

Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations— “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

And he further warns Timothy:

### **1 Timothy 4:1-5**

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

What we're hopefully starting to see is that eating meat is a matter of conscience, not doctrine. Yet in the freedom to do it, there may be reasons not to. And there are some good reasons.

Of course, if you can't stomach the idea of eating meat, then there is no obligation to, so don't do it — that's good for your spirit. If meat disagrees with your stomach, don't eat it — that's good for your body. If you don't like the taste or texture, don't eat it — that's good for your palate. But *most* importantly, if you don't eat meat so that you don't cause a fellow Christian to stumble in their faith, then that consideration is good for your fellowship with them.

However, there can be wrong reasons for not eating meat. Indeed, you may have noticed that Paul says it is the one that *doesn't* eat meat that is weak in the faith. How come? You see, we tend to think those who keep to strict rules and regulations, whether about meat or sabbaths or any matter — and look down on others who don't do the same — that these are the strong ones. But actually Paul says no, they are the ones that are weak. Why is that? Because to limit yourself from what the Bible permits is to be weak in faith. Let me explain.

First, if you don't eat meat because you think God prohibits it, then you have a poor understanding of the Bible. Second, if you don't eat meat because you think by mankind cutting it out the world can go on forever, then you have a poor understanding of eschatology — that is, what the Bible says about the future of us and this whole planet. And third, if you don't eat meat or certain meats around certain people because you fear they might say of you, then you are running the risk of being a hypocrite just as Peter was, whom Paul corrected over that very issue. Those reasons for not eating meat are to be immature in your faith.

We see then, that there is freedom either to eat meat or not eat meat as a Christian. And Paul writes in verse three:

### **Romans 14:3**

Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.

So carnivores, don't be unkind to those who have personal convictions or preferences, and rather be considerate toward them. While I might joke, saying *"If God didn't want us to eat animals He wouldn't have made them out of meat"* the reality is I must show love to those who have convictions about such things. And that love may mean not eating meat in front of someone.

But likewise, vegetarians and vegans, this verse is looking at you — saying don't judge a Christian brother or sister because they eat meat, for God takes no issue with it, and therefore takes no issue *with them* over it. And therefore neither should you.

Paul's letter continues:

**Romans 14:4**

Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

While there is to be accountability between Christians, we are all ultimately accountable to God — and the standard that we are all to follow is His Word, not man's ideas of what we should and shouldn't do whether regarding meat or any other matter. And Paul moves to his second example:

**Romans 14:5**

One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

That is, some Christian's have strong conviction that a particular day of the week should be observed as the Lord's day, and strictly so — while others consider every day is the Lord's day.

And beyond the specific day, there are many personal convictions that Christians have about what should and should not be done on that day. I'm not talking about whether you attend church or not. I'm not talking about whether you prioritise attending church over sports, shopping, sleepovers, washing the car, playing golf or going to the beach. It should be a given that as a Christian you regularly gather with other believers.

What I'm referring to are those convictions that some have that means they do not go to the shops *at all* on a Sunday - even if they have run out of milk. Or that they will not enter a pub for any reason on a Sunday - including for a Sunday roast, or a soft drink and a bag of crisps. These are matters of personal conviction, to which we must hold fast to our own conscience, but not enforce upon others. Another example of this is in how we dress for church. I have personal convictions on what I will and won't wear to church — not radically from how I'd dress at home — but it would neither be right for me to go against my conscience, nor to impose my personal convictions on you. They are matters upon which we can disagree *without* dividing. Each one of us being fully persuaded in our mind.

However, we should take care not to use our freedom as licence do that which we should not. For example, if you go for a drink on a Sunday afternoon — and your conscience permits you to — I have no issue with that. If you get drunk on a Sunday afternoon, I do. Because the Bible takes issue with that (and not just because it's Sunday). Likewise, if you watch sports on a Sunday, I have no issue with that. But if you leave half way through the sermon to make the start of a game, or don't show at all — then there's issue with that because it's revealing your priorities as a Christian are wrong.



A wise comment I read is that *"A believer should do only those things to which he can give himself fully and without reserve."*

So then, when it comes to food, drink and other matters of conscience that the Bible doesn't prescribe specifics on — as long as what we're doing, and why we're doing it isn't contrary to scripture — then let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind. We read:

**Romans 14:6**

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

That is, as one commentator put it; *it is not what is on the table, but what is in the heart that is noted by God.* And we are to obey God from our hearts.

**Romans 14:7-9**

For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

So Jesus died for all, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. And as Christians, as those who have *come* to Him in repentance and faith, we are not our own. That should be plain and obvious to us from what else we read in the Bible, including this in 1 Corinthians:

**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Again, that price was the blood of Jesus Christ shed for you, to pay for your sin. And that of the person sat next to you. So if Christ so lovingly and graciously died for them, why should you treat them poorly for not agreeing with your convictions? They are not your servant, but His.

Paul writes, quoting from Isaiah 45:

**Romans 14:10-12**

But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

So then, you will not have to give account account for the person sat next to you. Or in front of you. Or behind you. Rather, you will one day need to give account of how *you* have lived, as you stand before the Bema seat of Christ where He will reward each of us according to their work — not to earn salvation, but to be rewarded with crowns that we may be able lay back at His feet.



While you may disagree with the personal convictions of your Christian brother or sister who doesn't see things the way you do, you are not to treat them disrespectfully or unkindly, for you will have to give account for how *you* have lived.

#### **Romans 14:13**

Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

Paul says *let us not judge one another any more*. And oh how people love to highlight phrases like that. And of course, it is scripture. It's good. But we must never take scripture out of context. As has been well said, if you take the text out of context all you're left with is a con. And people love to take a phrase like this, or where Jesus said "Judge not, that you be not judged." in Matthew 7 and cuddle the words to appease their conscience and protect them from right and proper correction or rebuke by other believers for their sin. But this isn't a free pass to avoid any kind of challenge against non-Biblical behaviour.

How do I know? Because in Luke 17 Jesus said *if your brother sins against you, rebuke him (and if he repents, forgive him)*. And in Hebrews we 3 we read *exhort one another daily*. Paul instructs Timothy to *convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching*. And he writes to Titus *Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith* as well as *Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority*. And then in Revelation 3, as Jesus writes to the church in Laodicea He says *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent*. So we can be sure that Paul isn't giving us permissions to live how we want.

But rather he is saying we are not to look down on anyone because of their personal convictions, and in fact we're to take great care that we don't trip them up in their faith by clumsily exercising the *freedom* we have, to do what they *struggle* with. Let me give some examples.

The Bible doesn't expressly prohibit drinking alcohol. But it does prohibit getting drunk. And since there are many who have a bad relationship with drink, we should be considerate to not cause them to stumble through our liberty. Such was the case with the late Tom Hoile who was part of our church — before becoming a Christian he had been frequently drunk, yet from the day he was saved to the day he died he never touched a drop of alcohol. But knowing this background, several of us were conscious never to invite him to the pub — not because he frequently stumbled, but because his conviction was to touch no alcohol, and we were considerate of that.

You may need to do the same with folks your church family today. That may even extend into your home. If your spouse struggles with drink, not only don't drink in front of them, but resolve to have no alcohol in your home at all. And if they struggle with betting, don't watch the horse racing. If they struggle with gambling, maybe don't play card games at home. Not because those things are inherently wrong, but because it would be wrong to trip up another believer through your freedom to do those things. And this is about your whole Christian family, not just your household.

Another example is films — you might feel comfortable watching some films with a 15 or 18 rating. But even seeing those DVD's lined up on a shelf in your home is enough to make a weaker Christian to go, "*Huh?! I didn't realise I could watch that.*". Think I'm making stuff up? I'm not, for that exact thing certainly influenced me and a friend as teenagers when saw one of our youth leaders with copies of a show we knew wasn't good for us, but liked the idea of watching. It felt like it gave us permission as young Christians to watch the same.

Indeed, there are many other things that we should be considerate in — for we are to be considerate in all things. Parents especially, think carefully about how the films you watch, music you listen to, magazines you read, what you drink, how much you eat, and the computer games you play will influence your children. What may not cause you to stumble, may cause them to.

So, as parents, or as friends, and certainly as church family, what are *you* prepared to give up? It should be anything — remember how Paul said *"if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."*

We continue in verse 14, where Paul returns to the example of eating meat:

#### **Romans 14:14**

I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

That is, the Christian is not commanded to abstain from meat or certain meats.

#### **Romans 14:15**

Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.

This isn't talking about your ability to cook! But rather, if you are acting without consideration toward your fellow Christian you are being unloving. And given that Jesus was willing to die for them, you should certainly be willing to abstain from eating or doing something around them — or if need be altogether — that hurts them in their Christian walk.

#### **Romans 14:16-18**

Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.

In other words, don't use your liberty or freedom to do something (which is a good thing) as something to offend others with, as doing so would be a poor witness. But rather, always keep in mind how your actions affect others — especially those weaker than you in the faith — knowing that in doing so you are not only being considerate to them, but you are also serving God, and honouring Him. Why does Paul say that is approved by men? Because no-one likes a hypocrite who says he loves others, but then fails to *do* so.

#### **Romans 14:19**

Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

Remember what we read in Romans 12, that *"If it is possible, as much as depends on **you**, live peaceably with all men."* We must not seek to stir up trouble, nor have hobby horses of personal conviction that we try to enforce on others, but rather look for ways to encourage one another — not merely complementing one another, but encouraging each other in our walk with God. For that is one of the reasons we're to meet together as Christians.

**Romans 14:20**

Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offence.

You are free to eat anything, but you're not free to offend others with that freedom. If you drive apart a church family because of your personal conviction over something that scripture doesn't explicitly command; shame on you! You are in no way permitted to do that.

Likewise, if you buy a take-away burger with the sole intent to eat outside the window of a vegan restaurant, or a bacon role to spite a Jew that has come to know the Lord, you're not acting in love.

Coming back to the point he made in verse 13, Paul writes:

**Romans 14:21**

It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.

This doesn't mean treading on eggshells, but rather Paul is underlining the need to be considerate to others in all things. Let me ask you, have you ever considered not drinking so that you don't cause others to stumble?

Personally, I didn't drink at all for at least 10 years while I was serving as a youth leader — nor would I even go for a soft drink in a pub in town on a Friday night right after Youth Club — as I never wanted to set the wrong impression or example. That's not because I didn't have the freedom or liberty as a Christian to do so. But out of love for those younger ones. That's one way that I personally felt convicted to be considerate.

But again, this is not limited to food and drink. How you dress could cause offence to others — not because you don't have style — but because revealing, or tight fitting clothing, or indeed designer clothing could cause others to stumble in their walk with the Lord.

And indeed, depending on the background, experience and culture of your Christian brother or sister before they came to know the Lord, or the strength of their faith since, there could be all sorts of things that you could unwittingly cause them to stumble in.

J Vernon McGee summed this up well, saying *"Anything that is questionable and is a matter of conscience for a weak brother becomes wrong for the strong one."*

**Romans 14:22**

Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

That is, you're happy if you don't tie yourself up with rules and regulations that the Bible doesn't place on you. Because the more legalistic you get in your personal convictions, the harder you'll find it to not go against your own conscience.

### Romans 14:23

But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

So then, if you are not sure if you should do something as a Christian — don't do it. Listen to your conscience. But furthermore, while the Bible doesn't prescribe exactly what we should do in every situation, it gives us principles that do apply in every situation. Augustine said well; *"In essentials, there must be unity. In nonessentials, there must be liberty. But in all things, there must be charity."* That is, there must be love.

## Conclusion

We need this chapter. And we need to pay attention to it. If you are comfortable with the idea of doing something, that's fine — so long as it first does not offend God, and second does not cause a Christian brother or sister to stumble. And I would add a third point, that it should not cause any confusion to your non-Christian friends about what you believe, what you stand for. Your walk should match your talk.

And we should always be considerate of others. We read in Psalm 133:

### Psalm 133:1

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity!

As a church family, we should pursue unity. And this is not mere union, but unity.

Barry Smith, the late evangelist, used to give the analogy of tying two cats together by their tails and hanging them over a washing line (don't try this at home!). In that moment, you certainly have union. But you don't have unity — for in unity there is a coming together for each other's benefit, not merely wanting the same short term goal.

Too often we're too willing to divide over things that matter to *us*, and not willing enough to divide over things that matter to God. Therefore, let us consider these things...

## Application questions

- In which areas of Biblical *doctrine* or *instruction* do you personally need to stand firmer on?
- In what matters of conviction or conscience do you need to personally show more grace?
- In what matters of conviction or conscience do you need to be more considerate in?

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