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## Introduction

Well, I saw a comic strip that had two sisters on it - a younger one and an older one. And the younger sister said this. "So, the voice stopped. I just wish I knew what it was." To which the older sister replied. "It's your conscience." To which the younger sister said, "My conscience sounds a lot like you."

In our passage tonight, we're going to be talking **about matters of one's conscience**. That is, as I said, a few weeks ago, Paul is dealing here with issues that are neither black nor white. In Scripture, these are issues that we call gray area issues, how do we handle gray area issues in the body of Christ. And when we're dealing with gray area issues, this is where Christian liberty comes in. Christian liberty. And where personal convictions come into play as we live out our Christian life.

But what happens even among Christians, is exactly what happens even with those two sisters. That is, as believers, we will try and play someone else's conscience. We can do that in the church. And we want to try and get others to align with our conscience, instead of humbling ourselves and realizing that they have their own conscience that we do not want to offend.

So, as we come to our text, tonight, we're going to be faced with how to deal with issues that are not clear cut, commendations, or condemnations in Scripture. These are gray area issues that deal with a person's conscience. So how do we handle these situations?

Well, as we've studied the last 13 chapters of Romans, and specifically in chapter 12, what were we reminded of in chapter 12? We need the Word of God to guide us. Right? We need to be renewed by the Word of God, our minds need to be renewed by the Word of God. And then it is His Word that helps

us to come to the decisions then that we make. Especially when we're dealing with a person's conscience.

And so, Paul is going to give us three principles here tonight, to think through when we have to make a decision, that is not a clear commendation, or a clear condemnation in Scripture. Specifically dealing with areas of the conscience.

- Our first principle we're going to see is Concern for Fellow Believers. First principle is Concern for Fellow Believers.
- Second principle is Concern for Gospel Matters.
- And then the third principle will be Concern for One's Heart.

## 1. Concern for Fellow Believers

So, let's look at our first point here, Concern for Fellow Believers. Look at verse 13. Romans chapter 14, in verse 13, Paul says this, [“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.”](#) (Rom 14:13)

Notice what Paul says there, "therefore", and we all ask what? There you go, good Bible students! Therefore, what is the therefore there for? Well, it takes us back to verses 10 through 12, which is this, [“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.”](#) (Romans 14:10-12)

Every single one of us, every one of us is going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, all of us are going to be held accountable for the things that we do and the things that we say. So that means that you and I are not to go around, judging each other's minds and hearts. We're not to go around judging each other's minds and hearts. We are to leave that up to God. God is the one who will judge them.

### How do people in the church judge one another?

Well, you have the weak, the weak who are in the church -- who are typically the legalistic or the more rule-driven people who are judging the strong, because they think that the strong are abusing their Christian freedom and doing things that dishonor the Lord. So, the weak will bring judgment upon the strong, because they don't uphold to all of the rules that the weak Christian upholds to.

But then you have the strong, who look down on the weak for their lack of faith, and their narrow-mindedness in matters of Christian liberty.

So, the weak and the strong will both judge one another in the church. And what God is saying here is no, that's not our job. That's not our duty to judge each other in the church -- We leave that to God. You see, when judgment happens in the church, what is the result? Disunity, and church splits. That's what happens when Christians within the body of Christ begin to judge one another. So, Paul tells us that we are not to judge one another anymore. But we must determine this in our minds. Notice what he says there -- not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. It means that we are to look out for the interests of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Now, who would most likely put a stumbling block in another brother or sisters' way? Who is the one in the church that would do that? Well, this would be the strong believer, the strong believer, the one who likes to practice Christian liberty, whose conscience is clear and says, "I can practice my Christian liberty, I have liberties in Christ and I want to practice those." And they're the ones who will often put a stumbling block in another brother or sister's way. They like to do things that the scripture neither commends nor condemns -- the strong believer does. But when they do this, it often causes the weaker Christian to stumble.

For example, if a strong Christian thinks that it is okay to go to the movies, the weaker Christian thinks it's a sin to watch movies. The strong Christian should not encourage the weaker Christian to watch movies, because that will cause that weaker Christian to go against their conscience, and sin against God. So, the stronger Christian can practice their Christian liberty when they would like to, but they are not to cause the weaker Christian to stumble. And they are not to judge the weaker Christian for their stance. For them taking the stance against watching movies, the stronger Christian is not to bring judgment against the weaker Christian.

Why? What does judgment convey to the weaker Christian in this instance? It conveys self-righteousness, right? As the stronger Christian, I'm the self-righteous one. It often breeds contempt towards the weaker Christian. And so, we're not to do that. But we're to treat each other this way...not putting a stumbling block in another believer's way.

What's interesting here is that Paul uses the words, **judge and determine** -- notice those two words there in verse 13. Those two words judge and determine in the Greek both of those words are the exact same word. "krino" is the Greek word there, which means "*to judge or to consider*" or "*to come to a decision*." What Paul is doing here is using a play on words to say, *don't judge, but if you do judge, then come to this final verdict. What is the final verdict?* That you will not cause another brother or sister to stumble. That should be the judgment that you come to -- the verdict, the final conclusion that you come to -- that I am not going to put something in the way of a brother or sister and cause them to stumble.

This needs to be a heart that each one of us has for our fellow believers, fellow brothers and sisters. Look at verse 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.*" (Rom 14:14) Paul now turns to himself, and he tells us that he is the one who is convinced that nothing is unclean.

And how does Paul know this? Well, notice the words there "[in the Lord Jesus](#)." He is convinced in the Lord Jesus. Paul received this as direct revelation from Christ, that all things are clean. He didn't come up with this on his own. In fact, if you remember, Paul was a Jew of Jews, right? A Hebrew of Hebrews. How much more would Paul have upheld all of the laws in the Old Testament about not eating certain meats? He would have. But he's been convinced "[in the Lord Jesus](#)", meaning he received direct revelation from Christ, that all things are clean.

But he goes on... "[to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him, it is unclean.](#)" (Rom 14:14) That is, we should never try to persuade someone to go against their conscience. If they think it is unclean, to them, it is unclean. Don't try and convince them. If a weaker believer thinks that it is wrong to do something, even though in reality, it is right for us to do, or okay for us to do -- to that person, it is wrong to do. For the stronger Christian, to try and convince them that they should violate their conscience is wrong, because it is leading them into sin. And we should never lead a brother or sister into sin.

If you invite someone over to your house, whom you know does not watch movies, and you pull up Netflix to watch a movie. It's wrong. It's wrong for you to do that. Even though you have the Christian liberty to do it. It's wrong for you to do it. Which is what Paul says in verse 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.](#)" (Rom 14:15)

Christ died for the weaker brothers and sisters; Christ died for them. Therefore, we should do nothing that will cause them to be hurt, and to sin against God, nothing. If we do that, what does Paul say? You are no longer walking according to love. You are no longer loving your neighbor as yourself. And now you have fallen into sin, because you are causing them to sin against God.

So, what do we do? We love them. We love the weaker Christian. We love them by laying down our Christian liberties, even though we have the right to practice Christian liberties.

### **Christian Liberty vs Situational Ethics**

Now, let me just pause right here and touch on something that I think is very important for us to note. Some people take Christian liberty to mean situational ethics, situational ethics there, there are situational ethics and there are Christian ethics. Let me explain the two situations.

- Situational ethics are those things that a person does, because it feels right for them to do it. It feels right for them to do it. Situational ethics says, if you think it's right for you, then it's right. If you think it's wrong for you, then it's wrong. You've probably heard it stated this way. Well, that's your truth. You have your truth, and I have my truth. However, things are not right or wrong because we think they are right or wrong. They are right or wrong because God says they are right or wrong. For example, some will say that having sexual relations before marriage is not wrong. Because to them, it feels right. I mean, we're going to get married anyways. That's situational ethics on display.
- But God's Word is very clear that that is wrong. That's called Christian ethics. Christian ethics. We don't get to practice situational ethics and call it Christian liberty. Christian liberty is still

always bound by Scripture. Do you get that? Christian liberty is still always bound by the Word of God. For example, just because you have Christian liberty to watch movies, there are certain movies that are out of bounds because they are inappropriate material in these movies that are clearly sinful to watch.

How do we know? Because the Bible tells us so. Matthew 5:28 says, "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matt 5:28) Therefore, to watch something which would cause you to lust after another person is, is wrong, because it has led you into sin. So, we have to understand how situational ethics is unbiblical, it's not biblical. We have to understand Christian ethics, and how our Christian liberty is still always bound by The Word of God. And whatever we do in practicing Christian Liberty, we always do it because we are concerned for our fellow brothers and sisters.

## 2. Concern for Gospel Matters

So, get our second point, point number 2. Concern for Gospel Matters. Concern for Gospel Matters. Look at verse 16. "Therefore, do not let what is good for you a good thing to be spoken of as evil." (Rom 14:16)

Again, notice that, therefore. He says, "therefore" in light of what has just been said in verses 13 through 15. Paul, again here is speaking to the strong in the faith. How do we know? Look at what he says, "Do not let what is for you a good thing." He's talking to the strong believer here, something that is good for the strong believer, meaning this is an area of Christian liberty, that they have Christian liberty to go out and do what is a gray area. Something that is good, because in Christ, this person has a free conscience. Their conscience is not bound, but their conscience is free, in Christ, to say, I am going to do this, I have liberty to do this. God's Word is silent on this, and so I'm going to go and do it.

But by practicing this freedom, this stronger Christian can cause a weaker Christian to stumble and make a bad name for Christ and for the gospel. If a strong Christian was to practice his liberty in Christ, and cause harm to a weaker Christian, this would give the watching-world a reason to attack Christ, to attack His church and to attack the gospel. Right? That's what they would do. They're just looking for opportunities to do it. And if you cause a weaker Christian to stumble, that is giving them an opportunity to attack the gospel. Paul saying don't do that. We should never give them an opportunity for this.

What should we do? Love one another and lay down our Christian liberties for our fellow brothers and sisters. Why? Look at verse 17. "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom 14:17)

The kingdom, the kingdom of God is not all about us being able to practice our Christian liberties. Get that? The kingdom of God is not all about us being able to practice our Christian liberties. Is eating and drinking good? Yes, yes, it is! But not at the expense of causing hurt to another believer. One commentator says it this way, "*the main point of the Christian faith is not eating and drinking, or some*

*area not clearly spelled out in Scripture. The kingdom of God does not consist in observing or not observing days, eating or not eating meat, or any other secondary issue of religious scruples. The kingdom of God is not externals," but listen, "but eternals and internals."*

That's what the kingdom of God is all about. **Eternity, it's a matter of eternity, and it's a matter of the heart. It's a matter of righteousness.** Meaning, walking right with God, having a right relationship with God, and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, meaning that we are always at peace with one another. And this is what the watching world should see. They should see that in the church, with fellow brothers and sisters, that we are at peace with one another. And when they see that happening within the church, what are we doing? We're drawing attention to the gospel of Christ, right? When we are living in unity with one another and love towards each other, what are we doing? We're pointing them to the gospel. We're pointing them to Christ. We're showing them what happens when salvation happens between two sinners.

How do these two sinners get along? How do all of us sinners in this room get along? Answer? The gospel. Because of the gospel. And we're also showing who our master is. We're showing the watching world who are master is. Look at verse 18. *"For he who in this way serves Christ, is acceptable to God and approved by men."* (Rom 14:18)

When you put down your Christian liberties, and serve your fellow believer, you're showing that you are a slave of Christ. That word *"serves"* there in the Greek is the word, *douleuo*, which means *"to act or conduct oneself as one in total service to another, to perform the duties of a slave."* We're acting as slaves of Christ when we lay down our Christian liberties. And we're promoting righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, and we are pleasing to God. And that's how we're to live our lives. But notice this, watch this, not just God. But look at the end of verse 18. Notice what it says there -- and approved by who? Men. *And approved by men.*

Jesus says in Matthew 5:16, *"let your light shine before who men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."* (Matt 5:16) We do good works not only to please God, not for salvation, but in response to our salvation. We do good works to please God. But we also do good works to make the gospel attractive to the watching world. We should live in such a way that the gospel is attractive to them, that they go, "what's going on there with these people? Why are they so different? Why do they all get along like that and love one another and care for each other and take care of one another?" Well, why don't you come and find out -- we'll tell you. Just sit down and listen. You'll hear the Gospel, and you'll see the gospel at work.

The world is watching. So, what then should we do? Look at verse 19. *"So then we pursue the things which make for peace and for building up of one another."* (Rom 14:19) We continually go after things that bring peace and build up our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Which means we humble ourselves, and lay aside our desires, and our wants, and we seek after the welfare of others. Pride brings destruction. But humility brings peace.

Look at verse 20. *"Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they're evil for the man who eats and gives offense"* (Rom 14:20). As we've talked about, Paul has



in mind the idea here of offending a Jew with food that wasn't kosher or offending a Gentile with food that had been offered to idols. Food is used here as that which is right and okay to eat. It's okay to eat food. Eating food is what the strong Christian will do, because of Christian liberty, whether it was sacrificed to an idol or not, the strong Christian will say, I'm hungry, give me the meat. Let's eat. Let's have a big feast and love one another in the midst of it. It's right, it's okay to do that. But if it's going to tear down a fellow believer, Paul says here, stop doing it. Stop doing it.

Notice that phrase there "[the work of God](#)" in verse 20. Notice that. The work of God there is referring to the weaker brother or sister. That's the weaker brother or sister. God has done a work in their lives to save them. But then the stronger Christian comes along and tears them down by practicing their Christian liberties and causing them to stumble. And Paul says, "Don't do that." Do not do that. Here's the picture that Paul is painting. Would you take your greatest, grandest prized possession and throw it in the street for a bus to run over it? You wouldn't. Of course, we wouldn't do that. Well, a fellow weaker brother or sister is worth more than your greatest, grandest prized possession. So don't tear them down. And don't treat them as something less than your greatest possession, because they are worth more. That weaker brother or sister belongs to God.

And our job as a church is to build them up, to love them, and to encourage them and to build them up, which is what Paul reiterates in verse 21. Notice what he says there, "[it is good not to eat meat or to drink wine or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.](#)" (Rom 14:21) We must be willing and ready to lay down our Christian liberties for the sake of our brothers and sisters, because --listen -- the world is watching. They're watching everything we do. And when we tear down a weaker brother or sister, not only is God not pleased, but we give a poor testimony to the gospel, as well.

### 3. We must have Concern for One's Heart

Finally, point number three, we must have Concern for One's Heart. Concern for One's Heart. Look at verse 22. "[The faith which you have, have is your own conviction before God. Happy as he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.](#)" (Rom 14:22) Paul is telling us here in verse 22, that we are not to place our own personal convictions upon other people. If you have personal convictions, that's great! Every one of us in this room, we have personal convictions. But keep them to yourself. And don't try to impose them upon other people.

You need to focus on your own heart and on your own convictions before God. You need to make sure that what you do -- you do it with a clear conscience. And make sure that you are not violating your own conscience. But don't also place your own conscience upon another and forced them to do what you want them to do. Don't be like that older sister. But keep your convictions to yourself and build up the weaker Christian. That's what we're called to do.

Now, how does the weaker Christian grow in their conscience? How do they get built up? Built up? How does that happen? **Through knowledge.** It happens through knowledge. As they grow and knowledge of God and His Word, they will grow stronger and more mature as a believer.

Warren Wiersbe says this, *"Conscience is strengthened by knowledge. But knowledge must be balanced by love. Otherwise, it tears down instead of building up. When truth is taught in an atmosphere of love, then the younger Christian can grow and develop a strong conscience. Believers may hold different convictions about many matters, but they must hold them in love."*

Notice what Paul says at the end of verse 22. *"Happy as he who does not condemn himself in what he approves."* (Rom 14:22) What Paul is saying here is that a man is blessed if he practices his Christian liberty and does not lead someone to sin against their conscience. If he does that, then he condemns himself, the condemnation is upon him, because he's led a weaker brother or sister into sin. Which means we need to focus on our own hearts right? We must focus on our own hearts and our own motives.

Charles Spurgeon, at the height of his fame, was walking down the street one day and he saw a sign which said this in a storefront it said this, *"We sell the cigar that Charles Spurgeon smokes."* After seeing the sign, Spurgeon gave up smoking, he gave up the habit. He came to see that what was for him a freedom-- might cause others to stumble. Bless it is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. Charles Spurgeon put that to practice. He gave it up. Because he realized that as the stronger Christian, his own conviction could lead a weaker Christian to stumble. And so he gave it up.

Paul there is talking to the stronger Christian, but then he transitioned, and he talks then to the weaker Christian, look at verse 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."* (Rom 14:23)

Although Paul spoke to the stronger Christian in verse 22, now he speaks to the weaker Christian -- notice -- *"to the one who doubts."* If that person eats or does something, when his conscience is telling him not to, then it is sin. That's what Paul is saying, Paul is saying this, when in doubt, don't. And that's a good principle for all of us to live by. When in doubt, don't. Stop yourself. Don't go there. Don't do it. If you have any doubts ever, don't do it. If you cannot do something with a clear conscience, then don't do it.

Spurgeon said this, *"Do nothing about which you have need to ask a question, be quite sure about it, or leave it alone. Whatsoever you cannot do with the confidence that you are doing right is sin to you, though the deed may be right to other people, if you have any doubt about it yourself, it is evil to you."*

When in doubt, don't. Don't do it. And listen, don't get in the habit of going against your conscience. Don't get in the habit of going against your conscience. That's going to lead you down a bad path. Because your conscience will continue to convict you and tell you "Don't do that, don't do that, you're falling into sin." And if you don't listen to your conscience, you're going to continue to lead yourself down the wrong path. And eventually you're going to fall into sin.

If your conscience changes, as your knowledge changes, that is okay. But don't ignore your God-given conscience. He's given it to us for a reason. We must keep our conscience informed and renewed by



the Word of God and do nothing against our conscience. But whatever we do, we do it in faith, while at the same time thinking about our fellow brothers and sisters, and our personal testimony for the gospel.

Let's pray Father, help us in this area. Help us to grow, to lay down our Christian liberties, out of love for one another. God, I pray that You would grow us in our relationships with each other. That we would obey Your Word and do what You've commanded us to do. That we would listen to our conscience that You've given to us and Lord, that we would be guided by Your Word. We thank You for Your Word that informs our conscience and gives us knowledge to guide us and lead us in the right direction. Help us to obey it for Your glory. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.