

## What Are Your Convictions?

Romans 14:5-9

ABC 4/2/17

Open your Bibles to Rom 14. It's obvious from Scripture that God is concerned about how we as Christians treat each other. As we saw last week, we must accept other believers & not look down on them. We must get along with each other even when we have different opinions on what is right in areas the Bible doesn't address. We all know sin causes problems in the fellowship of a church. But another thing that can create conflict are opinions over non-essential issues. For example: Hymns or choruses? Song books or on the screen? Organ or guitar? Pew or chair? Public school or home school? Paper or plastic? Suit & tie or jeans & a t-shirt? Internal combustion or electric? Text or phone call? Meat or veggies? Holidays or holy days? These are all non-moral preferences. It's not a sin issue in & of itself to do or not do these things but they can become divisive within a church. Such things have led to bitter feelings, a break down of relationships, split churches, & disgrace coming on the name of Jesus. Often the issue is small but what it can become is huge. Therefore, we need to know what the Bible says about how we're to get along with these differences of opinion. The issue is one of maintaining unity. It's **being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace** (Eph 4:3). It's the loving compatibility of diverse people all saved by God's grace. Disharmony results when the strong despise the weak & the weak condemn the strong (Rom 14:3). To help us understand how we're to get along, Paul devotes a chapter & a half to this (Rom 14:1-15:13), which is what we're currently studying. We see the issue in **vs 2**.

There are tensions between those who are vegetarians for spiritual purposes & those who aren't. The issue wasn't nutrition or animal rights, but whether meat was associated with sinful behavior like pagan sacrifices. Some Christians felt free to eat the meat & some did not. Paul gives 3 truths to handle this. 1) In vs 3 he says we shouldn't pass judgment on a brother in such things **for God has accepted him**. The very meaning of being a Christian is that God has justified the believer by faith in Jesus. He stands righteous & accepted by God. Beware lest you treat him any other way. 2) In vs 4 he says, **Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is**

**before his own master that he stands or falls.** Your brother, with whom you disagree, will give an account for his life before his own Master, & his Master isn't you! 3) In the last part of vs 4, Paul expresses his view of the perseverance of the disagreeing & imperfect saints, who will stand in the final day. **To his own master he stands ... for the Lord is able to make him stand.** The future of believers isn't up for grabs. God will keep us & make us stand at the last day. All of those theological truths are brought out by Paul to give a framework for handling our differences over non-essentials that can do so much damage. **1-9 PRAY**

Even though the practice of Christians varies, their motives are the same. Why does one Christian keep some dietary laws & traditions? Because he's convinced he's pleasing God by doing so. Why does a strong brother enjoy the freedoms of eating? Because he's convinced that pleases the Lord. After mentioning the issue of eating or not eating meat, Paul brings up another matter in vs 5 where believers in Rome needed to be accepting of each other: observing certain days as holy. If a believer came out of Judaism, he'd consider some days as more important than others, such as the Sabbath, feast days, & holy days. A similar regard of days was part of paganism as well. In Col 2:16 Paul says, **no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day.** In Gal 4:9 he refers to such things as **weak & worthless elemental things.** They're part of an old system. Jesus & the New Covenant frees us from having to observe special days. Mentioning both issues, Paul deals with the motives behind those who do or do not do these non-essential things. He assumes they're doing or not doing them **for the Lord** (6). Then he explains that all believers are under the lordship of Jesus (7-9).

So that we're clear, I repeat what I've said before: Paul is not condemning all judgment in this passage. Instead, he's dealing with the subject of judging others on non-essential matters where the Bible gives no commands. Paul corrected the Corinthians because they did not judge a sinning man in the church (1 Cor. 5). & Paul wasn't tolerant of the doctrinal error of the Judaizers (Gal 1:6-9; Rom 16:17-18). On moral issues where the Bible gives clear commands or on essential doctrinal truth, we would be wrong not to judge others. But there are many other

secondary areas where we must be gracious & tolerant with those who differ with us. We aren't to judge or treat them with contempt.

We all know we're to be modest (Phil 4:8; 1 Tim 2:9; 3:2-3; Js 3:17). But define *modest*. Skirt below the ankles or above the knee? Shoulders bare or covered? Long sleeves or short sleeves? How tight is too tight? The line varies depending on our convictions, doesn't it? In Sierraville Muriel got a call of condolence that I had been fired. This was news to both of us. The rumor going around was I was fired because she was wearing shorts; not short shorts, but missionary shorts. You know, the kind the go down to the knees. According to the one who started this rumor, a pastor's wife shouldn't wear shorts. That was her conviction but she was imposing it on another. I called the elders & we all had a good laugh & we were there another 7½ years.

The issue Paul addresses today isn't modesty, but what to think about certain days & what to do on those days. Next week we'll tackle the Sabbath & Sunday. In vss 1-4, about what to eat or not eat, his counsel was, *Don't despise or judge each other. God has accepted the brother, & He will be his Judge not you, & God will make him stand.* Here he says something different. He says, **Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.**

**1. Fully Convinced** (5) This amazes me because I'd think this would make things worse not better. Paul's saying to do whatever you think you ought to do. He isn't saying, *Each one can have his own conviction.* He's saying, *Each one should have his own conviction.* It's a command, not simply giving permission. It's the same word Paul used in Rom 4:21 where he says that Abraham **grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, & being fully assured that what God had promised, he was able also to perform.** According to Paul, minor matters don't call for mushy faith or flimsy convictions. They call for clear faith & full conviction. The observing of days isn't a moral issue. You feel it honors God best by celebrating Easter, then do it. If you feel you bring glory to God by not celebrating Christmas, then don't do it. Paul comes along & instead of saying, *Lighten up, these things are minor & don't merit strong convictions,* he says, **Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.** That looks to me at 1<sup>st</sup> like trying to put out a fire with gasoline!

*All you squabblers over secondary issues, firm up your convictions! No wafflers or fence-sitters. Everybody come to a clear conviction! Everybody know what you're convinced of & take a stand on what you believe.*

Paul isn't concerned with Sabbaths, feast days, & what you do Sunday. He's concerned that we not violate our own conscience. If conscience tells you to keep a certain day, then you ought to keep it. If you train yourself to ignore your conscience, you'll have problems because the Holy Spirit often leads through a person's conscience. Paul doesn't want anyone to have a seared conscience (1 Tim 4:2) & become insensitive to truth & the prodding of God's Spirit. Don't train your conscience to do wrong. If your conscience tells you to abide by certain traditions & taboos, then do so if you believe it pleases the Lord. Don't let anyone tell you not to. 1 Cor 8:7 says, **not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; & their conscience being weak is defiled.** In vs 8 Paul says if it bothers a person to eat food offered to an idol, then don't make him eat it. In vs 9 he says, **take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.** Weaker brothers are often criticized for holding onto something they no longer need to hold onto. By doing so we're pressuring them into doing something that will defile their conscience. That will make them feel guilty & drive them deeper into legalism. We must be patient for the Spirit of God, the Word of God, & gracious & loving Christians to bring that person to maturity. Paul continues in 1 Cor 8:11, **For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.** Do you want to destroy a weaker brother by forcing him to abuse his conscience? Of course not! The conscience is a very important tool in the hands of God. We should follow Paul's example when he said, *I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day* (Acts 23:1). Paul not only obeyed the Word, but also did what he felt the Spirit of God prompted him to do in his conscience. The way for disagreeing Christians to get along with each other in a God-honoring way isn't to be wishy-washy or indecisive on minor issues. The answer to being judgmental & despising others isn't vacillation, wavering, & uncertainty about what to do. That might create a kind of peace because people without opinions tend to get along pretty well. But Paul doesn't believe the solution to Christian disagreement is for all of us to become wet

noodles, even on the minor issues! When Paul weighs the risks of the mindset that can't come to a conviction & stand for it versus the risks of the mindset that has convictions on minor matters, he chooses the 2<sup>nd</sup> set of risks. In fact, he advocates for it: **Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.** How does Paul keep convictions about minor matters from becoming divisive? If he's not going to solve the problem by telling us to lighten up, what is his solution? **Each one should be fully convinced...** But of what? I think the answer is this: We must be fully convinced that what we're committed to is 1) not sinful, 2) honoring to Christ, & 3) the best way I can think of for me to act in this situation. Paul isn't saying we must be fully convinced our way is the only way to honor God or the only way to avoid sin. But it's the best way we can see now for us to act. We have a responsibility, each one of us, to search out these matters for ourselves & come to a conviction. It isn't enough to say, *I grew up in a church where Sunday was just like any other day.* Or *My church never celebrated Christmas because we're not commanded to do so in Scripture.* Or *Since it doesn't really matter, I just won't think about it; I'll just go with the flow.* Paul isn't condemning anyone, but the reason he isn't saying either position is wrong is that he considers Christians to be responsible, thinking individuals who should be working through each of these matters for themselves. This means you shouldn't just do what you do by habit or because everyone else does it. Rather, take the time & effort to study the Scriptures & think it through biblically. Do what you do because you believe it glorifies God, it's not sinful, & you're applying biblical principles to this debatable issue as best as you can.

The words **in his own mind** are important too. Why? Because this last section of Romans began with an emphasis on the mind, saying a Christian isn't to be conformed to the pattern of this world but to be transformed by the renewing of the mind (Rom 12:2). As we walk closely with our Savior, spending time with Him in prayer & Bible reading, & as we continually yield to His Spirit & present ourselves daily as a living sacrifice, our mind is being renewed & our convictions are being confirmed by God's Spirit within us. It's important that none of us violate our own conscience, because to do so is not to act in faith, which is sin (22-23). As you grow in your knowledge of the Word, your conscience becomes more informed. You'll see that keeping or not

keeping certain days isn't the issue; rather glorifying God in all you do is the issue (1 Cor 10:31). On these non-essential matters, don't judge your brother; judge yourself. Obey God as you understand His Word, seeking Him for more understanding.

Once again, to be perfectly clear, **each person must be fully convinced in his own mind**. Paul isn't talking about clear moral commands or essential doctrines of Scripture. Paul's dealing with non-essential matters where the Bible doesn't give specific commands or clear teaching. These non-essential areas don't affect one's salvation. All Christians, both the weak & the strong, have been accepted by God (3) on the basis of faith in Christ. Both are servants of the Lord (4). & both are seeking to please the Lord (6). But they hold to different views on these secondary matters. & that's OK. One of Paul's indisputable truths is that people with opposing viewpoints on non-essentials can both be perfectly right with God. We need to take this to heart. One Christian can celebrate Easter & have an egg hunt with a visit from the Easter Bunny & do so **for the Lord**. Another Christian can be convinced that because eggs & bunnies & even the name *Easter* have nothing to do with Jesus' resurrection & they purposely avoid involvement with anything like that & do so **for the Lord**. One is convinced it's fine & the other is convinced it's wrong & they're both correct for themselves. They're not correct if they try to impose their conviction on secondary matters on the other.

2 famous Christian preachers in the Victorian Era in England were Charles Spurgeon & Joseph Parker. Early in their ministries they were good friends & even exchanged pulpits. Then they had a disagreement. Spurgeon accused Parker of being unspiritual because he attended the theater. Interestingly enough, Spurgeon smoked cigars. In fact, on one occasion someone asked Spurgeon about his cigars, & he said he didn't smoke to excess. When asked what he meant by excess, he answered, *No more than two at a time*.<sup>1</sup>

Who was right? Parker & attending the theater or Spurgeon smoking a cigar? Perhaps neither, perhaps both! Better yet would be to realize they could disagree & both be in the will of God.

**2. Motive** (6-8) It's possible to serve the Lord whatever you're convinced of in these grey areas if it's for the Lord? The strong brother eats according to his conscience & enjoys everything in sight & thanks the Lord for his freedom. The weak brother eats according to his conscience & thanks the Lord for his limited diet. In either case the believer thanks the Lord, so the motive is the

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<sup>1</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *Be Right, An Expository Study of Romans*, p 156

same. They're both doing what they believe pleases God. Christians on both sides of these issues are glorifying God in what they do. This is a major emphasis of Paul's, because he repeats the idea 3x in vs 6 alone: **6**

Paul brings the 2 examples of diet & the keeping of days together & says it's possible to serve the Lord either way in either area. The person who is a vegetarian for religious reasons is so because he believes this is a testimony to God. He doesn't want to eat meat that's been offered to idols or isn't kosher. On the other hand, the person who eats anything receives his more abundant meals as having come from God & he rejoices that religion doesn't really consist in eating or not eating. He knows, as Paul says just a few vss further on in **vs 17**.

& what about the observance of special days? The one who stops all worldly activity on Sunday does so in order to serve the Lord. The one who is free to live life normally on Sunday does so in order to serve God as well. This isn't easy for us to believe. We've come to our full conviction by asking, *What will honor the Lord in this situation?* & we've made up our mind on our answer. It's not easy for us to believe that someone who chooses the very opposite behavior that we've chosen can do it for the honor of the Lord & that Jesus will be glorified by their behavior as well as by ours. Again, you can't do everything to the glory of God. You can't murder or steal or commit adultery or be legalistic or gossip to the glory of God. But there are many things we can disagree on in which both sides can be done to the glory of God. Paul says Christians who disagree on non-essential things can both do opposite things to the glory of God. They can eat & they can not eat to the glory of God. They can eat with thanksgiving to God for what they're eating. They can abstain from eating with thanksgiving that God is able to satisfy them, even though they don't eat. We struggle with that but Paul says that's the way it is. If the other Christian is giving thanks to God for his food or the conduct into which he's been led, then his thanks to God should be proof to you he's doing it **for the Lord**. This takes us back to **vs 4**:

If he's serving the Lord, then you should keep out of his way & allow God to work through the other believer as He sees fit. The critical question is this: Are you really serving God by what you do? Does Sunday really count for you in your Christian life & walk? Are you using it well? Do you

benefit from it? & for that matter, how about the other days of the week? Are you serving God in those days too, as you should? We all must learn to do whatever we're doing for God's glory. Are you doing that? It's important we answer these types of questions. You are not called to be a clone of anyone but Jesus. To work on that you must be a biblically thinking Christian. The principle of giving thanks is also a great help for discerning what we ourselves should do in doubtful situations. What may I do in such & such a situation where the Bible is silent? One good question to ask yourself is: *Can I enjoy it in the Lord & give thanks to God for it?* The recurring phrases here are, **for the Lord & gives thanks to God**. As believers, we belong to the Lord & we live for the Lord. Our aim is always to please Him. If you observe a special day as holy, such as Christmas or Easter (neither of which are commanded in the Bible), you should do it as unto the Lord. If you don't feel compelled to observe special days, you still should live every day as unto the Lord. The same applies to feasting or fasting: you should do it as unto the Lord with a thankful heart. It's your motive that matters. Unlike the pagans, who do not honor God or give Him thanks (Rom 1:21), believers live for God's glory with thankful hearts. **7-8**

Paul means that all of life, including dying, is to be lived with a God-ward focus. When you get saved, Jesus becomes your Lord. You recognize He's the Sovereign Ruler over all your circumstances. Nothing happens to you apart from His kind & loving will. Nothing, whether **tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword**, can separate us from the love of Christ (Rom 8:35). So, rather than living to please ourselves, as we did before we met Jesus, we now live every day for Him (2 Cor 5:9, 15). Since He has all our days numbered (Ps 139:16), when it comes time to die, we die for Him. God is **Lord** over life & death. As believers, we should want to glorify Him in our dying as much as, if not more, as we have glorified Him by our lives. The Puritans used to talk about *dying well*. They wanted to glorify God in their suffering & with their dying breath. Isn't that what you want as well?

To come back to the principle of our motives in these non-essential matters, here's how it applies. You ask, *Can I go to a movie that contains profanity, sexual immorality, or violence?* The answer is, *Can you go to that movie **for the Lord**? Will going there help your relationship with*

*Him? Will it glorify Him? You ask, What kind of music should I listen to? Which TV programs & how much TV should I watch? How should I spend Sundays? Which Bible-believing church should I join? How should I spend my free time?* Apply this principle to any non-essential matter where the Bible doesn't give a direct command: *Can I do it for the Lord & His glory?* Your motive is crucial. We live for Him & someday we'll die for Him. Paul does something surprising as he tries to help us believe what seems so hard to believe: that things as opposite as eating & not eating can both honor the Lord. He brings up life & death. Why? Because life & death are the ultimate opposites of eating & not-eating. If you're alive you have a body that can enjoy the pleasures of life. But if you're dead, your body is in the grave & you don't eat or drink anything. Death is the ultimate abstaining from what the world offers. So Paul reaches for the ultimate: Life & death. He says that both, not just one, but both, are experienced by believers **to the Lord**. That is, to the glory of the Lord. & the point is: If life & death (as radically different, even opposite, as they are) can both display the great worth of Jesus, then He can get glory from our little differences over eating or not eating & celebrating or not celebrating. & He will. The last phrase of vs 8 is one of the greatest commands to holy living in all the Bible: **We are the Lord's**. Every Christian is subject to the unconditional sovereignty of God. **We are the Lord's**. What's that mean? That we're His possession. 1 Cor 6:19-20 says, **Do you not know ... you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price**. I'm not my own, so I'm not to live for myself & neither do I die for myself. I am His, so I must live for Him & I'll die for Him. All believers have the same relationship to the Lord; we all serve the sovereign God we've embraced as our Redeemer. If we're weak & we limit ourselves to living a certain way, we do so because we believe we're pleasing Him. If we enjoy our freedom in Christ, we do so because we believe we're pleasing Him. Since those are matters of preference & not sin, it shouldn't be an issue or cause problems among fellow believers.

### **3. Jesus is Lord 9**

Of course, Jesus was Lord of all before He came to this earth. He is the eternal Son of God. But in coming to this earth as a man, Jesus subjected Himself to death on our behalf. When God raised Him from the dead, He conquered death once & for all. God highly exalted Him to His right hand

& put all things in subjection to Him as the crucified & risen Lord (Eph 1:19-23; Phil 2:5-11). By virtue of His death & resurrection, He is **Lord both of the dead & of the living** (9). This means He's the Judge of the living & the dead (Acts 10:42; 2 Tim 4:1; 1 Pt 4:5). As Paul told the citizens of Athens, **God has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead** (Acts 17:31). Or, as Jesus Himself told the Jews,

**For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him** (Jn 5:22-23).

By the way, that's a strong claim of Jesus' deity. You see the same thing in our text, where Paul freely moves between **Lord** (referring to Jesus) & **God** (referring to the Father).

With all that being said, here's the sum of the matter: Paul's dealing with disagreements over non-essential matters like what days you celebrate & what food you eat. Instead of saying, *Don't sweat the small stuff*, or *Lighten up*, he says, **Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind**. He believes people with conviction & decisiveness are better risks than the other kind. So how does he handle the risk of conflict when lots of people are **fully convinced** that their way isn't sinful, honors God, & is the best way they can see for themselves in this situation? He boldly asserts that opposite behaviors, eating & not eating, can both show the worth & glory of Christ. To support that he says it's true of the ultimate condition of opposites: life & death. & to support that radical statement he goes to the greatest event in history: **9**

The living display the infinite worth of Jesus' lordship by valuing Him in all His good gifts. The dead display the infinite value of His lordship by valuing Him above all His gifts when they're taken away. Therefore, Paul doesn't say, *Lighten up*. Or, *Don't sweat the small stuff*. Instead he says, *Stand in awe of the risen Christ who will get His glory from the living & from the dead & from the eaters & the abstainers & from the day-keepers & the non-day-keepers*. Stand in awe of Jesus & **whatever you do ... do all to the glory of Christ** (1 Cor 10:31).

Why should we open our arms & accept each other? Because God receives us. He holds us up. He is sovereign, & ultimately He alone has the right to judge us. Many conflicts in the church

arise over non-essentials, but they can be stopped if we'll accept each other. Drop unnecessary criticism. Don't be arrogant, judgmental, or self-righteous. Let the Lord be the Judge & do what you believe God would have you do in these non-essential matters. & go to bed tonight not worrying about what someone else has done but knowing you've lived your day for the Lord. & go to sleep knowing if you should die, you'll do so for the Lord.