



Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 16 – Conscience and Considering Others | Romans Chapter 14

Few Bible commands are more difficult or more *essential* to follow through on than Christ's command to love one another. It's not always easy, is it? Sometimes arguing feels so much more satisfying. In this chapter, Paul talks about Christians living in unity without demanding uniformity. When it comes to matters of opinion that the Bible is silent on, we are given the freedom to choose—but not without considering others or compromising our Christian witness.

Icebreaker

If your conscience was a traffic light, describe how you personally know when the light is:

Red

Yellow

Green

Goals for this Session:

- Discover how to respond to differing opinions in a way that maintains unity.
- Consider what being “fully convinced” in matters of conscience requires.
- Pray honest prayers that extend grace and cultivate fellowship with one another.

Grace in Action

Romans 14:1–12

It's easy to connect with people who share a common perspective, but what about when we disagree? Paul discusses how to treat one another when we have differing points of view.

1. Matters of conscience (verses 1–6). What issues were a point of conflict between Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome?

Good to Know

Diets and holy days . . .

Meat in the Roman marketplace came from pagan temples. After a portion was offered to gods, the rest was sold. For some Gentile Christians, this couldn't be eaten in good conscience. Also, for a Jew who practiced strict dietary laws, anything that wasn't kosher was a problem.

Strict Sabbath regulations gave Gentiles a bone to pick with their Jewish brothers. Ancient secular writings indicate that Romans viewed Sabbath laws as nothing more than an excuse for Jews to avoid work.

- a. Did Paul instruct them to *agree* with each other? If not, why not? Explain what Paul was telling them to do in spite of their differences.*

- b. What bottom-line principle does Paul say should guide how we respond to differing opinions in a way that maintains unity? Review verse 1, 7–8, and 12 for your answer.

2. What point was Paul making? Check all that apply:

- Vegetarians are weak in faith.
- Being weak or strong refers to one's convictions about what faith allows them to do—not their belief in God.
- Don't judge others based on your weakness or belittle others based on your liberty.
- Never make spiritual maturity a condition for fellowship.

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

accept (proslambano) Admit into fellowship; receive and treat with kindness.

weak (asthenésō) A tendency for strict rules for conscience's sake.

doubtful things (dialogismós) Reasonings; opinions in non-essential matters; gray areas.

Give an example of something that would be considered a "matter of conscience" for Christians in our culture. Using the guidelines Paul lays out here, how should we respond?

*Paul is not talking about doctrines essential to salvation. He is referring to personal convictions on issues not explicitly commanded or prohibited in the Bible. Romans 14 does not restrict Christians from holding one another accountable for obvious sin. Paul never endorsed immoral practices among believers in the name of being tolerant.

3. What's involved in the process of being "fully convinced" in our own mind? Put another way, how do we determine where we stand in matters of conscience? Look for a *guiding principle* from the following scriptures for how to think a matter through. State it in one simple phrase.

Psalm 25:4

Psalm 119:105

James 1:5

Proverbs 19:20

James 4:17

1 Thessalonians 5:21–22

Romans 12:2–3

For you personally, how important is it to have a position on issues or cultural trends that affect the church and our witness in the world? What should be our main focus?

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

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

Romans 14:19 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Which part of this verse resonates most with you today? How and in what way?

Liberty and Pursuing Peace

Romans 14:13–23

Paul discusses the impact that our convictions, opinions, and actions have on each other.

1. Disagreeing graciously is a skill which many of us are still learning. When grace permeates our thoughts and attitude, it will come through in the way we respond to differing viewpoints with our brothers and sisters in the Lord (Colossians 4:6).

a. Liberty (verses 13–18). Instead of judging, we are instructed to consider our own actions and how they affect others.* How and in what way?

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

obstacle (proskomma) A trip hazard or the result of taking a tumble.

stumbling block (skandalon) A trap; a baited cage that ensnares one passing by and brings them down.

b. Peace with others (verses 19–21). What main reason does Paul give for pursuing things which make for peace among believers? Give some practical examples of how we can do this. Use the verses below for help with your answer.

Ephesians 4:29–32

Philippians 2:3–4

Hebrews 12:14–15

c. Peace of mind (verses 22–23). Paul instructs believers to have their own convictions as an act of faith between themselves and God. This simply means we aren't to pressure others to live by our own personal convictions rather than theirs. Consider the following questions (sharing is optional).

Have you ever felt pressured to follow someone else's "do's and don'ts" list as a Christian? How did you respond? What did you learn from that experience?

Give an example of one thing that is on your personal "do's and don'ts" list as a Christian.

* Charles Swindoll gives a helpful illustration of obstacles and stumbling blocks. Picture a Christian running, enjoying their freedom in Christ; then imagine a legalist sticking his foot out. Picture a believer carefully trying to discern what is appropriate by observing other Christians; someone's reckless use of liberty becomes a trap they fall into.

2. *How the gospel changes everything.* Believers are not to condemn one another because all of us will be judged by Christ. As Paul says in this chapter, the day is coming when every believer will give a personal account to God for how we lived and what we did with the opportunities He gave us. When we remember that Christ delivered us from judgment, the power of the gospel is good news all over again.

a. **The gospel is incentive to put differing opinions in perspective.** That boisterous brother, that persnickety sister in Christ who gets on your last nerve today? Someday we'll all be shoulder to shoulder—arms raised, knees bowed—confessing together at the top of our lungs that “Jesus Christ is Lord”(Philippians 2:10–11). Our differences won't matter and we will see the good work that Jesus has completed in each one of us (Philippians 1:6). In the meantime, how shall we live and serve together to the glory of God?

Philippians 2:12–15

Colossians 3:12–14

God doesn't always give you the people you want, but He gives you the people you need.

b. **The gospel is incentive to build up one another.** Imagine what could happen if we would trade in our judge's robe for a pair of work gloves? Apply yourself to help others move forward. Let's ask ourselves, are people better able to grow strong in their faith because of me? Or are they tripped up and hindered? Use the following verses to explain what will build up one another.

Ephesians 4:15–16

Ephesians 4:29–32

1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14



Gospel at a Glance: Pursue What Makes for Peace | “How many arguments and conflicts could we avoid if we followed Paul's simple instruction to ‘pursue the things that make for peace’? Life sometimes gets very hard for us, and painful, and full of anxiety simply because we don't ask ourselves, *Is what I'm about the say likely to cause problems or promote peace?* One hallmark of spiritual maturity is the commitment to doing what edifies others, regardless of the potential cost. And most of the time, what spiritually builds up and edifies others also tends to bring peace.” – Greg Laurie¹

“A harsh word stirs up anger, but a gentle answer turns away wrath” (Proverbs 15:1 NIV).

¹ Greg Laurie, *Start! The Bible for New Believers*, (©2010, Holy Bible NKJV ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.) p. 198

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

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