

Study and Convictions

Will study help with grey areas?

- Our study often results in black and white conclusions about doctrine and practice
- This is good
- There is no doubt the Bible teaches certain, specific things
- We learn one thing is right and another thing is wrong
- And every honest student of scripture must admit this

- But there also more complex topics
- These are matters of personal application
- Some of which are not addressed directly in the text
- They are left to individual believers to work out
- And, though they are not addressed directly, it is still the scripture that guides us
- It tells us how we can come to conclusions
- And the attitude we must have toward those who come to different conclusions

- Romans 14 is a great text to help with this
- I think it will convince us that study can help with grey areas
- There are a few things we should know from the start

- Christians are different
- We see things differently
- Our sensibilities and sensitivities are different
- We have experienced the world in different ways
- We are convinced of different things
- Romans 14:5 puts it this way...

"One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

- Two Christian men often come to the opposite conclusion on the same issue
- These conclusions are personal
- We are "fully persuaded" about certain practices and activities based on personal experience

- In the church at Rome, as we'll see in this text
- There appears to be have been at least two separate tracks of experience
- First, Jewish believers that previously lived by the law's dietary restrictions and special, religious days
- Second, those who had previously worshipped idols, offered meat and wine to idols, and sold or purchased leftover portions in the market

- It's not difficult to imagine that these past experiences (and who knows how many others) were impacting the present day Christianity of these Roman believers
- Since the experiences were so different, it was more likely that conflicts could occur
- And, just as they did, we all have past experiences that impact us today

- In this context, perhaps some didn't understand the advantages of the new covenant?
 - They had doubts about whether or not they should celebrate a holy day or follow some of the old covenant dietary laws
 - There were lengthy discussions in early chapters (particularly Romans 2, 3, and 4) about the law, righteousness, and faith
 - Perhaps others were so disgusted with the wickedness of their former idolatry that they could no longer bear to eat meat purchased in the marketplace
 - They might have thought "I'll just eat vegetables," trying to avoid any internal conflict or grief of conscience
 - We know for sure others believed "it was just meat!"
 - They were able to eat with no doubt and nothing troubling their conscience
- We have a few details in the early part of the chapter, beginning in verse 2...

"For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him."

- We're not talking about one good believer and one bad believer
- Or even, one right believer and one wrong believer, necessarily
- If you are strong and I am weak, that doesn't mean you are better
- It also doesn't mean I am worse
- We differ
- Both are accepted (or received) by God
- So, this is not a passage in which a believer finds justification for himself, or finds something he can hold against his brother
- In fact verse 12 says...

"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God"

- No matter what our position may be, we both have responsibilities
- No one is off the hook for continuing in Godly action and attitude
- In fact, we must

- I think we see how this is possible in Romans 14:14-23...

Romans 14:14-15

14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.
 15 But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.

- We can be lacking charity
- And if we are, love can be absent in our actions and attitudes

- If we are prepared to elevate our liberties above our responsibilities to our brothers and sisters in Christ, we may be a lot of things, but we are not loving
- Did you notice what it said? "if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably"
- If we do something (in this case eat meat) in front of a brother or sister, causing them grief, we are not walking in Christian love toward them
- We can even be right (the facts can be on our side) and be unloving at the same time
- Remember, if a man is convinced something is unclean, to him it is unclean
- We can be lacking love in not seeing this
- Maybe another passage will help...

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.
 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.
 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

- Our motivation in these sensitive areas should be love, and can be love
- But not when we elevate our liberties
- We can also be destructive, when we elevate our liberties
- Real harm can be caused
- We may think something is "no big deal"
- And it might not be, but that doesn't mean it can't cause harm
- We can make the most accurate and articulate argument in the world that our liberty must be elevated in any given situation
- And we may be technically right
- But we can still be destructive
- And holding on can hurt others
- We should see the value in the one "for whom Christ died"
- And therefore love and avoid harming them
- Our focus can be adjusted
- We must see those both within the church and those without the church as someone "for whom Christ died"
- That is a change of focus for the person who is tempted to have it their own way
- It's tough to willfully offend someone, when we are seeing them with heavenly vision, taking eternity and the glory of God into account

Romans 14:16

16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of:

- Don't give an opportunity for your good to be evil spoken of

- It's possible for criticism can be justified
- Want to have a barbecue for the glory of God?
- Take into account the truth you observe in this passage
- Because if you don't, a true accusation could be brought against you
- It's not a problem for a Christian to be accused, providing the accusation is not true
- This person, who elevates his liberty above his responsibilities, could be doing two things: 1) offending a brother and 2) damaging his own testimony
- Another passage comes in the broader context of obedience to authorities, but can be applied by way of encouraging us to place constraints on our liberty...

1 Peter 2:16

13 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;
 14 Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.
 15 For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:
 16 As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.
 17 Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

- Our liberty should be constrained for the sake of others
- Back in our text...

Romans 14:17-18

17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.
 18 For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

- Our priorities should be properly set
- Meat seems rather a small thing in light of the kingdom
- Make no mistake, convictions are not insignificant, they are just secondary to that which is absolutely certain in the Christian life
- Don't become a "no big deal" Christian, but keep your priorities straight
- I mean, don't get the idea "everything" is a secondary issue, just keep the primary issues forever in view
- Three key words are highlighted here
- Righteousness comes as a result of a faith-based relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ
- It is imputed to us and we have righteous standing because of Christ's finished work on the cross, not by avoiding bad and doing good
- This same word for righteousness is found elsewhere...

1 Peter 2:24

24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

- Peace also comes from Christ
- He took our penalty for sin and allowed us to transition from a place of enmity toward God, to a position of peace
- This idea, and this word for peace appears in Ephesians...

Ephesians 2:14-16

14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

- Joy is also in Christ
- See the next chapter of Romans...

Romans 15:12-13

12 And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.

13 Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

- Righteousness, peace, and joy are all experienced and exhibited in right relationships with our brothers and sisters
- But they originate in Christ
- This means our service can be authentic
- I pointed us back to our position in Christ, because that is exactly where verse 18 takes us. ("For he that in these things serveth Christ...")
- If we are serving Christ in these things, authentically serving Him, we will be well-pleasing to God and approved of men
- There is no point in time when serving your self or your own interests becomes acceptable in these issues
- These are personal convictions, but they are not about us
- We must not do anything, because we simply want to do that thing
- All must be about Christ

Romans 14:19

19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

- Choices can be made that seek peace
- All of this is about personal choices
- One of the definitions of this term "follow after" is "to run swiftly after a person or thing"
- In this case we are running after peace and edification
- This pursuit leads us away from selfishness and conflict
- And so we should ask, in grey areas
- Are we running after peace and edification?
- Or are we self-focused

Romans 14:20

20 For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.

- Causing offence is a problem
- The permissible can be wrong
- The man who holds to freedom, disregarding a brother who is "fully persuaded in his own mind" is doing evil
- This understanding makes it imperative for us to think deeply about issues of personal conviction
- We cannot be flippant Christians, concerned exclusively with "what we can get away with"
- Let's look back at our outline and realize the potential for lacking love and being destructive
- And when we do so, see the value in a brother or sister "for whom Christ died"

Romans 14:21

21 It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

- We can be a person who forsakes freedom
- Giving up can be good
- Biblical usage of the word for good in this context can mean excellent, eminent, choice, useful, and admirable
- We ought to desire good
- And we see what is "good" here
- To neither eat flesh
- Nor drink wine
- Nor any thing
- Whereby our brother stumbles, or is offended, or is made weak
- It would be good for us to remember this...

James 4:17

17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

- Again in our text...

Romans 14:22-23

22 Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.

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

- We can experience doubt
 - Believers can be uncertain
 - If we feel confident before God that a certain action or inaction is permissible, fine, we must hold to that standard in our own conscience before God (verse 22)
 - If we have doubt and struggle over an action, an activity, a habit, a question of culture, a "hot topic" of the day...we must refrain
 - Christians come to different conclusions on certain matters
 - We must do all things according to faith
 - If we have a conviction that one thing or the other is wrong - it is wrong for us
- Recall these two verses from elsewhere in the New Testament...

1 Corinthians 6:12 & 10:23

12 All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

23 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.

- Not sure about something?
- Look to the scripture
- There may be a myriad of principles that can inform our decision
- But we have to be diligent to look
- And that means study