

Romans 14:1 – 12

INTRO - Some Christians are uncomfortable with diversity. They adopt the motto: Believe as I believe, no more and no less. I am right and no one else. Everyone should feel as I feel. Think as I think. Eat what I eat. Drink what I drink and look as I look. Do as I always do, then and only then will I fellowship with you.

DIVERSE CONVICTIONS CAUSE PROBLEMS IN CHURCHES, YET IN HIS CHURCH GOD WANTS UNITY WITH DIVERSITY.

The first problem in the church at Rome was whether or not a Christian should eat meat.

Rom. 14:2, "One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables."

This problem arises out of the background of the early church in which there was a real moral question about eating meat. Because of OT dietary restrictions Jewish Christians had been raised to believe eating pork was always wrong. They had also been taught that they could only eat beef and lamb if it had been slaughtered in a certain way to make it kosher. Therefore many Jewish believers did not eat meat at all.

Some of the Gentile Christians had been raised in pagan societies where animals were sacrificed to idols and then their meat was sold to eat. Some Christians said that if you ate the meat from an animal that had been sacrificed to an idol it was equivalent to believing in and worshipping that idol. Therefore many Gentile Christians did not eat meat.

Then there were Jewish and Gentile Christians who said, "We have been set free from the OT dietary restrictions. It doesn't matter if we eat pork. It doesn't matter how the animal was slaughtered. It doesn't make any difference if the animal was sacrificed to an idol. Meat is meat. Let's eat meat." So they ate meat: pork, beef, and lamb and they didn't care if it was kosher or not. Nor did they care if it had been sacrificed to an idol.

The second problem in the church at Rome was whether or not a Christian should observe the Sabbath and other Holy days.

Rom. 14:5a, "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike."

The Jewish Christians had been raised all their lives to set aside the Sabbath and other Holy days for the sole purpose of worshipping the Lord. They were not supposed to work or play on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a day to rest and worship the Lord.

The Christian Gentiles argued that every day is equally devoted to worship and service of God and that there was nothing special about the Sabbath and Holy days. Therefore the Christian Gentiles played and worked on the Sabbath.

How are we to apply this to ourselves? After all, meat eating has not been an issue in the church during my lifetime. However several gray areas have been an issue in the church during my lifetime and probably yours.

THEATER - Some Christians think they should never go to a movie theater. Other Christians think its ok to go to the movie theater, if they are selective in the movies they go to see.

COSMETICS/JEWELRY - This is not the issue it used to be, but it is controversial in certain parts of the world. In parts of Europe women with pierced ears are never allowed to take part in communion. (Lifestyle Evangelism - P. 40) ALCOHOL - Some Christians believe that a Christian should totally abstain from the use of alcoholic beverages. Other Christians believe it is ok to drink alcoholic beverages in moderation. TABACCO - For years, the Mason Dixon Line was the dividing line for what Christians thought about the smoking and chewing tobacco. South of the Mason Dixon Line Christians thought it was ok to smoke and chew tobacco. North of the Mason Dixon Line Christians thought it was wrong to smoke and chew tobacco.

J. Vernon McGee said that his wife grew up in as the pastor's daughter in a Southern Baptist Church in Texas. Her father the pastor and the officers of her church smoked. But when she moved to California she found out that if you were a Christian, you did not smoke. Is it Ok for Christians to smoke or chew tobacco.

CARD PLAYING/PLAYING THE LOTTERY/BINGO - Because of their association with gambling, some Christians think it is wrong to use face cards, play the lottery or play bingo. DANCING - Because of its association with alcohol and sexual suggestiveness some Christians believe that dancing is wrong. Is it Ok for a Christian to dance? Does that mean Christians shouldn't participate in Ball Room? Ballet? Line dancing? Square dancing? Tap? Belly? FASHION - Trendiness is viewed by some Christians as worldliness. Judgments are sometimes made on the basis of clothing and hair style. Is it ok for Christians to wear bright clothes or should we all dress like the Amish? Is it ok for Christian men to have long hair? Should women wear slacks? Especially to church.

BIBLE TRANSLATION USED - In some Christian circles the Bible translation you use can be a quick ticket for acceptance or rejection. Is it ok to use a Bible other than the King James?

MUSIC – What is appropriate Christian music? Is Christian rap ok? Is Christian rock ok? Joe Aldrich said that when he spoke at a conference in Switzerland, the local Christian community was upset when the American Christians brought Coca Cola to the Conference. (Lifestyle Evangelism - P. 42) As I said, Jay Vernon McGee's wife grew up in a pastor's home in Texas. She was taught that it was wrong for boys and girls to swim together. And when she went to California she was shocked the first time first time she went down to the beach with the young

people of her church and the boys and girls swam together in the Ocean.

Warren Wiersbe said, “Some of us can remember when dedicated Christians opposed Christian radio “because Satan was the prince of the power of the air!”

BIRTH CONTROL - Is it ok for a Christian to practice birth control? - Every Protestant denomination opposed it until the 1930’s –

HOME SCHOOLING - Is it ok for a Christian to send their children to a private Christian School or Public School. These are just a few of the issues on which Christians have been divided or continue to have different opinions about.

Let us be very clear that there are areas that Scripture speaks about that are not debatable at all. It is always sinful to be drunk. It is always sinful to commit sexual immorality, murder, steal, slander, bear false witness, covet, and hate. It is always sinful to be envious, jealous, unforgiving and proud. It is always sinful to worship idols and be greedy. These things are clearly wrong and sinful.

In these areas Christians are commanded to rebuke, exhort and reprove one another, and even discipline one another according to patterns set out in the Scriptures. Judging each other in these areas is not wrong. The Word of God has judged these things and it says that they are wrong and sinful.

However, none of these other issues we talked about are listed as forbidden or sinful in Scripture (although the Scriptures give guidelines in relation to each item). In these areas God leaves it up to the individual to determine what he or she does.

Diversity in understanding God’s will for our lives has existed in the past, exists today and will continue to exist in the church until Christ returns. The Apostle Paul makes no effort to eliminate the diversity. Instead he gives instruction how to live with diversity in love, for Christ’s sake.

HOW ARE WE TO LIVE OUT THE CONVICTIONS THE LORD PLACES IN OUR HEARTS AND MINDS?

Rom. 14:5b, 6, “Each should be fully convinced in his own mind.”

I. I. WE SHOULD BE FULLY CONVINCED IN OUR OWN MIND THAT OUR CONVICTIONS ARE APPROVED BY GOD.

We shouldn’t base our beliefs on tradition, the convictions of our parents or the convictions of the pastor. We should individually seek God’s will for ourselves by praying for God’s wisdom and studying God’s Word until we are fully persuaded in our own minds that our conviction is based on God’s Word and a genuine desire to trust, obey and bring honor and glory to the Lord

with our lives.

It's possible our convictions and choices will be different from our parents, the pastors, or other Christians, but we must be confident in what we choose. We shouldn't waver back and forth in our convictions. If we don't come to a settled conviction about what God wants us to do, we may succumb to the convictions of those around us and be in danger of acting against our conscience.

Rom. 14:5b, 6, "Each should be fully convinced in his own mind."

APPLICATION - Do you have convictions in these gray areas of the Christian life? How did you obtain your convictions? Did you pray for God's wisdom and study God's word until you were fully persuaded in your own mind that your convictions will cause you to obey God and bring honor and glory to Him with your life? Or do you waver back and forth on whether something is right or wrong for you?

II. WE SHOULD BE WILLING TO ACCEPT THE FACT THAT THE CONVICTIONS OF THOSE WHO DIFFER FROM US ARE/OR MAY ALSO BE APPROVED OF BY GOD

Rom. 14:6, "He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God."

Paul is saying that the Christians who disagree with us are not trying to be disagreeable or sinful. They are acting on the basis of what they believe is right and pure, so we must give them the benefit of the doubt. We must believe that they are as intent on pleasing, obeying and honoring God as we are.

Paul says, that those Christians who think Sunday, and Holy days are special days and ought to be kept different from every other day are doing so because they believe that is what honors and glorifies the Lord. We must respect their convictions.

Those Christians who abstain from meat does so because they believe that is what honors and glorifies the Lord. We must respect their convictions.

Those Christians who eat meat and treat Sundays and Holy days like other days do so because they believe that is what honors and glorifies the Lord. We must respect their convictions. Paul says,

Rom. 14:3, "The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him."

Paul's point here is: people with opposing viewpoints on non-essentials can both be perfectly right with God. God sees both of these men and both of these viewpoints as honoring him

ILLUSTRATION - Two of the most famous Christians in England during the 1800's were Charles Spurgeon and Joseph Parker, both mighty preachers of the gospel. Early in their ministries they fellowshiped and even exchanged pulpits. Then they had a disagreement, and the reports got into the newspapers. Spurgeon accused Parker of being unspiritual because he attended the theater.

However, Spurgeon smoked cigars, a practice which many believers in his day considered to be unspiritual. In fact, on one occasion someone asked Spurgeon about his cigars, and he said he did not smoke to excess. When asked what he meant by excess, he answered, "I never smoke more than two at a time."

Who was pleasing to God? Which one of these men obeyed, honored and glorified God? Parker or Spurgeon? Perhaps neither, perhaps both. Better yet it's possible that the two men could disagree on the theater and smoking and both be in the will of God

HOW WE ARE TO TREAT OTHERS WHO HOLD A DIFFERENT VIEW THAN US.

Rom. 14:1, "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters."

Paul considers the "narrow party - those who say it is wrong to do what is not forbidden in the scripture" (going to the theater, total abstinence from alcohol, card playing, dancing, etc.) as being weak in the faith. He considers the "liberal party - those who say it is ok to do what is not forbidden in the scripture" (go to the theater, drink alcohol in moderation, play cards, dance etc.) as being strong in the faith.

To the liberal party, Paul says accept the person in the narrow party. Do not reject them. Do not ignore them. Do not treat them as a second class citizen. Accept them because they are your brothers and sisters in Christ. Accept them without attempting to argue with them and straighten them out on the points you disagree with them.

Rom. 14:3, "The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him."

The word translated "look down" means "push him out." The strong or liberal Christian must not push the narrow or weak Christian out of the Christian fellowship. The strong Christian must not exclude the weak Christian from their social contacts. The strong liberal Christian must not ridicule and laugh at the weak narrow Christian. The strong liberal Christian must not feel superior to Christians who are weak and narrow.

On the other hand, the “weak and narrow Christian must not condemn the strong liberal Christian.” The word “Condemn” means “to sit in judgment”. So the weak narrow Christians are not to judge the strong liberal Christians as being sinful.

The weak should not criticize the strong or go up to them and say, “I do not see how you can be a Christian and do that. These issues have nothing to do with being a Christian. A person does not become a Christian by doing or not doing certain things. They become a Christian by placing their faith in Jesus Christ.

The weak should not classify the strong as carnal Christians or rebuke them for their sinful behavior. The Bible does not decisively call these behaviors sin.

WHY WE ARE TO ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER WITHOUT JUDGEMENT

1. I. WE ARE NOT EACH OTHER’S SERVANTS. WE ARE THE LORD’S SERVANTS.

Rom. 14:4, “Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”

The reason the strong Christian is not to look down on, exclude, reject and change the mind of the weak Christian is because the weak Christian is not their servant. The reason the weak Christian is not to criticize and judge the strong Christian is because the strong Christian is not their servant. The weak Christian and the strong Christian are not responsible for each other’s conduct in areas where the Bible doesn’t speak directly. The weak Christian and the strong Christian are both the Lord’s servants. The Lord chose each of us, therefore it is the Lord’s responsibility to evaluate us and to change us.

2. CHRIST ALONE HAS WON THE RIGHT TO JUDGE AND WE MUST ALL GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF OURSELVES TO GOD.

Rom. 14:7-12, “For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written: As surely as I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God. So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.”

We belong to the Lord. We are brothers and sisters. We are not servants of each other. We are servants of the Lord and he alone has the right to judge us. So Paul says, “Stop trying to take the Lord’s place. Stop trying to be Christ to the rest of the church or playing God to each other. You, the Weak Christian, why do you judge your brother? And you, the strong Christian, why do you look down on your brother? It is wrong. You are trying to take Christ’s place when you do that.

But remember that all of us, men and women alike, all brothers and sisters together, must individually stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

I Cor. 4:4, 5, "My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me, therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God."

- 1. DIVERSE CONVICTIONS CAUSE PROBLEMS IN CHURCHES (V. 2, 5a)
WE SHOULD BE FULLY CONVINCED IN OUR OWN MIND THAT OUR CONVICTIONS ARE APPROVED BY GOD. (v. 5b, 6)**
- 2. WE SHOULD BE WILLING TO ACCEPT THE FACT THAT THE CONVICTIONS OF THOSE WHO DIFFER FROM US ARE/OR MAY ALSO BE APPROVED OF BY GOD (v. 3, 6)**
- 3. IF WE ARE STRONG WE SHOULD NOT LOOK DOWN UPON, EXCLUDE AND RIDICULE THE WEAK**
- 4. IF WE ARE WEAK WE SHOULD NOT JUDGE THE STRONG AS BEING SINFUL (v. 3)**
- 5. WE ARE NOT EACH OTHER'S SERVANTS. WE ARE THE LORD'S SERVANTS. (v. 4)**
- 6. CHRIST ALONE HAS WON THE RIGHT TO JUDGE AND WE MUST ALL GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF OURSELVES TO GOD. (V. 7-12)**