

ROMANS

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Romans chapter 14 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

Keep in mind that Paul is in his fifth and last main division of his letter to the Romans, a section dealing with application which began in chapter 12 and continues on through chapter 15, verse 13.

And, as you can imagine, it is a very challenging section for us. But the key to living this way, the key to applying these things to your life is very simple really.

You see, you can't apply the things of God to your life until you first surrender your life to Him! That is exactly what Paul said in Romans 12:1-2 as he opened up this section. He wrote, **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”**

Once you have placed your life as an offering unto God, consecrating your life to Him, then you will be able to use the spiritual gifts that God has given to you for the edification of the body of Christ instead of being self-seeking.

In other words, you will love the brethren. You will overcome evil by doing good and not succumb to the draw that evil has and be overcome by it. You will submit to the government who is in authority over you. “Are you kidding me?” No, as we saw last time, we are to submit to the government, to those who are in authority over us! Not an easy thing to do, but it is what the Lord has called us to do. And the only way we can negate what they say is that if they tell you to do something that is wrong, like, for women, they force you to have an abortion. You don’t have to obey that because it goes against what God has said. But you do have to pay taxes, sorry! Also, you will love those who are outside of the body of Christ, unbelievers. You will walk with the armor of God, His light flowing from your life because the days are drawing to an end, the Lord’s return is getting closer!

Now here in Romans chapter 14 Paul is going to speak on the liberty we have in Christ and how we are to use that liberty.

You see, in the early church many of the Jewish believers were compelled to follow the Mosaic Law with all its dietary restrictions and-so-on. It was hard not to practice that which you had been taught since you were a child.

There were also Gentiles who were not bound to the Law but couldn’t bring themselves to eat meat that was offered to idols and sold in the marketplace.

On the other end of the spectrum were those Jews and Gentiles who saw the freedom they had in Christ and were not shackled to the traditions or superstitions.

And these are some challenging words by Paul but again, it all has to do with surrender, and our surrender is to the Lord and His Word to us!

Listen to what J. Vernon McGee had to say regarding this chapter. He wrote,

In this section Paul puts down principles of conduct for Christians relative to questionable matters. He gives us three guidelines: conviction, conscience, and consideration.

A Christian should have a conviction about what he does. **Conviction** means “that which anticipates.” Does he look forward to what he is going to do in high anticipation and enthusiasm?

The second guideline is **Conscience**. Does he look back on what he has done, wondering if he were right or wrong? Or does he even hate himself for what he has done?

The third guideline is **Consideration** for others. Are other people adversely affected by what he does? These three guidelines give us principles of conduct for our Christian lives.

In our day there are actually two extreme viewpoints about this matter of Christian conduct in questionable matters. And it has created an artificial atmosphere in which one is to live the Christian life. As a result, we have abnormal or subnormal Christians in these extreme areas.

One extreme position has no wall of separation from the world; the lives of these folk are carbon copies of the unsaved man of the world. Their lives are no different from what they were before their so-called conversion. They indulge in all forms of worldly amusement. They go everywhere the world goes, and they spend their time and energy in activities that have no spiritual profit.

There are certain passages of Scripture that have no meaning for them at all. For example: “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)” (Phil. 3:17–19).

There are other folk who do not indulge in any form of worldly amusement, yet they are as worldly as they can possibly be. They gorge and gormandize themselves. They don't get drunk, but they certainly overeat. Also they overtalk - they are great gossips. They even tell questionable stories.

Again let me quote Paul: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

My friend, your thought life is bound to affect your conduct sooner or later. What you keep thinking about you will eventually do. I have found that a great many Christians think about a temptation for a long time before they actually submit to it. This sort of thing is done by a great many so-called Christians. Paul seemed to question whether or not they were Christians because they lived exactly as the worldling lived.

Now there is a second group that is extreme in the opposite direction. They have reduced the Christian life to a series of negatives. Paul warned the Colossian believers against the group that was characterized by "Touch not; taste not; handle not" (Col. 2:21). These folk rejoice in salvation by grace and deliverance from the Mosaic Law, but they immediately make a new set of ten commandments - only they usually double that number. They become very self-centered, very critical, and very proud. These are the ones that Paul labels "weak in the faith" (v. 1), by the way. And they are the folk who have become very "separated."

The following letter which I received several years ago illustrates the sad state of one who adopts this position.

I've returned to California after a year of full-time Christian service in Ohio and an extended trip east. But I've come back almost spiritually shipwrecked! Have been a Christian for three and one-half years and until recently was able to give a glowing testimony about being saved out of Unity.

But lately, I've been so dead that Christ seems way up there, and I'm way down here. I have all the negative virtues of a Christian (don't smoke, drink, play cards, attend movies, use makeup), but those things do not make a happy Christian! My friends tell me I'm becoming bitter-and oh, I don't want that to happen!

Before becoming a Christian, I was very ambitious, worked hard for whatever I believed in (and incidentally I was listed in Who's Who) - but now I wonder what's the use? The world is going from bad to worse. Everything is heading for disaster, and the only hope is to wait for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, my friend, this person was in a terrible condition! Notice how "separated" she was, but this kind of separation will not bring joy in the life.

Somewhere between these two extreme viewpoints of questionable matters in Christian conduct the believer is to walk.

- J. Vernon McGee, Thru the Bible, Vol. IV, pp. 739-740

As you read through the Scriptures you will see that disunity has always been a major problem with God's people, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament!

Think about what we see just in the New Testament, the divisions that were going on!

We see that in Paul's letter to the Corinthians that they were divided over human leaders and it got so bad that some of the members were even suing each other. Can you imagine that going on in a church, but it was! (I Corinthians 1:10-13, 6:1-8)

In Paul's letter to the Galatians we see that Paul said this about them, "**But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!**" Galatians 5:15. Again, this was going on in the early church. Praise God we don't have that problem today. Just a little sarcasm there.

And the believers in Ephesus and Colossae were no different, they too had to be reminded of Christian unity! (Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 2:1-2)

And remember the problem in Philippi. There were two women who were at odds with each other and the end result of this conflict is that they were splitting the church. Do you see how that is self-focused, only interested in themselves no matter the cost? How sad! (Philippians 4:1-3)

Remember what the Psalmist wrote in Psalm 133:1, "**Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity!**"

It is wonderful to dwell together in unity and that unity has to be based in Christ, in truth and not apart from it.

Today we see the church wanting to join in unity no matter what the teaching is and that is wrong, and it is very dangerous. There is no unity apart from truth, apart from Christ.

Make no mistake about it though, the Devil loves to divide the church. That is why Jesus prayed to the Father for believers, **I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.**

John 17:20-21.

So that is going to be the focus of our study tonight, walking in Christ with people from various backgrounds and ideas in Christ and still be in unity!

Again, that is something we truly don't see but it is something that the Lord prayed for as I have said.

So with that as our background, let's begin reading in Romans chapter 14, starting in verse 1, and see what the Lord has for us this evening as we study through His Word.

ROMANS 14

VERSES 1-2

As we can see, Paul is speaking of those Christians who were weak in the faith and those who were strong in the faith.

And there are a few reasons why someone is weak in the faith. They could be new Christians. They may lack the teaching by which they would grow and mature.

But I believe the idea here is legalism, and the example Paul uses is that of eating meat. Some Jewish believers might reject meat because it was not kosher. Some Gentile believers may not eat meat because it was offered to idols before it was sold in the marketplace.

And when you think about being weak in the faith and strong in the faith, many have used legalism to show people how strong in the faith they are. But that is not what Paul is saying here.

But how true it is, those that are weak in the faith, bound by legalism, always see themselves as more mature, stronger in the faith than those who walk in the liberty of Christ. We have seen that. But the reality is, the exact opposite is true.

Make no mistake about it. The issues of legalism back in Paul's day may have changed in our day some, not much though, but it is still legalism!

Paul's point is simple, "*Who really cares what you eat!*" You see, these are not foundational issues folks, not issues to cause division by. If God has placed upon your heart to be a vegetarian, praise the Lord for that! For me, put a steak with that fat around the edges on the old barbecue and I must agree with the Lord, it is sweet smelling and good tasting!

And when you think about this legalism that Paul is dealing with in this letter and several of his letters, that was almost 2,000 years ago! And what the Jews struggled with back then, should be done away with, but it is not. Now Gentiles are trying to follow these laws and they are bound in legalism Paul is saying, and they are weak in the faith.

Now please hear me out on this. If it is a matter of eating meat or not, I don't really care. But if you make it into a law, then I do care.

You see, we need to, and we must stand up for foundational issues, don't get me wrong. What is interesting to me is the non-foundational issues that are fought over. We argue and fight over music, what day of the week do we worship the Lord, what we eat, how we dress, the length of our hair, and-so-on.

These are not foundational issues and I don't think they bring honor to God when we fight over them. The Lord may convict you on a certain issue but don't make that conviction into a law for everyone to follow or they are compromising their faith!

And why do we want to be weak in the faith? Why don't we walk in the liberty that God has given to us? Again, I can see the struggles for these Jewish Christians some 2,000 years ago, but today, in 2018, why? It makes no sense.

If you think by doing these things that God is going to love you more, you are wrong.

And I love what Jesus said in Mark chapter 7, **“There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!”** **When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable. So He said to them, ‘Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?’** **And He said, ‘What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.’”**

Mark 7:15-23.

In other words, it is not the food that you eat that makes you unclean, but it is the words that come out of your mouth! Very interesting.

And in Acts chapter 10, as Peter is on the housetop praying, we are told, **“Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ But Peter said, ‘Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.’ And a voice spoke to him again the second time, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’”** Acts 10:10-15.

The Lord is not only speaking of what type of food to eat, but He is talking about that. But He is also speaking of Gentiles and how the Gospel is going to go to them as well, not just to the Jews. You see, in the Jewish mind the Gentile was just as unclean as these animals that Peter refused to eat. But God said that they are not unclean, and you may not only partake of these animals, but you may also go to the Gentiles and witness to them!

Isn't it interesting that we can become so spiritual that we even say ***“No!”*** even to the Lord! That is amazing, and it is not a good thing. As the Lord said, **“What God has cleansed you must not call common.”**

Pretty simple and yet, many miss this point completely thinking they are more spiritual by not eating this or not eating that. Paul's point is that you are not spiritual, you are weak in the faith!

VERSES 3-4

This first issue, special diets was dividing the church in Rome. My feeling is, if you don't want to eat certain foods, then don't. I like what Paul said in I Timothy 4:1-5, "**Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.**"

Again, back in Ephesus there was this problem of people abstaining from certain foods and Paul says that is crazy. God created them for us to eat, and thus, we should do so with thanksgiving and if you are that concerned, pray over your meal and enjoy it!

But there are those who are weak in the faith and can't let go of these things and thus, try to help them and love them.

I guess we can put it like this. Instead of having "The First Church of the Carnivores" and "The United Assembly of Vegetarians" be united in the Lord and see what awesome work He will do through people who love Him and love each other!

And please understand that we are talking about eating meat and next we will be talking about what day to worship the Lord on, not foundational doctrines.

As we have seen in Romans, the whole book of Galatians and Hebrews deal with this issue of legalism to bring you to God. And it comes against it. That is false doctrine and it does need to be dealt with.

It is so bad that Paul said, **“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”** Galatians 1:6-9.

And here’s the thing. There is a diversity in the body of Christ, and yes, some are weak in the faith and some are strong in the faith. But diversity should not cause division, but it should enhance the body of Christ. Again, I am not talking about foundational issues here, those need to be dealt with and removed from the church or it will destroy a church!

And if you have been a Christian for twenty years and you still struggle with these things, wow. Paul wants you to grow up. But there is diversity within the body of Christ and that is a good thing. Let me show you some diversity and, as you will see, they are not that big of a deal, but it was made into a big deal. Leslie Flynn, in his book *Great Church Fights*, tells us,

Wide disagreements exist today in our churches over certain practices. A Christian from the South may be repelled by a swimming party for both men and women, then offend his Northern brother by lighting up a cigarette. At an international conclave for missionaries, a woman from the Orient could not wear sandals with a clear conscience. A Christian from western Canada thought it worldly for a Christian acquaintance to wear a wedding ring, and a woman from Europe thought it almost immoral for a wife not to wear a ring that signaled her status. A man from Denmark was pained to even watch British Bible school students play football, while the British students shrank from his pipe smoking.

- Leslie Flynn, *Great Church Fights*, p. 46

The point is simple, have fellowship without arguing over non-essentials. Everyone doesn't have to agree with everything you do in the area of non-essentials and vice-a-versa!

VERSES 5-6

Here is another issue, which day of the week do we worship the Lord on? It was a problem back some 2,000 years ago, and, believe it or not, it is still a problem today! Go figure.

You see, some would argue that it is Saturday, the Sabbath and any other day is just compromising your faith. Some even go as far as saying that if you don't worship on Saturday then you are not saved!

Others said that it is on Sunday, the day that Jesus rose from the dead! Folks, I hate to burst anyone's bubble, but who cares?

I have been accused of worshiping God on a pagan day because I do so on Sunday. The rational goes like this. *Sunday* was named after the Sun god and therefore it's wrong to worship on Sunday. It sounds great, but I hate to burst anyone's bubble here, but *Saturday* was named after the god Saturn so now what?

Let me put it like this because I really don't limit the day that I worship the Lord. I worship the Lord every day of the week, not just one day!

The early church had their service on a Sunday as Acts 20:7 tells us, "**Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.**" (See also I Corinthians 16:2). But again, every day is the Lord's, or it should be.

And yet, as people are bound in legalism, judgment does come. But Paul tells us in Colossians 2:16-17, **“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”**

Don't place yourself as a judge condemning people when they worship God, the day of the week, the food they eat, because the substance is Christ and not those things!

And please understand that Paul is not giving us a license to sin as some may argue, but he is telling us that whatever we do unto the Lord, let our conscience be our guide, our conscience that is directed by the Holy Spirit according to the Word of God! It is when we move away from God's Word and the conviction of the Holy Spirit that we get ourselves in trouble!

And if you are not sure, if you are not fully convinced in your own mind, then don't do it because it is a sin to you. Not to everyone else, but to you!

In Romans 14:23 we see this played out for us as Paul says, **“But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.”**

But I think if you are truly open to the Scriptures and growing in the Lord, it is very clear!

VERSES 7-9

The lordship of Christ enters into every aspect of a believer's life. We don't live to ourselves but to the Lord. We don't die to ourselves but to the Lord.

Because of that, we must understand that from beginning to end our life is connected to other lives. Paul reminds the Roman Christians that ***“No man is an island.”***

In other words, we are all part of the body of Christ, we are all connected, and what we do will affect others in the body of Christ either positively or negatively!

The way in which it is possible to affect the body of Christ in a positive, an edifying way is to dedicate ourselves to the Lord, to be sensitive to His leading! And out of that His love will flow.

Paul makes this powerful point of us all being part of the body of Christ in I Corinthians 12:12-17 as he tells us, **“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one**

member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.”

Let us not forget the big picture by being self-centered, self-motivated, and self-seeking!
Let us be others-centered, others-motivated and others-seeking!

VERSES 10-13

First Paul speaks to the legalist Christian who found it easy to come against the Christian who walked in liberty, seeing him as a compromiser of the faith.

Then Paul speaks to the one who walks in liberty showing contempt or despises those who were legalistic in their faith, kind of being uptight holier-than-thou thinking of them!

The conclusion! Forget about it – don’t you have enough to deal with in your own life, with your own walk? You are going to have to answer before God for your own actions!

Again, we are not talking about false doctrine, false teaching here. In essence, these are likes and dislikes. But with false teachers and false teaching we are to judge and expose them for what they are. I hope I am clear on that because the Scriptures are very clear on how to deal with these false teachers and teachings!

And then Paul speaks of the Bema Seat or the judgment seat of Christ that we as Christians will appear before.

To illustrate this point, he speaks of the Isthmian Games, which were like the Olympics except they were held in Corinth. And like the Olympics, the winners would receive a crown for their victory.

Therefore, the ‘Bema’ or the Judgment Seat of Christ is where we will receive our crowns as they did at the bema seat in the Isthmian or Olympic Games! Remember what Paul said, “**... Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.**” I Corinthians 9:25.

Pastor Chuck Smith put it like this, “This is the *bema* seat, equivalent to the judge’s seat in the Olympic Games. After each game, the winners came before the judge’s seat to receive crowns for first, second, and third places. Likewise, the Christian’s works will be tested by fire, and he’ll be rewarded for those which remain. . . . The judgment seat of Christ is only concerned with a Christian’s rewards and position in the kingdom, not with his salvation.”

Paul, in II Corinthians 5:9-10 tells us, “**Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.**”

Then he expounds on the Bema Seat of Christ in I Corinthians 3:12-15 as he tells us, “**Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.**”

You see, God will judge the motives of our hearts, why we did this or that and reward us accordingly. We can lose our rewards by not having the right motives, but we can’t lose our salvation! We are secure in Christ!

And I think Paul is very clear here. There is coming a day when we all will appear before God in humility to give an account of our life, and like I said, for those who are saved, not for judgment but for rewards.

On the other hand, those that are not saved, they too will bow in humility before the Lord and ultimately appear before the Great White Throne judgment where they will receive their eternal punishment for their actions in this life in the Lake of Fire!

And here in Romans 14:13 Paul now summarizes what he has said so far. That we are not to judge our brothers and sisters in the Lord when it comes to non-essentials and we are not to use the liberty we have in Christ to cause them to stumble.

You see, if a brother or sister is sinning, we do need to come to them in the love of Christ and correct them. But in non-essentials, you can state your view but don't go into a filibuster with it!

VERSES 14-15

Think about this for a minute. Is it wrong to eat meat? Of course not! In fact, Paul tells us in I Timothy 4:4-5, "**For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.**" You see, it is not what goes in a man that defiles him but what comes out of his lips from his heart, as I have said.

The point is this. If what you are doing is causing another to stumble, don't do it for love's sake! Can you give it up to help a brother not to stumble? Now we can go crazy with this and thus, just be wise.

And in saying that, we have so much freedom in Christ but let's use that freedom we do have to edify, build up the body of Christ and not to tear it down.

A neat example of what we are to do is given to us from this World War II story.

Back in the early days of that war, German U-boats attacked allied ships traveling from the East Coast to Europe. To rectify this problem, they decided to travel in large convoys. The problem was that the convoys could only go as fast as the slowest boat. So the faster boats slowed down so that they all might be protected.

In other words, don't let the enemy torpedo our brothers and sisters in the Lord because we are running on ahead of them in the freedom we have in Christ! Know who you are traveling with and adjust your speed and surround them with the love of Jesus because folks, we are the body of Christ and not out there on our own!

Yes, you might be freer and faster and stronger than your brothers and sisters in Christ - but keep in mind with whom you are traveling. We're linked together. Don't do something that will cause a slower boat to be exposed to the underwater attacks of the Enemy, to be torpedoed by Satan. Slow it down. We're in this together.

VERSES 16-18

As I have said, we do have freedom in Christ but don't let the freedom you have cause a brother or sister to stumble, or else good will be looked upon as evil!

Paul, in Philippians 2:1-4 tells us, **“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”**

You see, if you are walking in the Spirit the focus of your life will be righteousness, joy, peace, and you will not be focused upon yourself but upon others!

That is the mind of Christ! And as we do then our service is acceptable, it is good before the Lord.

VERSES 19-21

Again, we need to be careful that as we are doing these things we are not succumbing to their legalistic heart. You see, in this chapter Paul is speaking of someone who has a sincere heart, that they may be stumbled by our liberty in Christ. We don't want to encourage someone to remain legalistic, but we also want to be careful we don't cause someone to stumble by our actions.

What Paul is speaking about here is the stumbling of a sincere heart, not catering to the whims of someone's legalism.

How can I be so sure? Look at the Scriptures. When some Christians from a Jewish background were offended that Gentile believers were not circumcised, Paul didn't cater to their legalistic demands. I hope that is clear.

And I do realize that some want a black and white answer to this question, “How do I know how to respond?”

It is not black and white, you need to pray about it and let God speak to your heart in these areas!

The thing is, don't force your convictions upon another, but walk in love. I would never tell someone they have to listen to a certain style of music, that is wrong. We all have different tastes and praise the Lord for that. Walk in love, be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading and you will not destroy the work that God is doing!

And I guess the big question here is, “What is the solution to this problem?” I like the way my pastor put it. He wrote,

Young Christians need the kind of fellowship that will protect them and encourage them to grow. But we cannot treat them like “babies” all their lives! The older Christians must exercise love and patience and be careful not to cause them to stumble. But the younger Christians must “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). As they mature in the faith, they can help other believers to grow.

The weak must learn from the strong, and the strong must love the weak. The result will be peace and maturity to the glory of God.

- Pastor Phil Ballmaier, Romans 14

I think that makes it very clear. Remember, we are dealing with young Christians or weak Christians and we don't want to see them remain that way. We want them to grow in the Lord, move out of the legalism and into a deep relationship with the Lord, enjoying the liberty that they have in the Lord!

VERSES 22-23

Paul is telling us that if God has placed a conviction upon our heart not to do something, and we do it, then it is a sin to us. Say the Lord shows us that we are to get rid of our television. That is what you need to do but don't make it into a law where everyone has to do that. That is wrong!

And it may cause you to think this way. "But what about the guy over there, he is still doing it?" That is not the issue, God may allow them to do that, it may not be a problem for them, but it is one for you and thus, you are ignoring what God has told you.

Far too often we look at what others are doing instead of what God is telling us to do, how we need to deal with a certain situation, our heart issues.

Remember after the death and resurrection of Jesus as He appeared to His disciples on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, we are told in John 21:20-23, "**Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, 'Lord, who is the one who betrays You?' Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, 'But Lord, what about this man?' Jesus said to him, 'If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.' Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, 'If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?'**"

Peter was concerned about John and what was going to happen to him. The Lord said what was going to happen to Peter, "**Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.**"

But Peter, like most of us, was worrying about others and the Lord's response to Peter was great, "**. . . 'If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.'**"

You see, we are to follow Jesus and apply to our lives the things He has told us! May we listen and allow God's Word to penetrate our hearts so that we may grow and allow God to work in the lives of others.

It is as Paul said in Romans 14:8, "**For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.**"

As I bring this study to a close, listen to this true story to sum things up for us. We are told,

In 1928 Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse was speaking at a conference in Montrose, Pennsylvania where about 200 young people were present. One day two women came to him in horror because some girls were not wearing stockings! These women wanted him to rebuke the others. Barnhouse's reply is classic. As he tells it:

Looking them straight in the eye, I said, "The Virgin Mary never wore stockings." They gasped and said, "She didn't?" I answered, "In Mary's time, stockings were unknown. So far as we know, they were first worn by prostitutes in Italy in the 15th century, when the Renaissance began. Later, a lady of the nobility wore stockings at a court ball, greatly to the scandal of many people. Before long, however, everyone in the upper classes was wearing stockings. . ."

These ladies, who were holdovers from the Victorian epoch, had no more to say. I did not rebuke the girls for not wearing stockings. A year or two afterward, most girls in the United States were going without stockings in summer, and nobody thought anything about it. Nor do I believe that this led toward disintegration of moral standards in the United States. Times were changing, and the step away from Victorian legalism was all for the better.

Voluntary limiting of our freedom is not meant to subject us to the prejudices of Christians who are well established in the faith but persistent in sub-Biblical legalism.

In Rome the believers were relatively young in the faith, and their scrupulous consciences had an ostensible Biblical base. We must remember to wisely apply Christian self-restraint and never to unknowingly or knowingly, by our exercise of liberty, cause another Christian to go against his conscience.

- R. Kent Hughes, Romans, pp. 269-270

May we learn to walk in the love of Christ, walk in the liberty that Christ has given to us as we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Let's face it, none of us want to remain spiritual babies in Christ. None of us want to remain immature in the faith. We want to grow in the liberty that God has given to us and thus, "**. . . let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.**" Romans 14:19.