

The Way
Maturity of the Church
Lesson 29: Believers Should Not Pass Judgment on Each Other

We are indebted to [Ethnos360](#) for providing the basis of these lessons

Review (Where We've Been)

Because of all God has done FOR US, what does He expect FROM US?

- To present our bodies as a living sacrifice and renew our minds (Romans 12:1-2)
- To use our spiritual gifts for the good of the church and the glory of God (Romans 12:3-8)
- To behave in ways that mark genuine believers (Romans 12:9-21)
- To live submissively under government authority (Romans 13) ***NEXT WEEK***

We're skipping a chapter because I want to personally address Romans 14 in connection with the way we behave toward others in the church who differ from us in matters of conscience.

BIG Idea

What are issues of conscience? Practical matters of liberty involving issues not clearly permitted/prohibited in Scripture, although there may be principles that guide.

What are some examples of issues of conscience?

- Church organization and practice
- Music listening choices
- Medical choices
- Schooling choices (public, Christian, homeschool)
- Games of chance (raffles, lottery, even risky business investments)
- Military service
- Clothing and tattoos
- Places of employment (regarding the values a workplace upholds)
- Eating and drinking practices
- Entertainment and free time choices
- Political parties, candidates, or voting choices (Scripture is our authority)
- Observance of special days

I would argue that more church unity and Christian relationships are destroyed in the wake of these issues, mostly because there may be no direct language in favor or opposition.

Information (What You Need to Know)

Principles for Handling Issues of Conscience...

▪ **Welcome those with whom you disagree**

Romans 14:1 (NLT) Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong.

✓ Defining the weak and strong

- **Weak conscience in faith** – this person's faith is not strong enough to enjoy freedom in issues of conscience

The tendency of those with weak consciences is to accuse those with strong consciences of abusing **liberty**.

- **Strong conscience in faith** – this person's faith has been strengthened to enjoy freedom in issues of conscience

The tendency is that those with strong consciences accuse those with weak consciences of **legalism**.

✓ Examples of disagreements between the weak and strong

Romans 14:2 (NLT) For instance, one person believes it's all right to eat anything. But another believer with a sensitive conscience will eat only vegetables. **3** Those who feel free to eat anything must not look down on those who don't. And those who don't eat certain foods must not condemn those who do, for God has accepted them. **5** In the same way, some think one day is more holy than another day, while others think every day is alike. You should each be fully convinced that whichever day you choose is acceptable.

Possible explanations of these scenarios...

- Mature Jewish believers viewed themselves as free from obeying the ceremonial points of the law (eating regulations, observance of certain days, etc.), which was offensive to a new or immature Jewish believer.
- The other situation may be related to Gentile believers in the church. Since Gentiles came from a pagan system of beliefs, many had been involved in idol worship and offering meats to false gods as a form of worship. So, when they came to faith they were offended when more mature Gentile believers would eat meat purchased in the market even though it had been previously offered to idols.

▪ **Assume that others are partaking or refraining for the glory of God**

Romans 14:6 (NLT) Those who worship the Lord on a special day do it to honor him. Those who eat any kind of food do so to honor the Lord, since they give thanks to God before eating. And those who refuse to eat certain foods also want to please the Lord and give thanks to God.

Paul is gracious to both sides by assuming they are exercising their freedoms or restrictions for the glory of God. The church wins when everyone extends grace in these differences, instead of assuming the worst of each other.

- **Keep your eye of judgment to yourself**

Romans 14:10 (NLT) So why do you condemn another believer? Why do you look down on another believer? Remember, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

“The *strict* Christian found it easy to **judge** his brother, writing him off as an unspiritual meat-eater-compromiser. The *free* Christian found it easy to **show contempt** against his brother, regarding him as an uptight-legalistic-goody-good. Essentially, Paul’s answer is ‘Stop worrying about your brother. You have enough to answer for before Jesus.’” – David Guzik

Application (What You Need to Do)

- **Enjoy your liberty**

Romans 14:14 (NLT) I know and am convinced on the authority of the Lord Jesus that no food, in and of itself, is wrong to eat...**17** For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

- **Strive for unity**

- ✓ Aim for harmony in the church

Romans 14:19 (NLT) So then, let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up.

- ✓ Don’t destroy the church over issues of conscience

Romans 14:20 (NLT) Don’t tear apart the work of God over what you eat. Remember, all foods are acceptable, but it is wrong to eat something if it makes another person stumble. **21** It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else if it might cause another believer to stumble.

- ✓ Celebrate your liberty in private if it will offend someone

Romans 14:22 (NLT) You may believe there’s nothing wrong with what you are doing, but keep it between yourself and God. Blessed are those who don’t feel guilty for doing something they have decided is right.

- ✓ Listen to your conscience (it may change as you gain more wisdom)

Romans 14:23 (NLT) But if you have doubts about whether or not you should eat something, you are sinning if you go ahead and do it. For you are not following your convictions. If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning.