



## Sermon Text: Romans 14:20-23

Sermon Date: August 21, 2016

As we look back on Romans 14, it is crazy to think that Paul has spent an entire chapter of sacred Scripture giving instructions over . . . food! The fact that the church of Rome was arguing and dividing over something as inconsequential as food causes us to shake our heads in disbelief; that is, until we remember that most of the issues that divide churches today are similarly inconsequential.

On Sunday, Pastor Justin briefly provided three concluding principles that Paul shares in our passage.

1. **Build Up, Don't Tear Down (verses 19-21).** Our goal is to build one another up as we relate to each other in areas of Christian liberty. If our Christian freedoms are causing one another to stumble, we should gladly stop doing them.
2. **Don't Flaunt Your Freedoms (verse 22).** We are to keep our Christian liberties to ourselves. We shouldn't argue about them or try to gain converts to our little club. Most especially, we don't want to create an environment that will cause people who feel differently to violate their conscience.
3. **Live by Faith (verse 23).** If we have doubts, if our conscience convicts us, then we should not do it. We are to do everything in faith, fully convinced in our own minds, for the honor of our King. When we are not living by faith, even if the thing we do isn't in itself sinful, we are sinning when we do it.

While we quickly saw these concluding principles, most of our time was spent examining the multiple layers of instruction Paul gives on this specific issue of food. From this chapter, Pastor Justin pointed out three dimensions of God-honoring obedience.

1. **Dimension #1 – OBJECTIVE: The Action Itself.** This is the inherent nature of the action itself. It is either commanded (always right), forbidden (always wrong), or allowed. Our Christian liberties fall into the “allowed” category. The Weak in Rome got this dimension wrong. They had moved eating meat out of the “allowed” category and placed it into the “forbidden” category. Knowing our Bibles is crucial!

Questions to Ask: Is it commanded? Is it forbidden?

2. **Dimension #2 – SUBJECTIVE: My Feelings about the Action.** This dimension focuses on my individual feelings about the action. It includes my conscience and my motivations. While eating meat wasn't objectively wrong, it was for the Weak because their conscience convicted them. When we think about God-honoring obedience we must remember the subjective dimension, so that we do not violate our conscience or pressure others to violate theirs. Additionally, our motivations matter too. We can do a right thing for the wrong reason and thus sin. Yet, we must remember that our subjective feelings never overrule what God objectively commands or forbids.

Questions to Ask: Do you have a clean conscience? Why are you doing this? Are you acting out of love for one another?

3. **Dimension #3 – EFFECTIVE: The Effect of the Action on Others.** This is the dimension that was tragically overlooked by the Strong. Since eating meat wasn't objectively wrong and subjectively their conscience did not convict them, they saw no reason to stop eating meat. They ignored this third dimension while the Weak were stumbling in their faith. Paul shows us that even if an action isn't objectively wrong, or subjectively wrong for us, we do not do it if it has a negative effect on our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Questions to Ask: Will this action cause someone else to stumble? Will it build one another up? Will it promote peace and joy in the fellowship?

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- 1) **What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?**
- 2) **Do you consider it “good... not to do anything that causes your brother to stumble?” Or are you bitter when you have to give up your preferences for one another? Why is this so hard?**
- 3) **Why is it important to have a rich, multi-dimensional understanding of God-honoring obedience?**