

The Strong and the Weak

Romans 14:1-23



Romans 14:1-23

**PERSONAL CONVICTIONS SHOULD
NOT INHIBIT HARMONY AMONG
CHRISTIANS**



The Issue at Hand

- Paul is speaking to the matter of:
- **Personal Convictions!**
- Individual Christians will often differ over matters of conscience and of liberties.
- The differences of which Paul speaks are not over absolutes or fundamental doctrines of the faith.
- Specifically, Paul mentions the matter of eating meat or only vegetables (v. 2), of observing certain holy days (v. 5), and of drinking wine (v. 21).





The Fruit and the Product

Is it OK for Christians to drink wine?



A vertical strip on the left side of the slide features a silhouette of a person standing on a cliff edge, looking out over a sunset sky. The sky is a gradient of orange and red, with a bright yellow lightning bolt striking the horizon. The person's arms are outstretched, and they appear to be holding onto a ledge or railing.

Getting it straight!

WHO'S WHO? THE STRONG AND THE WEAK

Do you know?

- Many have it reversed!
 - Many think the **strong** Christian was the one who knew he couldn't. He couldn't smoke, drink, dance or go to movies. And she couldn't wear lipstick or make-up. They Go to certain plays.
 - The **strong** Christian is "... someone who lives in mortal terror that someone, somewhere, is enjoying himself."
 - The **weak** Christian was the one who spoke of liberty.
- If this has been your understanding of the 'strong' and the 'weak,' then you had better take a closer look at this chapter and 1 Corinthians 8-11:1



Distinct Characteristics of the Strong and Weak

- (1) They are weak in faith.
- (2) They are correspondingly weak in their personal faith.
- (3) The weak are prone to condemn the actions of the strong.
- (4) The strong are those who are more fully aware of the nature of grace and of the teachings of the word of God.
- (5) The strong are susceptible to the sin of smugness and arrogance.



A Word of Warning

- To each of these groups, the strong and the weak, Paul has a word of warning and instruction.
- The instruction is to stop passing judgment on the convictions of the other, and to welcome them into warm fellowship and acceptance.
- **“Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions” (Romans 14:1).**



Further Instruction:

- (1) Personal convictions are private property.
 - Paul wrote in verse 5: “Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.” Again in verse 22 we are told: “The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God ...”
 - Paul’s point is uncomfortably clear. Mind your own business! If someone purports their conviction we can discuss it, but only graciously and biblically. (Eph 4:25-32)



Further Instruction:

- (1) Personal convictions are private property.
- (2) Our acceptance of men into fellowship should be no more restrictive than God's.
 - The strong were apparently guilty of getting together with the weak only to 'straighten them out.'
 - The effect of the matter was that strong and weak Christians were not associating with one another, or accepting them.
 - “Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him” (Romans 14:3).



Further Instruction:

- (1) Personal convictions are private property.
- (2) Our acceptance of men into fellowship should be no more restrictive than God's.
- (3) A servant is accountable only to his master.
 - Precisely what Paul is trying to get across to us in verse 4: “Who are you to judge the servant of another?”
 - “Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls, and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand.” (Romans 14:4).



Romans 14:10

- “But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God”



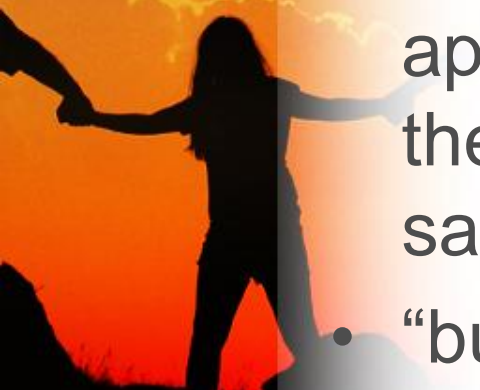
14:13-23

**THE EXERCISE OF PERSONAL
CONVICTIONS SHOULD NOT
INFLECT INJURY TO A
BROTHER**



The Right Verdict:

- We must go beyond this to a positive course of action which seeks to build up the weaker brother in his faith.
- “Therefore let us not judge one another any more, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way” (Romans 14:13).
- It is hard to spot the word play of the apostle in verse 13, but in the Greek text, the words ‘judge’ and ‘determine’ are the same Greek word.
- “but let us come to this verdict”



The Ultimate Issue Is Not One of Right or Wrong.

- The rightness or wrongness of these liberties is determined by our attitude toward them:
- “I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean to him it is unclean” (Romans 14:14).
- Judaism tended to associate holiness or uncleanness with the object rather than with the person.
- It is what he is within that matters (Mark 7:1-15, esp. v. 15)



Problem of Situational Ethics

- (1) Situational ethics is applied to all areas of conduct.
 - No matter how we feel about something that the Bible calls sin, it is still sin.
 - While situational ethics takes the whole spectrum of human conduct and applies relative standards, Paul takes only the segment of things acceptable before God, but questionable in the eyes of some immature Christians.
- (2) Situational ethics works both sides of the street, while Christian ethics doesn't.
 - If you think it's right for you, it's right. They also say, if you think it's wrong, then for you it is wrong.



A Matter of Lower Priority

- If the exercise of Christian liberties is not a matter of absolute right and wrong, neither is it a matter of great emphasis.
- Paul is pressing us in verse 17 to get the matter of our priorities straight: “for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17).
- Righteousness, peace, joy and Christian unity (v. 19; Romans 15:5, 6) are the main issue.
- To some I am no longer “fundamental!”



It's a Matter of Love

- “For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died” (Romans 14:15).
- We are not to be preoccupied with our Christian liberties, but rather with love. Love never causes a brother to stumble, but seeks to strengthen the weak.



Words for the Strong:

- Paul's admonition for the strong is expressed in verses 21 and 22: "It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves" (Romans 14:21, 22).
- The strong Christian should never practice matters of Christian liberty (such as eating meat or drinking wine) and thereby cause another, weaker brother, to follow in his footsteps and fall into sin.
- The strong Christian is obligated not only to abstain from the exercise of his liberties, but also from his efforts to convert the weaker brother to his point of view. If you have convictions, they are personal, so keep them to yourself (v. 22a). And be careful that what you claim as a liberty is just that (v. 22b).



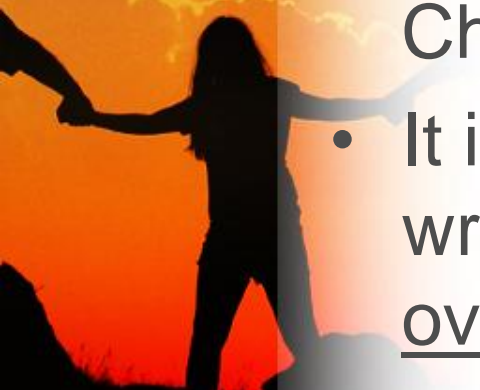
Words for the Weak

- The weak is warned never to act out of doubt, simply because another Christian is doing it.
- “But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).
- To act apart from faith, that is, to act apart from sincere conviction and the confidence that you are doing so acceptably before God, is to act in sin.
- The strong must make sure what they are doing glorifies God!



Points of Clarification:

- The main point of Paul's teaching is that every Christian should be free to hold his own convictions on matters of Christian liberty, but that no Christian is free to exercise these liberties at the expense of his brother's spiritual welfare.
- Paul's teaching is that there is nothing categorically wrong with matters of Christian liberty and freedom.
- It is not wrong to enjoy a good meal, but it is wrong to destroy our physical bodies by over-eating.



Applications:

- (1) There is a desperate need among Christians for solid Bible based convictions.
 - When Paul said in verse 5, “Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind,” he instructed every Christian to have his own personal convictions.
 - These convictions are not feelings (“I feel right about it.”) but convictions rooted in the mind, not in the emotions. “Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.”



Applications:

- (1) There is a desperate need among Christians for solid Bible based convictions.
- (2) We find a guideline for conduct in questionable areas: If it's doubtful, it's dirty.
 - Frequently, young people ask if God will let them do this or that, desiring to walk as closely along the border of sin without exacting its consequences. To doubtful acts Paul cries out, “whatever is not of faith is sin” (verse 23).



Applications:

- (1) There is a desperate need among Christians for solid Bible based convictions.
- (2) We find a guideline for conduct in questionable areas: If it's doubtful, it's dirty.
- (3) We should expect Christians to differ.
 - To put it differently, Christian unity is not uniformity.
 - Paul says that true Christian unity is derived from unanimity on the fundamentals and loving acceptance where non-essentials are concerned.
 - Doctrinal differences that are not over fundamentals of the faith should not divide the Church members.



Applications:

- (1) There is a desperate need among Christians for solid Bible based convictions.
- (2) We find a guideline for conduct in questionable areas: If it's doubtful, it's dirty.
- (3) We should expect Christians to differ.
- (4) The principle of faith should be as readily applied to others as it is to our own lives.
 - What we really doubt when we endeavor to forcibly convert others to our own convictions is God's ability to work in the lives of others.
- **May God give us a measure of His grace in dealing with the Saints.**

