

I. Introduction and review: Matters of conscience. 14:1-15:13

II. Real Christians differ on many issues of conscience. v. 1-2, 5a

A. On which issues may believers disagree without destroying fellowship?

1. Paul is not saying every doctrinal view and moral practice is to be tolerated.
 - a. Denial of the essentials of the faith is intolerable. Gal. 1:6-9 4:9-10 Col. 2:16f
 - b. Shameful acts of immorality are to be disciplined. 13:13 I Co. 5:11 Heb. 13:4
2. Nor is Paul saying these are issues on which one should have no conviction, or that everyone is right and no-one is wrong. 14:5,14 15:1
3. Very few think they are weak, or regard their convictions as matters of liberty.
4. How can we know what is primary and what is secondary?

B. Issues of conscience in the early church.

1. Diet. v. 1a I Co. 8: Gal. 2:11f
 - a. Some weak brothers from Jewish backgrounds may have been especially scrupulous about eating only Kosher foods. Daniel 1:3f Ex. 23:29 Lev. 11
 - b. The strong know we are no longer under Old Covenant dietary restrictions. Mark 7:15-19 Acts 10:15f 15:5 I Ti. 4:1-5
 - c. Some from pagan backgrounds may have worried about eating meat which had been sacrificed to idols. I Co. 8:1f
 - d. The strong know idols are nothing and material objects are not sinful of themselves. 14:14 I Co. 8:4-7 10:19,25
2. Drink. v. 21 John 2:1-10 I Ti. 5:23 I Co. 11:20-22
 - a. Apparently some felt compelled to abstain from wine.
 - b. The strong know we are free to partake of wine in moderation.
3. Days. v. 5
 - a. Many from Jewish backgrounds continued to observe the Old Covenant Sabbaths and Feasts. v. 5a
 - b. The strong know we are no longer obligated to observe such days because they have been fulfilled in Christ. v. 5b Col. 2:16-17

C. Issues about which Christians today have differences of conviction.

1. Diet and health: healthy foods, alternative medicine, cigars? I Co. 6:19-20
2. Drink: May Christians partake of alcoholic beverages? John 2:1-10 I Ti. 5:23
3. Days. Ex. 20:8-11 Col. 2:16-17 I Co. 16:2 Gal. 4:10-11
 - a. Sabbath or Lord's Day? Rev. 1:10 Acts 20:7
 - b. May believers celebrate Christmas and Easter? Must they?
4. Dress: skirts, ties, shorts, swimwear, modesty, jewelry, hair. I Ti. 2:9 I Pe. 3:3 Ps. 29:2 Isa. 3:21 Gen. 24:47 Ex. 21:6
5. Entertainment: movies, plays, TV, music, dancing, cards, gambling. Eph. 5:3-4 Ps. 101:3 Ex. 20:7
6. Family issues: birth control, schooling, infant scheduling, mothers working, dating/courtship, youth programs. Gen. 1:28 2:24 Deut. 6:7f Titus 2:3-5
7. Lifestyle: tithing, luxuries, social issues, politics. I Co. 16:1-2 I Ti. 6:17-19
8. Worship: head coverings, musical styles, Bible translations. I Co. 11:1f

D. Are there doctrinal issues on which believers may differ without breaking fellowship?

E. Paul's calls believers with differing convictions on secondary issues to unite in love

III. Four principles dealing with matters of conscience. v. 1-5

- A. Warmly welcome one another without qualification. v. 1 15:7 Phm. 1:12,17 Acts 18:26**
 - 1. Those you regard as weak are to be fully accepted into fellowship as believers.**
 - 2. This has very important implications for church membership.**
 - a. Paul's objective is not to create a church for the strong and a church for the weak, but to unite them together in one body.**
 - b. We should receive into membership all whom Christ has received.**
 - 3. This has important implications beyond church membership: accept one another!**
 - 4. Don't making correcting the weak brother your primary agenda. v. 1b Phil. 2:14**
- B. The strong should not despise the weak. v. 3a**
 - 1. Those who know their liberty will be tempted to look down upon those who are unnecessarily strict.**
 - 2. If you are strong, it is only by the grace of God. I Th. 5:14**
- C. The weak should not judge the strong. v. 3b Js. 4:12 Mt. 7:1-5**
 - 1. Those who are more scrupulous will be tempted to view themselves as the holy remnant against the libertine majority.**
 - 2. Because these are matters of conviction, it is very hard for the weak to be tolerant.**
- D. Each should be fully convinced in his own conscience how he can best serve God. v. 5b**
 - 1. Paul is not saying these issues don't matter or that we shouldn't bother to think about them.**
 - 2. Take these matters seriously and carefully think them through biblically.**
 - 3. Don't go against your own conscience to please men. 14:23 Pr. 29:25 Ga. 1:10**
 - 4. Don't impose your personal convictions on others. I Co. 8:9-13**
 - 5. What matters is that we all are striving to please the Lord. v. 6-8**

IV. Four reasons to accept one-another. v. 3b-4,6-12

- A. God has accepted your brother. v. 3b 15:7**
- B. Your brother is accountable to God who sustains him. v. 4 I Co. 4:3-5**
 - 1. He is the Lord's servant (as you are). The Lord, not you, is his judge.**
 - 2. The Lord enables him to stand. 8:33-34 Phil. 1:6 Jude 24 Jo. 10:27-28**
- C. Your brother thinks and acts as He does for the Lord's sake. v. 6-9**
 - 1. The weak is scrupulous in what he eats and how he spends his time because he seeks to honor God. v. 6a**
 - 2. The strong exercises his freedom, not selfishly, but as the means by which he can best glorify God. v. 6b,7**
 - 3. Both acknowledge God through thanksgiving. v. 6c 1:21 I Ti. 4:3-5 I Co. 10:31**
 - 4. Christ has established His Lordship over every aspect of our lives. v. 8-9 1:3-4 8:34 I Co. 6:20 10:31 Acts 20:28 2:36 I Pe. 1:18 Phil. 1:21 2:9-11**
- D. You too are accountable to God. v. 10-12 Isa. 45:23 Phil. 2:9-11**
 - 1. So don't be judging your brother.**
 - 2. Your concern should be your own relationship with the Lord. Mt. 12:36-37 25:26**
 - 3. In what sense will we all be judged? II Co. 5:10 Ecc. 12:14 Eph. 6:8 Rev. 20:11f I Co. 3:10-15 9:25-27 II Ti. 4:7-8 Heb. 13:17**

V. Concluding applications.

Discussion questions

- 1. On which issues must there be no compromise or tolerance among Christians?**
- 2. On which kinds of issues should we be patient with those who differ?**
- 3. On which issues of conscience did the church in Rome differ?**
- 4. What are some issues of conscience over which believers today differ?**
- 5. What should the standard of church membership be?**
- 6. How is the strong tempted to sin against the weak?**
- 7. How is the weak brother tempted to sin against the strong?**
- 8. What matters most in matters of conscience?**
- 9. What reasons does Paul give that we should accept one another?**
- 10. In what sense will believers give an account of themselves before God?**