***Christian Consideration  
RO180-01***

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**Drunkenness**

The Bible says that drunkenness is a very grievous sin. It is condemned, and it is something that is forbidden in the Word of God as a moral issue, not only to those who are believers, but to those who are unbelievers.

**The Use of Alcoholic Beverages**

This has raised the serious question about the use of alcoholic beverages by Christians. And we have been pursuing what the Bible has to say on this subject to get a perspective from a biblical point of view, rather than just on pulpit-pounding, legalistic frame of reference. The cause of intoxication, of course, is the alcohol which one consumes in a beverage. The alcohol relaxes the brain so that it makes a person feel good. After consuming, however, a sufficient amount of alcohol, the brain relaxes to the point where the person loses control of mind and body.

How much one drinks determines the extent of the loss of control. One twelve-ounce can of beer is equal to a five-ounce glass of alcoholic wine, and that is equal to one-and-a-half ounces of a shot of whiskey. All of these contain exactly the same amount of alcohol. So, while you may drink a larger volume of liquid in three cans of beer than in three glasses of wine, and a larger volume of liquid in three glasses of wine than in three shots of whiskey, the result is the same in terms of the amount of alcohol which has been ingested. The effect of each on the body is the same, and can equally cause intoxication.

What happens is that alcohol goes into the stomach when you drink it, and then into the bloodstream. And then it is carried to the brain. There, in the brain, the control centers are directly affected by the alcohol. The muscles and nerves to the eyes become blurred, and the vision is affected seriously. The muscles of the arms and hands and legs begin to lose control responses at a certain point. And at a certain level of alcohol in the body, the person becomes staggering drunk.

Now, the effect of alcohol in a person depends on what is called "the blood alcohol concentration level." This is referred to as the BAC. The BAC is the measure of the amount of alcohol which is in the person's blood; his brain; his heart; and, his other organs. It is measured in terms of the grams of alcohol in one tenth liter of blood. The BAC is what the police measure when a driver stopped and suspected of drunk driving. Almost all states consider a BAC of 0.1% to be a state of serious intoxication, at which judgment is seriously impaired. Such a driver is dangerous, and he is six times more likely, statistics demonstrate, to have an accident when he has a 0.1% alcohol level in the blood.

As he continues to drink, and he rises to the point 0.2% level, this person now becomes seriously impaired in his judgment, as well as his muscular control. He cannot make complex driving moves safely, as those of you who attended the men's meeting last Friday saw. If you weigh 160 pounds, and you take eight normal drinks of one kind or another in one hour's time, you will be near the 0.2% of alcoholic intake. This is not uncommon. It is very easy for people to take eight drinks within an hour's time. At this BAC level of 0.2%, the part of the brain which controls muscular responses becomes so depressed that the person is indeed staggering drunk. He can't control his muscular movement. At this level, the part of the brain which controls his emotional behavior is seriously affected. Some people, at this point, become sleepy, and they fall asleep. Some people become moody, and they cry in their beer. Some people become belligerent, and they start a fight.

At a BAC level of 0.3%, a person becomes very confused and disoriented. At this point, he may begin vomiting, and he may fall into a deep stupor. At a BAC level of 0.4%, a person may go into unconsciousness, or even a coma. At 0.5% level, the brain control centers are so depressed that a person may be unable to breathe, and in fact may die.

Any individual's reaction to a specific amount of alcohol depends on his body weight, his age, and his other factors. The less weight you have, the more impact the same amount of alcohol will have on you as on another person of greater physical weight. At some point, however, everyone loses mental and physical control. A staggering drunk may be funny to observe, but if you've ever walked through a hospital ward of alcoholics who are going through the screaming memes, you will get a true perspective of what alcoholism really is like. It is not funny.

There are two million auto accidents in the United States a year from drunk drivers. Half of these accidents result in someone being injured, and 23,000 of them result in someone being killed. Alcohol in the body, at the time of an accident, furthermore, is very serious in terms of the injuries that one may sustain in such an accident. It makes the injuries much more serious. A minor head or neck injury can result in major, lasting effects if the person is drunk at the time of the injury, because alcohol causes increased bleeding and swelling in the brain tissue and in the spinal cord. And the result is increasing tissue damage of a permanent nature.

Alcohol, under those conditions, also slows down the flow of blood to the brain, thus reducing the supply of oxygen and the nutrients which a person especially needs under that kind of an injured condition. For this reason, a person who gets injured while in a state of intoxication can be permanently disabled, and even die from shock, whereas he would not have had he not been drunk.

If one is drinking alcohol and in an accident, your chances of being killed are four times as great as for a non-drinker. It is certainly foolish to suggest, as some people do, that since alcohol relaxes the person, that if you are in an accident, you'll take the blows with a relaxed way so that you won't be injured. That's not true.

One out of 20 people become addicted to the drug of alcohol.

So, driving home from a night out to a nice restaurant where you've been enjoying a variety of alcoholic drinks is a dangerous game. If the route that you drive is familiar, and no surprises jump out at you, you can generally make it home safely. But it takes about one hour for the body to rid itself of an alcoholic drink. It takes 20 minutes to absorb the drink on an empty stomach. If you're sitting in a restaurant eating, it'll take 30 minutes to absorb. But nevertheless, the blood alcohol content level concentration rises, and driving home after an evening out like that is very dangerous.

**Self-Control**

In Romans 14, the apostle Paul says that some Christians believe, for a variety of reasons, some of which they didn't understand as we understand today, that it is wrong to drink alcohol. Christians, of course, are not forbidden the use of alcoholic beverages in the Bible. The Christian with scruples against alcohol, however, should be respected, and not encouraged to drink himself. He has good reasons for his caution. God reflects his perfection in the moral standard that He sets forth in Scriptures for members of His spiritually born-again family. And the basic quality required of a Christian, as we showed you last time, was self-control. Self-control means not being drunk from alcohol. The Christian is to be under the control, the Bible says, of the Holy Spirit, who indwells him, and not under the control of the alcoholic spirits he may be drinking.

In 1 Peter 4:3, the apostle Peter says, "For the time passed of our life (speaking to these people as Christians, who are once unbelievers, and who once lived like the pagans) may suffice to have wrought the will of the gentiles, when we walked in the lasciviousness; lusts; excessive of wine; revelings; carousings; and, abominable idolatries." The word "excess of wine" looks like this in the Greek Bible: "oinophlugia." "Oinophlugia" means drunkenness. It comes from two words. It comes from this word "oinos," which means "wine," and from the verb "phluo," which means "to bubble up" or "to overflow." So, what this word is saying is that a Christian should not be a person in whom wine is bubbling up – out of whom wine is overflowing. These Christians here, to whom Peter spoke, in their unsaved, pagan days, bottled up with alcoholic wine, so they were drunk. But Peter says, "No more." The unsaved drunks cannot understand, furthermore," Peter says, "why we Christians no longer want to join them in their drunken debauchery. And because of that, they resent the Christian, and malign him.

1 Peter 4:4: "In which they think it strange that you run not with them to the same profligacy, speaking evil of you." You will find that the unbeliever does not appreciate being in the presence of a Christian who will not participate in his drunken debauchery. The Christians in the city of Corinth, we noticed last week, were rebuked by the apostle Paul for getting drunk on alcoholic wine before coming together to observe the Lord's Supper memorial. Alcoholic wine and drunkenness, Paul points out, are associated with the table of Satan and his demons. Nonalcoholic wine and sobriety are associated with the table of Jesus Christ. And Paul says, "You can't be part of the table of Satan and the table of the Lord."

In the Old Testament, the Nazirite vow and the Nazirite status was imposed by God on certain men who were destined to perform a great spiritual service for Him. And we pointed out that one of the requirements of the Nazirite was that, for all of his life, he never consumed any alcoholic beverages. This was illustrated by a great man like John the Baptist; by Samson; and, by Samuel, all of whom were explicitly placed in the Nazirite category because God says, "I've got great things for you to accomplish. And one of the things that will stand in the way is booze."

**The Use of Alcoholic Beverages by Church Leaders**

Today, we turn our attention to the use of alcoholic beverages by church leaders. I have seen, and been in the presence of, church leaders who use alcoholic beverages, and I am indeed personally deeply offended by the sight of somebody who is a pastor standing in the pulpit on Sunday, and getting glassy eyed at a table; at a bar; at a dinner; or, at a cocktail gathering, on some occasion, at the same time. It is offensive, and the Word of God is very clear against that.

**Pastor-Teachers**

In 1 Timothy 3:2-3, we have outlined for us some of the requirements of those who are to exercise the gifts of pastor-teacher within the local church assembly.

**Temperate**

Verse 2 says, "A bishop (or an elder) then must be blameless; the husband of one wife; temperate." This word "temperate" is the word that we are interested in. In the Greek language, it looks like this. It's the Greek word "nepalios." This word literally means to be free from the influence of intoxicants. Temperate is used here in the sense that you're sober. And it implies, therefore, being vigilant, and being circumspect – not drunk. So, the Bible is very clear. Your pastor should not get crocked and boozed up.

**Sober-Minded**

Secondly, in that same verse 2, it says that: "The pastor-teacher must be sober-minded." The word "sober-minded" looks like this in the Greek Bible: "sophron." "Sophron" connotes a sound mind with good understanding – a prudent judgment. This is a person who is under thoughtful self-control. An intoxicated pastor-teacher can obviously not exercise prudent judgment. He is not sober-minded.

**Not Given to Wine**

Verse 3 reinforces this even more, where it says, "Not given to wine." The word "not given" means "not addicted to" wine. The Greek word is "paroinos." He is not to be tearing at the bottle. And the idea here is that he's not to become an alcoholic. He is not to be "with wine." "Paroinos" means "with wine." 1 Timothy 3:3 says, "Not given to wine." He is not to be addicted to wine. This comes from the preposition "para," which means "with," the word you've learned ("oinos"), the Greek word for "wine." He is not to be "with wine;" that is, he is not to be a person who hangs around the bars. Total abstinence seems to be what is called for here for the pastor-teacher to ensure that he will not violate any of these requirements for his office.

**Timothy**

This was the position also of one of Paul's associates, Timothy. In 1 Timothy 5:23, the apostle Paul is writing to this young man. Timothy had some physical problems. He had some illnesses. And the apostle Paul gives him some advice. In 1 Timothy 5:23. He says, "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake, and your frequent infirmities." Timothy apparently suffered from some kind of a stomach problem and other ailments. Paul advises him to stop drinking only water, and to drink a little wine as well to counter his illness.

I remind you that this is the same Paul that we just saw in 1 Timothy 3:2-3. And you will also find this in Titus 1:7-8. He is warning spiritual leaders against becoming addicted to alcohol – against drinking alcohol. This verse clearly implies that Timothy drank only water, and that he did not drink any type of wine. We must assume that he drank neither fermented nor unfermented wine. Timothy, as a spiritual leader and a missionary, simply did not feel free to use alcohol. It was probably a moral conviction on his part before God. And what Paul is advising him is probably the use of some form of alcoholic wine for medicinal purposes. Occasionally, however, Paul may also be telling Timothy to stop drinking the water, and stick with the unfermented grape juice. Water in the ancient world was notoriously contaminated, and it was not unusual that, if you weren't used to the water in a particular place, you really would get sick. It's like going to Mexico today. If you live there long enough, you'll get used to the particular amoeba, and the parasites, and whatnot, and you won't get sick from the water. But I guarantee you, if you come down from North America (from the United States), and you start drinking Mexican water, you will know that something has happened to you very quickly.

Now Paul may be simply telling Timothy lay off the bad water and use nonalcoholic grape juice. Thereby, he would avoid the bacteria-latent impure water sources. And that in itself would help Timothy get well. Pure grape juice, of course, is nutritional, and it has therapeutic value in itself. The writers of the ancient world, as a matter of fact, refer to special unfermented wines which were given to sick people for therapeutic purposes, to help them to get well. Ancient writers such as Philo refer, interestingly enough, to wine for the sick (nonalcoholic), prepared for them, so that they could get well. So, even grape juice, they recognized, had a medicinal value.

Not Timothy himself, of course, would know exactly what Paul meant specifically – whether he meant the regular use of unfermented wine, or whether Paul is suggesting an occasional medicinal use of fermented wine for his illness. Paul, of course, was not advising Timothy to ignore the convictions of his conscience, and start drinking alcoholic wine as a missionary. The apostle Paul was not the W.C. Fields of the ancient world, advising against ever drinking water instead of booze. So, let's not make any mistake about that. His advice to Timothy was well-taken. His advice could have been fermented or unfermented wine, but it was for the purpose of health reasons.

**Deacons**

In 1 Timothy 3:8, we are also told of another category of church leaders – the deacons. They, too, are to avoid the use of alcoholic wine: "In like manner, must the deacons be grave – not double-tongued, and not given to much wine." The word "given to" looks like this in the Greek Bible: "prosecho." This word means "to devote yourself to something." So, it's connoting being addicted to something. He says, "Deacons should not be addicted to much wine." He's not just saying you shouldn't be drinking a lot of wine. This word means that you should not be grabbed by a lot of wine. You should not be addicted to wine. So, we've got the demand that deacons, who are going to handle our church money, and our offerings, and our finances, and deal with the material properties, should have their minds clear for church business, and church business does not belong in the hands of a drunk.

**Not Given to *Much* Wine**

The word "much" is, of course, not a suggestion to moderation. I have to point that out to you because we have a lot of crazies out there in the Christian community, and they grab this word and they say, "Well, all it's telling deacons is to be moderate in their drinking of wine – not to be given to *much* wine." Yes, that's what the Greek says. The word "much" is there. But what he is talking about is basically no alcohol at all. The way you preserve yourself from ever being hooked is not starting to fool with a drug. If you do not want to become hooked on cocaine, how will you do that? By using it in moderation? You will do it by not using it at all. That's how you will ensure that you will not become addicted.

**Sober-Minded Wives**

So, the safest and most reasonable course of action for a deacon is not to drink alcoholic beverages at all. That way, they will remain sober. Furthermore, deacons are also responsible to see that their wives are not boozing it up. They are to be sober-minded. 1 Timothy 3:11 says, "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanders: sober-minded." This is the same word again. Their wives are not to be alcoholics. Their wives are not to be addicted to wine.

The Scriptures again are not calling upon the wives for merely acting with moderation, but, in effect, not doing what could lead to intoxication in the first place.

**Aged Men**

Then, in Titus 2, the apostle Paul gives advice relative to alcoholic beverages, and this applies to those of you who are older men in the congregation. Titus 2:2 says, "That the aged men be sober-minded." The word "sober-minded" here is this Greek word "nephalios." And I put these words up here so that you understand that I'm not a pulpit-pounding, fundamentalist preacher who just doesn't like booze, and is trying to discourage you from a little fun, and a little enjoyment in life, but that these concepts are inherently locked into the very words of Scripture themselves. This word "nephalios" means "to be temperate," and it connotes that you should not be mixed with alcoholic wine. It says that you older men are not to be mixed with wine – with alcoholic drinks, to the end that you may be sober-minded. This is exactly the same word that is used of the pastor-teacher in 1 Timothy 3:2. He is not to be full of wine. He is not to be under the control mixed with wine.

Of course, the men of the congregation are to follow that example. I think you could probably understand this again, as the point of great wisdom – that it is advising total abstinence from the use of alcohol. It doesn't say that, but that would be the course of wisdom if you want to avoid becoming hooked.

In the case of the older women of the congregation, Titus 2:3 says the same thing to them. The aged women are not to be given to much wine.

Then for Christians in the congregation in general, we may go to 1 Peter 1:13 to get an idea of this category. This is just for all of you in general who are part of a local congregation. There is imposed a responsibility and a burden on you relative to the use of alcoholic beverages. In 1 Timothy 1:13, we read, "Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind. Be sober." This word is "nepho." The word "nepho" means "to be free from the influence of intoxicants." It really is very close to meaning to abstain from wine. The word "nepho" in the Greek language borders right on the very edge of saying, "Do not drink wine at all" – to abstain completely. What the context is calling for reinforces that idea. It's calling upon the mind being capable of acting clearly under the grace of God in terms of the revelation that has come to us through Jesus Christ. A Christian needs a clear mind for the Holy Spirit to be able to use him in the angelic warfare. The context is calling for a mind which is prepared for holy living. And that's what he means by "nepho" – that your mind be free from the control of intoxicants so that the Holy Spirit can lead you in holy living.

In 1 Peter 4:7, we have another exhortation to the members of the congregation in general: "But the end of all things is at hand. Be therefore sober-minded." This is the word "sophroneo." "Sophroneo" means to be of a sound mind. It means not to be of a drunken mind. It means to be able to think straight. Christians are to be enlightened mentally by doctrine, and they're not to be in a stupor of intoxication.

1 Peter 5:8 uses the same word again that we had just now: "nepho". 1 Peter 5:8 says, "Be sober." And there it is again, speaking to the members of the congregation. It means "free from the influence of intoxicant" – abstaining from alcoholic wine: "The Christian who is drunk cannot be vigilant against Satan." And the word "vigilant" means "to be watchful," and "to be alert to what the devil is up to.

In Proverbs 31:4-7, we have a very significant warning to those who bear governmental authority: "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink." And those are the Hebrew words for alcoholic beverages: "Lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the justice of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink to him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that are of heavy heart. Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more. The writer of Proverbs here says, "If you're a government leader, you must have a clear mind, lest you make decisions that will cause injury to other people – the people over whom you govern and bear authority." "But if you have somebody that is about to die; he's perishing; and, he's on the way out, let him drink wine; let him forget his agony; and, let him forget his troubles. Let him die with the least amount of distress, because he doesn't have a mind, at that point, such that he needs anything to be concerned with."

**Wine is a Mocker**

"Mine is a mocker," the Bible says, "and it makes fools of the best of people." Proverbs 20:1 tells us that about wine. And, of course, one of the great classic examples is Noah – that great man of God who created a little bit of alcoholic wine, and made a horrible spectacle of himself. This is inherent in intoxicating wine as such, and it is not only if it is used in large amounts. A small amount of wine is a mocker. It isn't just that it's in a large amount. It is inherent in alcoholic beverages.

You can have any amount of beef, for example, that you may eat. Beef is not inherently a mocker. It doesn't matter whether you eat a little bit of it, or a lot of it. But with wine, you are immediately affected by even a small amount of it. It is a mocker from the very beginning. Therefore, here in Proverbs 31, it is to be avoided entirely by government leaders because it's an attractive serpent with a sting. So, it is dumb to watch government leaders in international gatherings, standing there toasting one another with alcoholic beverages. You realize how far indeed this is the devil's world.

Would God call (I ask you) alcoholic wine a mocker, and a serpent's poison, and then ask people to use it moderately? This would be the same wisdom as for me to tell the kids in summer camp: "When you walk through the fields, don't let the copperheads bite you hard. Let them just bite you a little bit, because if they bite you hard, it will really be bad. Just let them nip you a little, if you are out there in the field." How is that going to be protective? How does that take the danger out of it? So you see what I mean? Wine is inherently a mocker. And God says, "It's a poison. And a little bit of poison is still poison. If you get more of it, it's worse, but it is still poison.

Would God indeed warn people to look upon alcoholic wine as such a threat to their body and souls, and then encourage them to use it socially? I don't think so. If the Bible does not clearly indicate that a reference to wine is a fermented wine, you cannot assume that it is. I hope that you have learned that. It is just as likely a reference to unfermented grape juice. The word is used for both kinds. Unfermented wine in the Bible is sweet; it's refreshing; it's pleasant; and, it's a blessing from God which makes the hard glad. Fermented wine is biting; relaxing; deceitful; intoxicating; and, it brings woe and sorrow into a person's life.

Now, putting all this in perspective, let's go to 1 Corinthians 10:33, where we had laid out for us the principle of expediency: "Everything which is moral," the apostle Paul points out, "is permissible for a Christian to do. But everything which is all right for a Christian to do is not necessarily expedient for him to do at any point in time."

**Expediency**

1 Corinthians 10:33 says, "Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many that may be saved." Even as I please all men in all things considered, I'm concerned with reaching people, so I don't just seek my own profit; my own freedoms; and, my own rights. But I seek the profit of many others so that they may be saved. Expediency limits one's Christian freedom to use alcoholic wines. Paul's point is that some things that he is free to do, he does not do, because it doesn't edify other believers. But it tears them down spiritually. Those who may follow your example in the use of alcohol may not stop short of drunkenness the way you do. Paul's decision, thus, is not to use his freedom in certain things.

**Love over Self-Indulgence**

He points that out in 1 Corinthians 8:9-13: "I can do this, but I won't, because under certain conditions, it's hazardous to the well-being of my fellow believers." Paul says in 1 Corinthians 8:9, "But take heed, lest by any means, this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak. For in any man sees you, who has knowledge, sitting at the table in the idol's temple, shall not the conscious of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols." Here it's a matter of eating idol meat: "And through your knowledge shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died? But when you sin so against a brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Wherefore, if food shall make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat, even though I have a perfect right to do so – even that meat offered to an idol. While the world stands, I will eat no meat, lest I make my brother to offend." This is the conduct of love rather than of self-indulgence at all costs to others.

There is an inherent danger in the use of alcoholic wine, which was not the case with the use of idol meat. But the apostle Paul says, "Even though there's no harm from eating the meat, I won't do it, because I don't want to harm this person spiritually by causing him to violate the guidance of his own conscience.

So, the concern of the spiritually strong Christian is not only to preserve from spiritual harm, but also from physical destruction. We deny ourselves so as to do good to other believers, and not to expose them to the evils of alcohol. Drinking in moderation will destroy your brain cells just as much as drinking without moderation. And drinking in moderation can make you a slave of alcohol just as if you drank in large quantities.

The Lord Jesus Christ never encouraged or dignified the use of alcoholic beverages. He never supplied the booze for the party. He didn't use alcoholic wine just because of expediency, but He didn't use it also, no doubt, because it's bad for a person with potential for addiction. Because alcohol is an inherently hazardous drug, doubts about the propriety of Christians to drink is not a matter of judging their freedom in Christ. Nobody's trying to butt in and keep you from doing what you are free to do in Christ. There's good reason for questioning the wisdom of this. It is best for oneself; for one's children; for one's friends; and, for you as a Christian, simply not to use alcoholic beverages ever.

There is someone, I say again, in this auditorium that you can look around and see right now. There is someone in your mind's eye that you can look at right now, and you know that you would be very uncomfortable to see them sipping a cocktail at a party or popping a beer can. You just wouldn't want to see that. Why? Because you know that there's a great danger. There's a great threat. And it would make you uncomfortable. There must be something inherently hazardous about it, or you wouldn't feel like that.

1 Corinthians 10:31-32 sum it all up: "Whether, therefore, you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the gentiles, nor to the church of God."

**You**

We conclude Romans 14 with verse 22-23, where Paul sums up this whole principle of guidance by personal conviction. In verse 22, he calls upon us to maintain the integrity of our conscience. Paul says, "Do you have faith?" Actually this is a statement. It says, "You, the faith which you have." In the Greek Bible, the word "you" is the first word in the sentence. That's the way the Greek has of emphasizing, and we translate it more smoothly: "You have faith." We would say it something like that, as a statement, not as a question, But it's literally saying: "You: the faith which you have," stressing upon the fact that you as an individual have a certain faith.

**Faith**

The word "faith" is the word "pistis." This refers to the believer's personal conviction about something in God's word. Paul here is the mature Christian, saying that he is confident before God that it is all right for him to eat unclean meat, or meat that has been offered to an idol. And it is all right for him to use alcoholic beverages. Paul says, "You: the faith which you have," referring to the degree of spiritual enlightenment of this mature Christian. The confidence that this Christian has – that he understands the doctrinal principles on this issue.

**Keep it to Yourself**

So, it's not a question in his own mind that it is all right for him to eat this kind of meat or to drink alcoholic beverages. And what he is presenting is the objection that some strong Christian may say to his conduct being restricted by the groundless scruples of some weak Christian, so that he may be inclined to demand his rights and his freedoms in Christ. Paul says, "The faith that have – keep it to yourself." And the words in the Greek Bible are very emphatic: "to yourself." What does he mean? He means, "Keep it to yourself before God – between you and God." The strong Christian is justified in the view that he has about his liberties in Christ. The strong Christian holds this conviction without any qualms of guilt in his own conscience – so that he can act before God with full faith. He is exhorted to hold his conviction about any specific, controversial practice quietly between himself and God, if he knows that it can cause injury spiritually to another, or distress another believer.

Paul, in effect, is commending the strong Christian in his freedom from his legalistic inhibitions about food and drink during the church age. Paul says, "That's good. That's the way you should be. That is true." But at the same time, he is stressing that he is not required to renounce this Christian liberty, but he is required not to flaunt it in the face of a brother to whom it will cause a problem. Paul is not asking for us as Christians to believe that something is wrong which is not wrong; nor for us to be burdened with the hangups of weak Christians. He's just asking us not to beat him over the head with it. He's asking a mature believer to use his understanding of God's grace in such a way that the weak brother is edified.

**Test Something**

Paul says, "If you do this, you will be a happy Christian. The Greek word is "makarios." This is the word which is used in the Beatitudes, and it is translated as "blessed." And that's what it stands for. It connotes a state of blessedness. Why are you going to be blessed? Well, Paul says, "You're going to be blessed because you will not be condemning yourself in your own conscience. You will be free from any condemnation in your own conscience about that which you allow yourself to do. And the word "allow" is an interesting Greek word. It's "dokimazo." And "dokimazo" means "to test something," and then decide it's OK.

**Happiness**

Somebody is going to sell you a gold coin. You test it. You "dokimazo" the thing, and you find that it's genuine, and then you accept it as such. Here it connotes approving your way of life after having tested it by the Word of God, and found that it meets God's standards. The strong, mature Christian is not to bring God's condemnation upon himself by what he does with his freedom in Christ. If he does, he's not going to be a happy person. He should test what he does by what Christ would do, and by the principles of Scripture, and then he will be a happy person. The strong Christian, in other words, is not to parade and protest his liberty in Jesus Christ to the detriment of the weak.

This happiness is a present possession. It's enjoyed by the Christian with a clear, non-doubting conscience. It's doing things God's way, as found in doctrine. That creates confidence. It creates freedom. And that person is happy because he can eat and drink without feeling guilty about what he's doing, or where he's doing it. The old adage is indeed very true: "In essentials: unity; in non-essential: liberty; and, in all things: love."

The Christian's conduct ultimately is to be based not on what pleases the believer; not on what is best for him; and, not in what is the preference for others, but what is the will of God at any particular point in time.

**He Who Doubts is Condemned**

Verse 23 concludes our chapter: "And he who doubts." The word is "diakrino:" "He who doubts." This is a spirit of indecision and of uncertainty about something. He is talking about the Christian who is constantly uncertain because he does not feel at ease about what he's doing. He just isn't sure: "He who doubts is condemned, which means that he is judged by God to have done something that is wrong. He is condemned if he eats. So, the weak Christian, or the sincere Christian (who maybe isn't a weak Christian) does not feel that he ought to be drinking wine with his meals. And he's in a condition where somebody who is a Christian does that, and urges him to do it, and tells him that it's OK, and he shouldn't be hung up on these kind of trivialities.

Verse 23 is talking to the weak Christian. Verse 22 talks to the strong Christian. Don't knock your fellow believer over the head with your freedom. Verse 23 says, "If you have a doubt about the thing, don't ignore that. Don't just throw it aside. You have a concern. And it's legitimate that you pay attention to it." This word "condemn" is the word "katakrino." This means to be judged wrong in some matter. And in the Greek language, it's in that perfect tense, which means that you have been condemned already in the past, and you continue being so to the very present. And it's in the middle voice, which tells us that that judgment is against yourself. You don't hurt anybody else but yourself when you violate something that your conscience is telling you not to do. This is not judgment relative to salvation. It's judgment relative to your walk with the Lord.

**Paul Condemned Peter**

In Galatians 2:11, the apostle Paul points out that the apostle Peter was condemned by Paul face-to-face, because Peter would not sit down and eat with gentile Christians, because the Jews were begging him not to do that. Peter, in his heart, said, "This is wrong. These gentiles are my Christian brethren. They're in the body of Christ. I should sit down to the table and eat with them. But Peter knuckled under. He violated his own conscience, and knuckled under to the Jewish Christian legalists. And Paul says, "You have been condemned for that." And Peter did not feel happy about that.

That's what he's talking about. You may have some questions or doubts – you are condemned by something that you're eating: "If you eat." That is third-class condition. Maybe you will; and, maybe you won't. But if you do it, then you, as a weak Christian, are going to be egged-on. If you, as a Christian, are egged-on by the strong Christian to violate your conscience, then you yourself are going to know that you have done something wrong. Because why?

Paul says, "You're not eating of faith?" And again, we have that same word "pistis." Here it doesn't refer to trust in Jesus as Savior. It means "without mental reservations." You're not eating with mental confidence that God approves what you're doing. We use that phrase. We say, "I don't have any faith in that person." What do you mean? You don't believe in him. You don't trust him? "I don't have any faith in this project." What do you mean? "I don't trust it? I'm not at ease with this." And that's exactly the same idea here.

**Whatever is not of Faith is Sin**

Here you are. You're eating something that you question the moral action of (the morality of – the moral rightness of), and you do it? You're not going to be a happy person. And you're not going to be blessed. You have uncertainty, misgivings, doubts, and fears about an action. That indicates that it's not of faith, and therefore, Paul says, "It is a sin to do that." So, don't do that: "For whatever is not of faith is a sin." You have missed the mark of God's standard of righteousness.

Such action does not spring from personal faith or conviction. It springs from somebody else's beliefs that have been imposed on you. The sense of right and wrong of the conscience is to be respected, even if your conscience needs to be readjusted by doctrine to a better perspective. The Christian's conduct is determined by what he believes rather than by the opinions of others.

So, a weak Christians can emulate the strong without sharing his convictions about the propriety of doing something. And in that case, the weak Christian is sinning. If you do something without the confidence that it's OK with God for you to do it, it is a sin.

**Martin Luther – I Cannot Violate my Conscience**

It was at Martin Luther's examination by the Roman Catholic authorities at the Diet of Worms in Germany that Luther finally summarized his whole position, when he told them, "If what I have in these books on the table, and what I've written in these books as the exposition of the Word of God, is false, and if you will show me from Scripture that what I have taught is not what the Bible says, then I will recant. But unless you do that, I cannot violate my conscience." Then Martin Luther said, "It is not safe to do anything against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other." How true. How true. It is not safe to do anything against conscience.

**Christian Consideration**

So, we summarize verses 13-23. We should have learned this about the principles of our subject of Christian consideration.

1. **Don't Cause Harm to Others**

Do not be preoccupied with passing judgment on another Christian's conduct, but be concerned about not causing spiritual harm yourself to others.

1. **Do not Ruin other Believers**

Do not use the freedom of God's grace in such a way as to bring spiritual ruin to another believer.

1. **Anticipate the Judgment Seat of Christ**

Live in anticipation of the Judgment Seat of Christ, where our works will be judged for the divine good value.

1. **Edify Believers**

Seek to edify believers rather than cause a brother to stumble spiritually.

1. **Consider the Scruples of Immature Christians**

Treat with consideration the unjustified scruples of immature Christians.

1. **Protect your Happiness**

Protect your happiness by not doing what your own conscience condemns.

1. **Anything which God doesn't Approve is a Sin**

If you do anything which you believe God would not approve, it is a sin for you to do it.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1988

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