

Does It Really Matter?

Part 2

Romans 14:1-12 & 15:1

October 23rd, 2011

There are many times in our Christian lives when we encounter people and a certain topic comes up, and we really want to say, does that really matter? Our first reaction is no, it doesn't matter. But we discovered in the last lesson is that is not true, it does matter. It matters because it matters to the person who believes what they believe, and if it matters to them it should matter to you and I. In this passage, Paul is not discussing matters of doctrine, nor is he discussing matters of morality, but he's discussing matters of conscience. Please don't apply the principles Paul teaches here to matters of doctrine, or morality. In matters of doctrine and morality, we have a clear "thus saith the Lord." But there are issues that face us many, many times as Christians, and when we open the Word of God, there is not a clear "thus saith the Lord" about that particular thing we're dealing with. Once we realize it's not a matter of doctrine or morality and we file it under a matter of conscience, then we have principles in Romans 14:1-15:13 that clearly apply. We will discover that one of the highest marks of maturity is when we get to the place where we say that I won't do that or I won't engage in that if my actions are offensive to my brothers. God wants you and I to respect the beliefs of others, even when the beliefs of others are contradictory to what you and I believe when it comes to matters of conscience.

Scripture

"As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us will give an account of himself to God."
Romans 14:1-12

"We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves." **Romans 15:1**

The Strong and the Weak of Conscience

When you are studying this section of Scripture, you will see that Paul speaks of a division in the Church over certain things, and he is going to divide them under two categories. One group he will call weak in faith, and the other group he will call strong. According to Romans 15:1, it appears that Paul places himself in the category of the strong, in opposition to those who are weak. And because of that, many people make the assumption that when Paul is talking about people that are weak he is talking about immature believers. Because he identifies himself with the strong, many believe he is using it to refer to mature Christians when he talks about strong. They believe that immature and mature is talking about their walk in their relationship with Christ. The more I study this section of Scripture, I don't believe that is how Paul is using these terms.

He is talking about a person who is weak in faith. In our English language, the same Greek word is both translated as "belief" and "faith." So faith here could refer to what a person believes, not the faith he has in Christ. I think when you examine the last 3 verses of Romans chapter 14, you are going to see there are some issues that people are struggling with and they are just not sure what the right answer is. Paul will tell them not to engage in something they aren't sure of because if what they do doesn't proceed from faith, to them it will be a sinful behavior, even though the behavior itself may not be sinful. Paul will say that if you have a doubt about those issues that are non-biblical, (not moral or doctrinal issues) even though it may be ok for someone else to do, you shouldn't be doing it yourself. While it may not be sinful to someone else, if you do it, it would be sinful for you because you have doubts about it.

Therefore, I believe when Paul talks about the weak in the Church, he is talking about people who are weak in their conscience, people who have not yet come to a strong conviction about how the Christian life applies to certain situations. When he mentions the strong, he is referring to those people that when they come to certain behaviors, issues, and situations,

they don't even give it a second thought. They know what they believe and they never second guess themselves at all. I believe that's what we're dealing with here in this passage. A person who is strong in his mind, he has his mind made up. And then we have people who are still struggling and just not sure. That is not a mark of maturity. I have known people who are far more mature than I, but when it comes to certain subjects, they weren't sure. I felt like I had a clear conviction in my conscience about that situation, but I would consider myself a lot less mature than that other person. When it comes to matters of conscience; please don't make this a test of Christian maturity. In this section, Paul is trying to protect those who are weak in faith (in matters of conscience) against those who are strong; those who have already made up their mind. Paul is saying that when it comes to that person who is weak, we are supposed to "*welcome him.*" But the motivation in welcoming him is not to quarrel over opinions.

Now I want you to look at this last word, "*opinions,*" in verse 1. It's really important, it's where we get our English word, ***dialogue***, from. It is that conversation that takes place at the restaurant. It is when those groups of guys gather around at a certain time in the morning and they are drinking their coffee and eating their breakfast, and they are shooting the bull, so to speak. It's that conversation that happens down at the bait store. You know, when everybody is voicing their opinion! I've noticed that we can disagree at the bait store, the coffee shop, and the beauty shop, and still have fellowship. But why is it that when it comes to the Church in matters of conscience, we can't still fellowship? I believe it is because of that last word in the 1st verse, translated "opinion." In some versions it is translated "disputings," or "scruples." It is describing what you think about this particular subject. You have no "thus saith the Lord;" it's your opinion, your thought. I have noticed that when it comes to church things, church behaviors, and Christian conduct, every person who has an opinion believes his opinion is God's opinion about the subject. Isn't that scary? To believe on issues that the Bible does not clearly speak about, you believe when you speak, you speak on behalf of God. In other words, I know what

God thinks about this, and if I know what God thinks, just agree with me! That has caused quite a bit of pain and division in the Church of Jesus Christ. In most of the Church conflicts that I've known about in Western KY, it's usually not a matter of doctrine or morality, it's usually a matter of conscience that divides the body of Christ.

- **Welcome the Weak**

Scripture says that when we encounter a person who we consider weak in matters of conscience, I am to "*welcome him.*" I am not to welcome him in so that once he gets in I can change how he thinks and win him over to my opinion. I am to genuinely welcome him. This word, "welcome," is the Greek word ***proslambano***. ***Lambano*** literally means 'to receive or to take in.' When you put the preposition ***pros*** in front of it, it intensifies it. This is a picture of you meeting a brother who has different opinions than you about certain things that you hold strong opinions about. The first instinct you have as a Christian is going to be to let the strong opinions of that brother, who contradict your strong opinions, to cause you to separate from that brother, but the Bible says you must take him in. The first thing you have to do is realize that he is not standing where you are. You are on the inside, he is on the outside, and it's your responsibility to take him from the outside and bring him in. It's your responsibility to bring him from where he is to where you are, and to truly welcome him, to accept him, for who he is. Don't let what he believes cause you to separate yourself from him or to keep him at a distance. Can we be honest? That is hard to do, is it not? And yet, that is what Scripture says.

Now since he's talking about the one who is weak, it sounds like he's giving the admonition to the ones who are strong because it's usually the ones who already have their mind made up and are strong-minded that cause the division. If you are strong-minded, it's your responsibility to accept and welcome that brother into your circle of influence and to love on him, not try to change him. Does that mean it doesn't really matter what we

believe? No, it does matter, and because it matters to them, and to God, that changes the way we react to people.

- **Do not Pass Judgment**

Now, in the next few verses, Paul is going to tell us what is happening in the church at Rome. You have one group on homecoming Sunday that sits right down and eats everything. Then, you have another group that is cautious before they put something on their plate. As a matter of fact, they are so cautious about what's going on in Roman society, and what they have bought at the supermarket and prepared for homecoming, that they have decided they won't eat anyone's BBQ. They have cut the meat out of their diet. Now, that leads us to believe these people are Jewish in their background because the Jews were the ones that were taught there were clean and unclean things from God. There were things you could eat and there were things you could not eat. They believed even the things you could eat had to be killed a certain way. Therefore, they followed a kosher diet. The other group you have in the Roman Church is pagan. They ate everything in their pagan life, and they don't see a reason to quit eating what they have always been eating now that they are Christians. Now, I do not believe you should compare Romans 14 to 1 Corinthians when Paul discusses not eating meat offered to idols. Paul doesn't delineate that the meat here is meat offered to idols, and I don't think it's the same thing. In this situation, these believers have just decided they should eat a strict vegetarian diet to the glory of God. So, imagine it's homecoming and one group is just gorging themselves on meat, and the other side won't eat any meat. The next thing you know they are kind of eyeing each other. Now, look at what he said in verse 3, "Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him." You see, here is a positive statement, welcome your brother and don't let what he holds true in his conscience cause that to separate you from him. But Paul knew that it was going to be hard to do. He knew that one of the first things Christians would do is either disdain, or judge. Have you ever noticed that if you

withdraw from doing certain things, you get looked down on by those people who really have their mind made up that they are ok to do? They kind of make you feel like you are immature, or like you haven't arrived. They kind of make you feel like if you were where they were, this wouldn't be a problem. Have any of you ever felt that from people? That is called disdain. In the Greek, it means 'to bring to nothing, or to treat that person as if their opinion doesn't count.' God is getting all over those of you who are strong-minded people for the way you treat other people. Can I say this...get off of your high horse! I mean, you really can't look down upon a person unless you believe you are in a position of superiority to that person. I usually have to look up to people, even when we disagree, because I do not consider myself better than those people. I do not consider myself more mature than those people, even though we do not agree over things, and that is the attitude Paul wants us to have.

Now, if you are the weak-minded brother, while you don't look down at people, you do have this opinion about those people arguing over what you aren't sure they should be able to do. You look at them and make a judgment about them. And because you don't believe you should be doing it because you aren't sure about it, you make a judgment about them because they are doing it. You pass a premature judgment, and that is harmful in the body of Christ. When we get to the next section, Paul is actually going to say that our disdain and our judgment of other people are actually going to destroy the work of Christ. How would you like to stand before God on the Day of Judgment and be responsible for destroying someone's Christian faith who God redeemed from sin? I don't want that on me, and that is why Paul is taking time to discuss this.

I will never forget back when we used to have Youth Explosion at Hardin Baptist Church. Youth Explosion started out really small, about 30 people, and ended up with over 140 people over a few years. We got to invite youth from all over the region, even youth from other states started coming, and it was a wonderful thing of God. It was during that time that I had been invited to preach a revival in Graves County in a small church. As

I was preaching, it became obvious to me during the first sermon that the couple sitting on the second row either did not like my sermon, my preaching, or just did not like me, and honestly, I am kind of sensitive! It was a small enough church that I had a head count of everybody there. The more I preached that night, it just became obvious that there was something going on. I left that night, prayed about it, and came back the second night and began to preach. I really prayed that God would move them to the back row. I mean it's one thing if you don't like the preacher and you are on the back row, it's another thing if you don't like the preacher and you are on the front row! As I began to preach, this couple was so transparent that one of three things was obvious to me; they either did not like the topic again (but I'm thinking I couldn't strike out two times in a row on the topic), they do not like my style of preaching, or they do not like me. They were sitting on the second row that night. I get up to preach the third night and I was preaching on something similar to this message. I made some statement about some things that churches have divided over in their past and some things that really shouldn't matter, and I could tell I hit a nerve. What I should have done (but I wasn't bold enough) was just stop the service right there and asked what was wrong, but I didn't. As uncomfortable as I was, I preached through that sermon. When I walked to the back door, they were the first ones to greet me at the door. I am telling you the truth, for two hours, they skinned me alive! Being a visiting evangelist, I stood there and I took it! I did not get to shake another hand. All of the other 76 people left and went around me, even the pastor went out the back door! He was supposed to be my friend! He didn't even call to check on me that night! Nobody ever rescued me; they skinned me alive! Two hours later, we were only ones at the church, and toward the end of the two hour tongue lashing, it finally came out what the problem was. It was Youth Explosion. These parents had let their son come to Youth Explosion. Their son was one of about 800 kids that were there. The night their son came, because it was a youth event and because of what we were going to do that night, I actually stood on the stage in a pair of shorts that came down a little above my knees! And that

was the unforgiveable sin in that couple's life. Their dads had taught them, and their dads before them, and the dads before them; there were four generations of deep seated hatred to shorts! And trust me, I left that night knowing they did not believe I could possibly be a man of God because I would do the unthinkable, and that's put on a pair of shorts. Since then, I have never put on shorts and come anywhere close to the church facilities. The reason is because it mattered to them. I apologized and asked them to please let their son come back next year to Youth Explosion. Don't judge what God is doing in the life of an event based on the pastor.

Many of us have been there before, on one side or the other of that kind of situation. This is what Paul's talking about. He knows these are the opportunities for us to truly reveal the Spirit of Christ. You see Paul doesn't take up for either side because he knows no matter which side of this you are on, the weak-minded or strong-minded, your first tendency is to look at that person and let what they believe cause you to separate from them. Your obligation to that person is to run toward that person and not let what they believe in their conscience cause you to stay away from them. As a matter of fact, look at the end of verse 3. Paul tells the person who is abstaining, who is looking down at the one who is eating, that God has welcomed him!

Now remember what I said in the beginning? It sounds like he is talking to the strong. But we are supposed to welcome those who are weak, so when you come to the end of verse 3, he is talking about the one who is abstaining, not judging the one who is eating! God has welcomed the one who eats anything on his plate, and he never thinks about whether he should eat it or not! So what is the truth here? Why do I welcome people into my circle? It is because God welcomed them into His circle. I am amazed at how many times in Scripture the motivation for our behavior is because it is God's behavior. Why are we supposed to love people? It is because Christ loved us. Why are we supposed to forgive people? It is because Christ forgave us. Do you know why we are supposed to welcome people? It is because God welcomed that person. I just can't imagine being

a Christian and keeping somebody out over a matter of conscience who God has already welcomed in.

I understand there has to be separation when it comes to morality, the Bible teaches that. The Bible teaches that when a Christian steps outside of a certain moral boundary, we are to put them outside the fellowship of the body. The Bible teaches us about heretics and people who teach false doctrine. They are a danger to the body, and we have to stay away from those people, the Bible clearly teaches that! But when it comes to matters of conscience, we do not apply the same principle. When you look at verse 4, it's obvious. When it comes to those matters of conscience where we differ, here is where we find the emphasis, he said who in the world are you? But what we think is, how can you be a Christian and believe what you believe about that? But verse 4 reverses this and says that what should be happening when you meet somebody who disagrees with you in matters of conscience is not a question of who are they; the question is who are you? Did you get that? The moment my mind begins to analyze them, what should really happen is that I should analyze me. And Paul asks me this question, "Who are you to pass judgment on another man's servant?" I mean whether I like the way they are doing it or not, if they don't work for me, should it matter to me? Absolutely not! It's not my servant, it's not my master, so I literally ought to stay out of this, and that is what Paul is teaching.

Boy, I wish we could get this! When you and I look down on or judge someone, you are judging God's servant. This word servant here, *oiketēs*, is a Greek word that describes a household servant. It's not the servant who works in the back 40, or down at the mine. It is the servant who is trusted; that person who is put in charge of the family, wow! How kindly do you think God takes it when you and I judge His children and His servants? Paul is teaching that the one it really matters to is God. If God is ok with what they are doing and He hasn't stepped into their life and changed them yet, why don't we stay out of it? It is the Christian thing to do.

- **Honor the Lord**

Then he goes even further and moves from diet to days. He talks about how one puts more emphasis on one certain day, and another puts emphasis on all of the days. And then Paul gives us some principles in verses 6-12. The first thing he's going to tell us is that each one of us has to come to a place where we are fully convinced in our own mind of what we are doing. I can't live my life doing, or not doing, because of what you believe. I must individually come to that place where I'm convinced in my own mind, which means these things really matter. Paul is saying that the guy who sets that one day aside and makes it more holy than another guy is not doing that to be legalistic or to earn a right relationship with God; he is trying to honor the Lord. When he observes that day, he gives thanks to God for that day. When a guy sits down to eat, he is eating to honor the Lord, and he gives thanks for the things God has put on his plate. The guy who is not eating certain things, he is giving thanks to God for the things he isn't eating, and he is not eating certain things because he wants to honor the Lord.

I was reared in a small country church where there were a lot of matters of conscience, and to be totally honest with you, I did not hold to some of the matters of conscience in my mind that the people in my church did, even my family. But here is what I know, everything my Granddaddy Bogard did, he tried to honor God in, and he gave thanks to God for the life he had. How dare I judge a man like that, and how dare you judge a man like that! Why is it we can't see there are some things that it really doesn't matter how they are done? What matters is how the person is doing what they are doing, and that is them honoring God to the best of their ability and being thankful to God for what they have.

Paul wants us to recognize that we all belong to the Lord, and once you recognize that, you do what you do unto Him. You see, I don't believe there is anything immature about this passage of Scripture because both sides are striving in Christian maturity to be honorable and to do what they

do to the glory of God, and they are thankful for what they do. They recognize that their life does not belong to them; it belongs to God. And because it belongs to God, they are striving to be godly in that behavior, even though their behavior is not the behavior that I might think is godly! We don't have to make everybody around us like us. We have to recognize God has ordained diversity in the body. Therefore, we will not all be at the same place in the body of Christ.

- **God will be the Judge**

There are many people that leave the Church because other people aren't where they are. They look down on their fellow believer from a position of superiority, and Paul says that shouldn't be happening. He switches from "who are you" in verse 4, to "why do you" in verse 10. I love to analyze the Apostle Paul's teaching; he is a master teacher. All of us who teach the gospel can learn so much from him. In verses 10-12, Paul doesn't tell us not to judge our brother in matters of conscience because he is going to be judged. He says don't pass judgment because we all will be judged. Did you get that? I promise you, God can take care of His own. These verses are teaching that the last thing you want to have happen on the Day of Judgment when you stand before the **Bema** seat of God (the reward seat of God) is for Him to judge you for trying to be God in somebody's life. He takes being God, the sovereign ruler of the universe, very seriously. And He will not share that job with any other, not you and not me. Therefore, the consolation is don't worry about your brother, God is going to judge him. Paul says not to judge your brother because God is going to judge you. The last thing you want to be brought up on the Day of Judgment is how you judged a brother over a matter of conscience and broke fellowship with him. The biggest mark of maturity in the Christian life is how we use our personal liberty in regard to those who hold the different view concerning issues of the conscience.