

Romans 14 13-17b

13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

14 I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

15 Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.

16 Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil;

17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Here we are, again, looking at a passage many of us have read many times. And again we will find that there is always more for us in God's Word than we will ever get. It is truly amazing just how deep a mine of truth there is in God's word. We read it and we think we have gotten it all, but then God's Spirit reveals that He has more riches for us. And then more, and more. How good God has been to us to reveal so much about Himself in His word.

As I was studying the text I was thinking about how most Christians ask a very good question from time to time in their Christian lives. They ask, **how do I live the Spirit filled life?** How do I remain in the place that God wants me? How can I **please Him?** How can I **live for Him?**

And the answer to that question is in every book in the New Testament. Oh it is stated lots of different ways, and lots of different angles are addressed. But all in all, it is a simple concept. Here in Romans we have already seen many truths that would direct us in this process.

We are told we live **to the Lord**. We realize that we exist for his pleasure so our choices should be the ones that he approves of.

Then we are told about living **by thanking God**. And we saw the wonderful litmus test that giving thanks gives us about our activities. If we cannot thank God, we should not be doing what we are doing. If we can, we are probably living by faith. That doesn't prove we are **right**, but it proves we are **sincere**.

Then the next thing we see is the importance of keeping a good conscience.

14- Who considers anything to be unclean-

The word conscience is not used in this text but it is used in a parallel passage describing the same thing.

1 Corinthians 8:7-13 (NKJV)

7 However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

8 But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.

9 But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.

10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols?

11 And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?

12 But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

Well, what is conscience? Well, it is made of two root words. Con and Science. It means with science or with knowledge. And it implies knowing along with something else. What it really ends up being is our **knowing along with God** or knowing along **with knowledge given to us by God.**

In Romans we are told that God has given every man some innate knowledge of Him. It is difficult to know exactly how far to go with that. But we know that some innate knowledge exists.

Every man begins life with a conscience. Sometimes events in childhood seem to destroy it. Sometimes it takes a lifetime to destroy it. And in some people it functions very well.

The conscience is where feelings of guilt come from. We pick up, rightly or wrongly, some idea of good or bad. If we abide by what we think is good we have a good conscience. If we do what we think is bad we feel guilty.

Now keep in mind that our consciences are not infallible. They are just like opinions. Just because we have them, and think them so strongly, does not make them correct.

Scripture has a lot to say about conscience. And it is very clear that it has a great bearing in the Christian life. The Christian should live according to his conscience, while continually learning God's Word to educate the conscience and to correct it.

Paul says in- **Acts 23:1 (NKJV)**

1 Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."

Notice what this is saying. When Paul was doing the worst things imaginable, hunting down Christians to harm them, he was doing it in a good conscience. Then when he learned that he was wrong, his conscience changed and **servicing** those people was the right thing to do. Paul does not say he was always correct in how he lived. But he is saying that even when he was wrong, he sincerely lived according to what he believed was correct. That is a good thing.

Acts 24:16 (NKJV)

16 This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. Here Paul describes a conscience that he does not offend. Paul strives to not go against his conscience. Now keep in mind here that Paul is a Christian. We cannot get the idea that once we are believers that our conscience no longer has a part. It has a daily part. It is part of living according to the Spirit of God. We must comply to the rule of our conscience until our conscience is changed by the light of scripture.

Romans 9:1 (NKJV)

1 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,

Here it is again. Paul's conscience bears witness with the Holy Spirit that what he is saying is true. He is doing nothing to violate his conscience when he says this, and even more so, he is not violating what the Holy Spirit knows. Paul is speaking as we should speak. We should not go against our consciences, but they should bear witness with what we say.

We have already read I Cor 8:6-7. This is our parallel passage to our Romans text. And we find that a person can have a weak conscience. They can have a morbid scrupulosity. They can feel guilty about things they really do not need to feel guilty about. They feel they are wrong in doing something that really isn't wrong. So should we laugh at that spectacle? Should we tell them, don't worry about those feelings. You are just screwed up in your theology. Just get over it? No. We are to cater to those weaknesses. We are to do whatever we can to help them live the Christian life, even though they misunderstand some things. Their ultimate welfare is far more important than their correctness on the issue.

1 Timothy 1:18-19 (NKJV)

18 This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, 19 having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck,

The imagery here is of a ship being sailed. Faith and a good conscience are steering the ship. And they will do fine as long as we submit to them. But if we begin to go against them, what happens to the steering of our lives? We go off track and we wreck. Think about the shipwrecks in your life? How many were due to this very thing? You didn't feel right about it. You weren't sure about it. But you did it anyway. And ended up in a mess. Do you see the importance of doing what you think is right?

1 Timothy 4:1-2 (NKJV)

1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,

This is frightening. Here we see what can happen to a person who chooses to go against their conscience time after time. These people **know** they are lying. They **know** they are pretending. They **know** that they are not what they are portraying. But they just choose to **keep doing it**. They keep **pretending** to be true. They keep **pretending** to be sincere. They keep **pretending** to be honest. And what is happening. They have caused an iron pulled from the fire, red hot, to be placed against the figurative skin of their souls. And what does it do? It seals the wound in such a way that no feeling is left. The skin will heal, but it will never again feel. And that is what these people do. They can go through the motions. But they have absolutely no spiritual sensitivity. They can no longer sense right and wrong. Everything is just a lie.

Scripture has more to say about this topic, but I think we have seen enough to realize the importance of the conscience in the believer's life.

We need to ask the question this morning, are we living by our consciences? Is there something we can't thank God for, something we suspect is not right, but we just keep doing it? Oh, maybe we have given wonderful justifications for the things. Maybe we have argued about our freedom to do these things. Maybe we can make a real good argument. But we still don't feel right about it.

Think about it. Is there something that you hide from other people about yourself? Now that is not always wrong. Some disputable things God tells us to

keep between ourselves and Him. But I am talking about things we think are wrong. Things we are ashamed of. Things we are unsure of. What do you keep hidden in your life that you believe to be wrong? That is a point of spiritual danger to you. Because you are conditioning your conscience not to work. And you are hardening yourself against God to where it becomes easier and easier to sin. We need to expose those things. Maybe there is another Christian you should trust with these matters. Odds are it is going to be hard to overcome it by yourself. Do whatever is necessary, but don't live in violation of your conscience. Nothing good can come of it. And you are offending God.

That is what Paul is talking about. We must live by our consciences, no matter how that makes us look. We must do what we believe to be right until what we believe changes. We must live by faith. We must live sincerely before the Lord. Now let's jump ahead to verse 16

16- Do not let your good be spoken of as evil-

This is an odd statement. You might think it means that if something is right don't let anyone think that is wrong. Defend your case. Give your reasons. Argue your arguments. But in context it can't mean that.

What it **does mean** is that just because an action is right **in itself** does not mean that it is always right **for us to do**. Paul is telling us here to not do something that can be considered good in such a way that it does harm. Do not do it in such a way that a weaker brother regards it and speaks of it as some kind of evil, some kind of thing that will harm believers, something that is destructive.

Paul doesn't argue that it is not a good. But he is concerned about the perceptions that others hold that will cause it to **not be used for the good**.

In other words, don't do a thing if another brother who is watching will have their conscience condemn that thing.

17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Paul here goes from his conversation into a sweeping truth.

I know not everyone here is into computers, but for those who are, have you ever looked at your home from Google Maps in the satellite view. We live so much of our lives in our houses and in our yards and on our roads. But we have little perspective of where the rivers and mountains are from our homes and how the rivers wind through all kinds of property. We don't realize where everything is in perspective to everything else until we see it from the air.

That is what Paul is doing here. He is showing us the truth from the air.

And what does he show us? What does he mention? Where does he direct our attention?

To the Kingdom of God.

We tend to live an existence that focusses on that which can be seen. We live in and around our little towns. We live in Garrett County, or in Jarrod's case Preston County. But Paul jumps into Google God view. He shows us our lives as they really are. They are lived in the Kingdom of God.

Now think about the word Kingdom. What is the first thing you notice about the word? Maybe it is KING. Yes. That is what it is. It is run by a King. There is authority, rule, order, protocol. It is not simply a collection of people without purpose. That would be a rabble or a riot. No, this is a collection of people in submission to a King. They are people who recognize their subservient position to the worthy one in charge. And at its center is Christ, the lamb of God. And we are all his servants, and very rightfully so.

Sometimes we lose perspective and we think we are primarily part of a political group. Or we might think we are a religious group. We might think we are just a bunch of people who believe similar things. But we miss out on the fact that we are much more than that. A Christian is part of a spiritually elite group who God himself has brought together. We have entered a realm that is overseen by an absolute authority.

Sometimes we think in terms of our experiences and we think that it is all about some decision we made. We think about everything from our frame of reference. We evaluate things by our experience. But we have lost perspective.

The Kingdom of heaven is not about **us**. It is about what **happens to us** as God has pulled us into it. The kingdom of God is not about us primarily. It certainly involves us and includes us. But it is really about **God**. It is **God's plan**. It is **God's purpose**. It is about what **God** is going to do. It is about the rule of God. And He uses His word to bring about this rule. The center is Christ

Look at **Luke 11:19-20 (NKJV)**

19 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.

20 But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Do you see what happens here. This is an example of the rule of God. The force of God. Christ exhibits authority to tell the devils messengers what to do in no uncertain terms. That is kingdom. That is rule. That is authority.

So the question comes down to

Are you in the kingdom?

Nothing else will matter. Nothing is more important this morning. Are you in God's kingdom? Do you know for sure? If you don't there is nothing more important than this. Do whatever you must, talk to whoever you must to get this settled. You **can be** in the kingdom of God. You can be a citizen. And if God is calling you this morning respond to that call. Seek it out. Talk to someone who knows how.

Now this kingdom is a bit strange. We are in the kingdom and the kingdom is in us. We are under His rule. And His rule is **in** us. His guiding is **in** us. The kingdom of God is among us.

So often we lose sight of this Google God perspective.

So often we think the main question is how can I be happy? How can I have what I want? How can I experience better things? We ask, is God giving me stuff that pleases my flesh? Is he taking away my difficulties? Is he giving me good experiences?

Those are the wrong focuses. They are the wrong questions. No- we should be asking, am I in the kingdom of God and is the reign of God in me? What position am I in? What state am I in? It is better to be living in misery in a **saved** state than living in bliss in a **lost** state. It is better to be perplexed in a difficult position as a believer than to be blissful in a state of rebellion.

Do you know what the big picture is? Do you know what the right perspective is?

Matthew 25:31-34 (NKJV)

31 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.

32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.

33 And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

On that day, our preoccupation with our current pleasure will be seen for the distraction that it truly was. Our small thinking about our little issues will be seen as unimportant as it really is. And we will understand that the kingdom was truly what this life was all about.

So the Kingdom is what is most important. But what is the kingdom **not** about? It is not about eating and drinking-

Do you see what Paul is saying? Being correct about these little things is not the essence of what true spirituality is about. Determining accurately what is right and then clinging to that right for your pleasure is not what the Kingdom is about. This is the danger of missing the forest for the trees.

It is the danger of absorbing ourselves in the minutia and missing the most important things. It is losing our perspective, losing our balance.

We have so much of this loss of perspective in the modern church. Just look at the names of the denominations. They are about minutia. They are emphasizing the less important to the most important. They are emphasizing a particular doctrine as the most important doctrine.

Let's start with our own. It is always best to start closest so we don't become proud. We are the Ferndale Baptist Church. And what do you suppose caused the Baptists to put the word Baptist into their title? Well naturally, the means and conditions of baptism. Oh, there is more to it than that. But is that really the most central thing in the kingdom of God? Ok, how about the Pentecostal Church. Is the practice of the gifts described at Pentecost really the most important thing in the Kingdom of God? And how about the Charismatic Church, again is the expression of the gifts that central? How about the Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church, these both refer to Church governance. We don't have to look far to apply our text. We show in so many ways that we didn't get Paul's point. We allowed all of the wrong things to divide us. We showed a failure to love in our history, all around.

We see the same danger in movements. There are evangelism movements and discipleship movements and family enrichment movements. But they are all specific focusses that miss the importance of the whole.

And we even have this danger with how the Bible is studied. Do you ever see anywhere where the Bible should be studied in a remote objective matter as if it were a text book? Were we ever supposed to study the topics in a manner that is not for direct application?

Mike never thought much of Seminaries. They make a science out of something that should never be a science. There is no objectivity in the study of scriptures.

We are all subjected to the instructions of scripture. Everything **affects** us.

Everything is addressed **to** us. We are to submit to it all. We are to live it out.

This is not a study of a bunch of rights and wrongs. Bible Study is really learning about how to live in the Kingdom of God.

This passage is also showing us that we cannot elevate **one focus** to the **undoing** of another. That is not how the Kingdom of God as a whole works. For instance,

we cannot elevate our family responsibilities to a place higher than they should be. The kingdom of God does not just consist of Storge families. The same is true of church responsibilities. We cannot deny our family responsibilities for the sake of church responsibilities. We must carry them both out in their proper perspective, in their proper balance. The same is true of societal responsibilities. We should not abandon those things that God has given us to do in our families and churches to be a light in the society. There is a balance in the Christian life. There is a bigger perspective that helps us to avoid the extremes. There is a global view that helps us to see better where we live.

This focus about what the Kingdom of God **is not** also helps us to see this. Christians are **not** people who are simply moral. The moralist would ask- is it right to eat meat or take drink. Yes it is right. Therefore I will do it. A Kingdom of God citizen lives by something **bigger** than whether something is right or wrong. We live by something more important than a moral code. The Christian is moral, but He is more than that.

Christians are not simply people who do good. Our position is not that small. We cannot be reduced to people who simply help other people and look after their best interest. It is not that simple. It is not that limited. We cannot be defined by our treatment of others. We are to be people who put others best interest above our own. If we are following Christ, we do good for others. But we are more than that.

Also Christians are not simply people who believe doctrines. We cannot be defined by a checklist of things we believe and that is all. We cannot be explained as people who all agree on a few facts. It cannot be reduced to some book club where all we have in common is that we believe the same book. We certainly do believe the same book. But we are much much more than that.

No, those are the trees but that is not the forest.

The forest is the kingdom of God. The forest is living in a reality that will stretch into eternity. We are members of a **completely different kingdom** than the rest of the world around us. It is almost like we are **aliens** from space. We look like humans and we have feelings like humans, but we are different. There is fundamentally something **other worldly** about us that is odd and peculiar, but is fitting for a **completely different world** than we live in.

That is the picture this text in Romans is painting. This is the Google God view, a perspective that we must keep in mind. It is a perspective we see by faith and not by sight.

And this is how Christ told people in His kingdom to live while in the here and now of a hostile reality.

Matthew 6:25-34 (NKJV)

25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?"

26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?"

28 So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;

29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"

31 Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

33 But **seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness**, and all these things shall be added to you.

34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

I would like to end with a quote from Martyn Lloyd Jones.

MLJ

I have a terrible feeling within me that the real answer is that you and I who are on the inside *of the kingdom* have somehow given the impression that this business of the kingdom of God and of Christianity is so small and contemptible that it is not even worthy of *the world's* thought and consideration. They want something worthy of their thought and consideration. They want something **big**, they say, they want **real life**, not this **negative smallness**, this finicky little thing, with self important people concerned here and there about **details**.

Oh my dear friend, there is nothing more important for you and for me to answer than this question: What impression are we giving to others as to the nature of the kingdom of God? Let every man examine himself.