

Romans 14:22, 23 Do you have faith? Have *it* to yourself before God. Happy *is* he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.*

Should a Christian keep secrets? Should a Christian intentionally hide some things that he does? Are there times when a Christian should sneak?

Even when I ask these questions I am tempted to think...no. A Christian should live above scrutiny. And that is true. But are there things that a Christian should keep hidden from the public because those things would do the public no good? And even more important, are there things that a Christian should hide from other believers?

Paul says in our text a very clear, "Yes, there are things best kept hidden. There are freedoms best enjoyed in private."

I have seen Christians condemned for a freedom they enjoyed in private. And they worked to keep things private so they would not cause other people who would **not regard it as a freedom** to fall. Oddly enough, part of their condemnation was that they hid things, that they tried to keep them private. The condemnation was based on a very shallow understanding of the text we are in, as if, yes this is what Paul says. But he really doesn't mean it. In reality we should never partake of the freedoms we believe we have. But that is not what Paul is saying.

Paul says this in First Corinthians

25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; 26 for "*the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness.*" 27 If any of those who do not believe invites you *to dinner*, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. 28 But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for "*the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness.*" 29 "Conscience," I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another *man's* conscience? 30 But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for *the food* over which I give thanks?

31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, 33 just as I also please all *men* in all *things*, not seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of many, that they may be saved.

Notice what Paul is telling us to do here. In public, you act differently than you would if you were in private. In private, you would eat the meat without caring where it came from. But in public, you will only eat that meat under certain circumstances. Certain things must be true. **Who is watching** and the **circumstances you are under** determine what you will do. Someone watching might think we are being hypocritical, that we aren't being true to ourselves. But that isn't it at all. It isn't like we hide our freedoms because we are ashamed of them, or that we keep it secret because it is sinful. No. There are things Christians should keep secret for the benefit of those who would misunderstand or who would be offended. So if you find out that a believer was keeping something secret, you may not want to assume the worst. Ask that person why they are doing what they are doing. You might find that it is love that kept them from revealing the behavior.

At the same time, it could **also be sin** that caused them to keep it a secret. You will not know if you do not ask. Some of the biggest tests of Christian character involve remaining silent about things that you have done for a good reason but most would misunderstand them.

So, there are times that believers should keep loving secrets.

Let's look at our text again.

Romans 14:22, 23 Do you have faith? Have *it* to yourself before God. Happy *is* he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *he does not eat* from faith; for whatever *is not from faith* is sin.

So Paul is asking here, do you have faith. In context we could paraphrase the question to be this. So are there things that you are convinced that you have the freedom to do by faith? Ok. If that is so, this is what you should do about it. Keep your opinion about that thing to yourself in situations where revealing it would do others harm.

Then Paul goes on....

Happy *is* he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

Happy is a word that is used a lot in the new testament. It is normally translated Blessed. It is the same word Jesus used in the beatitudes when he told us we were blessed if a number of things apply to us. This **blessed** or **happy** is a fortunate state for us. We might say lucky, although there is really no chance involved. We are in a good state if we do not condemn ourselves in what we approve.

This statement addresses those who are the strong in their position. They are the ones with the proper freedoms. And they are said to be blessed if they only chose those things that **they can do by faith**. Their conscience does not condemn them.

Now we need to think about this. What does this condemnation mean? Could a believer be damned by doing something that he didn't have the faith to do? No. That isn't the point. And it would go against what we have already learned in Romans about the perseverance of the saints. So this does not have to do with final condemnation. But it does have to do with being judged as being in the wrong. A paraphrase would be, "A person is truly blessed when he does not do things that will prove him to be in the wrong for doing them."

The word for approve means to test, examine, prove, to discern to whether a thing be true or not. Essentially this is telling us that we cannot cheat when deciding what is correct and what is wrong. We must do it according to what we believe scripture **really** says. It requires a process. It is not something innate. It is not something we can trust our perceptions on. We must determine it based on reading what God says and basing our opinions solely on that.

Are you deciding a course for your future right now? Is there something you are deciding? Something you must respond to? Something you must handle?

How are you making those decisions?

The world is told to follow their hearts. They are told to make decisions to be true to themselves and to maximize their pleasure. They are told to look after their rights. And it is very sad when we hear believers making their choices the same way. Those kinds of decisions always have "me" at the center of the decision. My will be done. My kingdom come. But those are not things that can stand up to the test. They are not things that will be found to be true. As Christians, our decisions should **not** be based on our temporary happiness or convenience. They should **not** be based on some arbitrary limit based on how much we think we can take. We cry out in desperation that we can't take any more and we think that is a Godly reason to go forward with our plans. But it is not. God knows us better than we know ourselves. He truly knows how much we can take. And it could well be that he has placed us in our current trial because there are things he wants us to learn that we can learn no other way. There is one

thing you can be sure of. If you are a believer and you chose a way that does not stand the test of approval, if you choose a path contrary to God's will, it will have unforeseen circumstances and you will live to regret them. They will appear to be the answer to your difficulty, but they will not be. They will just be a path into different difficulties.

It doesn't matter what difficulty you face today. It doesn't matter what stress you may be under. As a believer you must determine your path based on what God says. You must trust Him and His will in this matter. It doesn't matter if you are surrounded by people giving you different advice. It doesn't matter that they give you advice that **they** might feel right in taking. You must determine from scripture what **you** believe to be what God advises in your situation.

That is what our text is dealing with. It is talking about determining what we believe God prohibits and what he allows. And even greater than that, it is about what is most **loving and edifying** to others.

Don't allow yourself to believe your feelings. Don't allow your desperation to have any authority in your decision making. It will only lead to heartache. God promises that you, if you are a believer, will have eternity for unending happiness. Whatever situation you are in, God will make it worth your while to remain faithful. But the decision at hand is only and always, what does God say? What does God want me to do? And that must be based only on God's clearly revealed Word. Don't trust any other source.

OK, so the last verse was addressed **to the strong**. Now this next verse is addressed **to the weak**, to the one with a hyperactive scruple.

23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.*

Suppose there is a thing that you very much want to do. And you know other Christians are doing it and they seem to be fine Christians. Yet you study it and you cannot see how it would be the right thing to do. You cannot, by faith say, yes God approves this thing. There is a long list of things that could fit in this category.

At one time for me it was an issue of listening to popular secular music. I became convinced it was wrong for me to listen to the albums I had. Now was I correct in my theology? I don't think so now. But I believed what I believed back then. Were there other Christians around who seemed free to listen to the same music? Yes there were. And I very much wanted to

listen to that music. But I ended up burning all those albums. When I look back I ask myself, should I have done that. And I believe I should have. Why? Because it was wrong to listen to that music? Well, not objectively, but it was wrong **for me** because I could not do it by faith. I could not do it and thank God while I was doing it. So the only faithful avenue for me was to do what I did.

Doubt seems to be the million dollar word in this sentence. It means to be at variance with one's self, hesitate, doubt

It is talking about that state where **you aren't sure** something is right and at the same time **you are not sure** that it is wrong. It is a lack of certainty. It is a lack of being securely confident about something.

It is the kind of thing you are deciding and you keep thinking- I am not sure about this. I am not sure this is right.

Well scripture is very clear on this point. If you aren't sure, don't do it.

Don't do it **until** you are confident based on what God says that you are making the right decision.

Remember when we went over Romans 1:17? It said For in *the gospel* the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "*The just shall live by faith.*"

This new life is lived on the basis of faith. It is made by trusting God enough to do what He says and to believe what He tells us. It is not made by trusting flesh. It is not made by depending on intuition or feelings. It is lived by faith.

Paul is just telling us how that is **fleshed out** in circumstances where we are not sure. We must either become sure or avoid the thing.

23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

This verse tells us that we are in the wrong, no matter how ok the thing is that we did. The bigger issue is not that we are correct. The bigger issue is that we are living by faith.

Do you see how this works? Suppose a man is a brilliant scholar but has no faith in God. He reads scripture and can discern technically what thing is moral and what thing is immoral in God's eyes. And then assume that this man could actually **do** the moral things. Every single thing he does condemns him. Every single thing proves him to be in the wrong. Because he has no faith. He is not **in the faith**. He is not living to please Christ in the only way that Christ is pleased.... By faith.

Then take the most ignorant person who comes to Christ. He does not have the gift of proper reason. He cannot discern the difficult concepts. He tends to believe that most everything is wrong. And in his all encompassing desire to please Christ, he forbids himself many of earth's pleasures. That man, if he loves his brothers who have freedoms he does not have, will be found most pleasing to Christ. And why is that? Is it because he has superior knowledge? Absolutely not. It is because the man lives by faith. It is because the man has a living breathing faith that **he started** in and that **he will finish in**.

Now let's consider the last phrase in our text.

for whatever is not from faith is sin.

Do you get just how powerful this statement is at the end of this chapter? The whole issue has been the consideration of what is right to do and what is wrong to do? What thing is lawful and what thing is sinful? What thing is technically forbidden and what thing is technically allowed?

So those in the weak party and those in the strong party are focused on the technicality of the issue. They think the sin consists on being technically correct.

But look how Paul shifts the focus. He moves it from being a technical theological issue to being an issue of relationship with Christ.

He says you may be right or wrong about the theology. But I can tell you this for sure. If you do something and you have doubts about it being the right thing, that is sin, **for sure**. You might get that other stuff **right or wrong**. You might believe something is ok for you to do but **it really isn't**. You might believe something is wrong to do, but **it really isn't**. Well as long as you are living by faith, that stuff is easily straightened out. It is simply an issue of being given a little more information. That is not a heart issue. But if you start doing things in your life based on strong compelling desires, things you feel you must do, you feel compelled to do, but you do it outside of knowing that it is ok **with Christ** to do, that is a serious issue. That is more important than those other issues.

Why is faith so important. Let's look at something John Piper wrote.

1. Paul's point in [Romans 4:20](#) is that faith glorifies God: "Abraham grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God." The reason faithless acts are sin is that they don't glorify God as trustworthy.
2. In [1 Corinthians 10:31](#), Paul said, "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." But you can't glorify God if you are dishonoring him by

- not trusting him. So where there is no faith, [1 Corinthians 10:31](#) is being disobeyed in every action (no matter how neutral in itself).
3. [Hebrews 11:6](#) says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Therefore, where there is no faith, all acts displease God.

John Piper also said in another writing the following
"The most penetrating and devastating definition of sin that I am aware of in Scripture is the last part of Romans 14:23: 'Whatever is not from faith is sin.' The reason it is penetrating is that it goes to the root of all sinful actions and attitudes, namely, the failure to trust God. And the reason it is devastating is that it sweeps away all our lists of dos and don'ts and makes anything, from preaching to house-painting, a candidate for sin. In the original language, this is stressed even more than in our versions: it says, 'Everything which is not from faith is sin.' Anything, absolutely any act or attitude which is owing to a lack of trust in God is sin, no matter how moral it may appear to men. God looks on the heart." (Piper, John. ["Whatever Is Not from Faith Is Sin"](#). 1980.)

Isn't the progression of thought in Romans interesting?

First it starts with all men in the state of sin.

Then we see how Christ's work sets the regenerate heart free from sin.

Then we attempt to determine the course that God wants believers to choose. And we disagree on some of those things. Some think they are sin.

And others don't. But we find as Paul progresses that **the sin of not considering our brothers in this process** is even greater than the issue of getting all the do's and don'ts correct. But here Paul takes it to its true end. Trace it to its source? Did this thing, this action, this motivation come **from the faith that Christ put in us?** Does it conform to the **faithful walk**, with us considering what it is that our Savior desires? If yes, it is good. If no, it is sin. Period. We like to make it more complicated than that. But Paul made it clear. Ultimately it is about our relationship with Christ.

whatever is not from faith is sin.

So we might think... well, that is helpful information. That will help me know if something is sin or not. And we can easily put that in the same objective world of those other issues of eating and drinking. But if we do that, we miss Paul's emphasis. God hates sin. Sin is what destroys his

creation. Sin is what cost Him the life of His Son. Sin is what caused Him to pour out His wrath upon Him that He most loved.

Sin is the worst evil. And living a life of sin is unfathomable for a person who is born again to please His Savior. So when Paul says, whatever is not from faith is sin, He is essentially saying to his audience, don't miss the point. You are fixated on the technicalities. But here is the core issue. Are you living by faith to please Christ? I don't care if you have this freedom or that freedom. Who are you living to please? If you don't have **pleasing Christ** as your top priority, all these other discussions are just a waste of time. They mean nothing. Faith has to be the driving factor. It has to be the motivation behind all this consideration. And if you don't have that, if you aren't exercising that, well....., the technicalities are just fodder. They mean nothing. And if you **are** living by faith, then even if you are technically wrong, that will be worked out.... If not here, then in eternity. You know, it is difficult to imagine coming into a new year on a better passage. Here is a phrase that instantly helps us put our Christian walk into perspective. Is this thing I am doing being done according to the faith I live in with Christ? Is this thing I am considering the thing that I am convinced is most pleasing to my Master? Is this thing of fleshly origins or faithful origins? Did it originate in my own strong desires for any number of things, or did it find its origins in the heart of God and **my** heart for Him?

We are allowed and encouraged to enjoy any number of wonderful things at God's hand. He wants us to enjoy His **presence** and the **presents** he bestows us with. Every good and perfect gift comes from God's hand after all. We are free to enjoy that which God has for us. But we are not allowed the option to have those things we get **outside of our relationship to Christ**. Those things are sin, even if they wouldn't be sinful in themselves. They are sinful to us because they are not by received by faith.

Maybe 2014 is the year to clear the air. Maybe it is the year for clarity in our lives. Maybe we should put this phrase somewhere where we can see it every day.

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Along with this I would like to challenge you to play a game. Jeremiah and Sam and I played this game years ago and I think it was helpful to them. It is a game that is intended to bring attention to how we are living, how we are spending our time.

Hopefully you got one of these already. (see end pages of sermon)

The game is simple. You assign a value to your time based on what you did with that time. Now I understand everything about this game is **arbitrary**. There is nothing that represents God's authority or God's true score on your life. It is not designed to **pronounce God's score** on your life. But it is designed to bring attention to the value of those things you are committed to. The first step to improvement in any area of our lives is recognizing where we have room for improvement and to recognize where we might be failing. I think you will find this game very helpful in drawing attention to what you are doing with your life. That is really all it is intended for. Your scores are yours. They are private. Sam and Jeremiah and I made it a competition. It was kinda fun. But that is not really what it is for. It is for you. And it is to answer the question, how am I living a faithful life? Am I using the time I have been given wisely? Or am I wasting it? Am I living by faith or by flesh?

I hope you will join with me this week in playing this game. But more importantly I hope we will together consider why we are doing what we are doing. Is what we are doing by faith? Or is it faithless and sinful?

What is your worship worth?

Life is the process of displaying to Christ what He is worth to us. That is worship. We show Christ's worth to us by how we spend our hours, our thoughts, our money. What are we displaying about Christ's worth by these things?

What I am proposing is a game. What I hope to accomplish is to show us all how much better we could be using our time and what that better use of time is worth.

All of the scores are arbitrary. A heathen could win this game and a saint could lose it, so it does not measure spirituality. But it is a challenge to spend time instead of wasting it and to choose best things over better or worse things.

Rules- every hour on the calendar will get a value of -20 to 10. You will place the letter and the value on each hour of the calendar as you complete it. The value is determined by what the majority of that hour was used for. Only one value (the highest) should be chosen if you are doing two things during that hour.

These are the values

- A- 10 Bible Study/Prayer on a day when you get all the work done that was reasonably expected of you.
- B- 4 Bible Study/Prayer on a day that you did not complete the work that was reasonably expected of you
- C- 10 Ministry to others- This is real active ministry of sharing the Word to help another believer or to evangelize a non believer
- D- 10 Getting biblical help from another believer for a specific need or problem that was initiated by you
- E- 6 Getting Biblical correction or guidance that you didn't ask for (often by parents)
- F- 8 Attendance in church, Sunday School or Bible Study class
- G-10 Teaching at Sunday School or Bible Study class or other spiritually oriented presentation
- H-8 Work in service to the church in some way- facilities or people's needs
- I-6 Household work, School or earning a living work, driving for family needs, errands, etc.
- J-0 Eating
- K- 1 For each hour sleeping from 1-10 hours per night
- L- -2 For each hour slept over 10 hours
- M- 0 For each hour watching tv, dvds, videos, pc, playing computer or video games,
- N- 1 Facebook, etc and spending time relating with friends (not watching tv or playing video games, etc)
- O- 1 Hygiene- taking a shower, etc
- P- 3 Reading decent material

Q- 3 Outdoor Recreation

R- 1 Indoor Recreation (not watching tv, etc)

S- 4 Exercise (that is truly getting you more in shape- high energy- sports, walking, weightlifting, etc.)

Z- -20 Time spent participating in anything that you suspect may not be right- attitude or action (sin)

