

I. Introduction and review.

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

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

1. Paul is not saying every doctrinal view and moral practice is to be tolerated.
13:13 Gal. 1:6-9 4:9-10 Col. 2:16f I Co. 5:11 Heb. 13:4
2. Nor is Paul saying these are issues on which one should have no conviction, or that everyone is right and no-one is wrong. v. 5,14 15:1
3. The great challenge in studying these matters is that very few believe they are weak or they regard their personal convictions as matters of Christian liberty.
4. How can we know what is primary and what is secondary?
5. Why do Christians differ on so many issues? Phil. 3:12

B. Issues of conscience in the early church.

1. Diet. v. 2a,14 I Co. 8:1ff Gal. 2:11f Daniel 1:3f Ex. 23:29 Lev. 11 Mark 7:15-19 Acts 10:15f 15:5 I Ti. 4:1-5
2. Drink. v. 21 John 2:1-10 I Ti. 5:23 I Co. 11:20-22
3. Days. v. 5 Col. 2:16-17

C. Paul is teaching principles which apply to all believers in at all times and places.

1. The Jewish background of many in the early church raised many questions.
2. Christians have similar differences about other issues at different times and places.

D. Christians today have differences of conviction in certain areas.

1. Diet and health. I Co. 6:19-20 I Tim. 4:8
2. Drink: May Christians partake of alcoholic beverages? John 2:1-10 I Ti. 5:23
3. Days. Gen. 2:1-3 Ex. 20:8-11 Col. 2:16-17 I Co. 16:2 Gal. 4:10-11 Rev. 1:10 Acts 20:7 He. 10:25 Luke 14:1ff
4. Dress. I Ti. 2:9 I Pe. 3:3 Ps. 29:2 I Co. 11:1f 9:19ff Isa. 3:21 Gen. 24:47 Ex. 21:6
5. Entertainment. Eph. 5:3-4 Ps. 101:3 Ex. 20:7
6. Family issues. Gen. 1:28 2:24 Deut. 6:7f Titus 2:3-5
7. Lifestyle. I Co. 16:1-2 I Ti. 6:17-19 Prov. 21:17
8. How active should believers be in politics and social issues? Jer. 29:4ff Jo. 18:36
9. Worship. I Co. 11:5 14:34 I Tim. 2:11ff

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

F. Paul calls believers with differing convictions on secondary issues to unite in love.

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

A. Warmly welcome one another without qualification. v. 1 15:7 Phm. 1:12,17 Acts 18:26

1. Those you regard as weak are to be fully accepted into fellowship as believers.
2. This has very important implications for church membership.
3. This has important implications beyond church membership: accept one another!
4. Don't making correcting the weak brother your primary agenda. v. 1b Phil. 2:14
5. Love assumes the best – that he is seeking to follow what Scripture says. I Co. 13:7

- B. The strong (or those who think they are strong) should not despise the weak. v. 3a
 - 1. Those who know their liberty will be tempted to look down upon those who are unnecessarily strict. Luke 18:9
 - 2. Weakness is not inconsistent with devotion to Christ.
 - 3. If you are strong, it is only by the grace of God. I Th. 5:14

- C. The weak should not judge the strong. v. 3b Js. 4:12 Mt. 7:1-5 Luke 18:9
 - 1. Those who are more scrupulous will be tempted to view themselves as the holy remnant against the libertine majority.
 - 2. Because these matters of conscience are matters of conviction, it is very hard for the weak to be tolerant.
 - 3. The weak cannot impose their strict requirements on the strong. Col. 2:16-17

- D. Each should be fully convinced in his own conscience how he can best serve God. v. 5b
 - 1. Paul is not saying these issues don't matter or that we shouldn't bother to think about them.
 - 2. Take these matters seriously and carefully think them through biblically.
 - 3. Don't go against your own conscience to please men. 14:23 Pr. 29:25 Ga. 1
 - 4. Don't impose your personal convictions on others. I Co. 8:9-13
 - 5. What matters is that all are striving to please the Lord. v. 6-8

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

- A. God has accepted your brother. v. 3b 15:7 Phil. 3:9

- B. Your brother is accountable to God who sustains him. v. 4 8:33-34 I Co. 4:3-5 Phil. 1:6 Jude 24 Jo. 10:27-28

- C. Your brother thinks and acts as he does for the Lord's sake. v. 6-9 I Ti. 4:3-5 I Co. 10:31 6:20 Acts 20:28 2:36 I Pe. 1:18 Phil. 1:21 2:9-11

- D. You too are accountable to God. v. 10-12 Isa. 45:23 Phil. 2:9-11
 - 1. Your concern should be your own relationship with the Lord. Mt. 12:36-37 25:26
 - 2. In what sense will we all be judged? II Co. 5:10 Ecc. 12:14 Eph. 6:8 Rev. 20:11f
 - a. Christ has already turned away God's wrath against our sin. 8:38-39
 - b. We will be judged as to our faithfulness: rewards (and regrets?). I Co. 3:10-15 9:25-27 II Ti. 4:7-8 Heb. 13:17

V. Concluding applications.

Discussion questions

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