**PRINCIPLES FOR PERSONAL CONVICTIONS**

Sunday School Lesson 12

*Bible Principles for Daily Living*

Romans 14

8/28/2022

**Introduction:** In Romans 14, Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit addresses the issue of eating different types of meat. While this isn’t much of an issue in our day or in our culture, we know that this was a struggle for those living during the days of the early church. There were many disputes regarding the practice of eating meats. One group that was made up of mostly converted Gentiles did not think it was much of an issue, and it did not bother them to eat any meat available. Another group that was made up of mostly converted Jews saw the practice of eating unclean meat as something that should be absolutely avoided. We know from the book of Acts that the leaders in the church in Jerusalem tried to settle this issue between the two groups. In Romans 14:1, the word *disputation* leads us to the conclusion that there are things that believers may be inclined to disagree or dispute about. We know that we are not to receive a weak Christian to doubtful disputations. We tend to look at that more as not receiving a believer who is going to cast doubt and dispute doctrine in the church, but the context of Romans 14 shows us that this is first speaking about unnecessary disputes over issues that do nothing but cast doubt or cause confusion to weak believers. Imagine being a new believer in the early church and being condemned by a Jewish believer for eating a plate of pork. Needless to say, it’s important for us to have some Bible principles for dealing with convictions that individual believers have.

1. **TO ESTABLISH WHAT A PERSONAL CONVICTION IS, WE MUST HAVE CLEAR DOCTRINE.**

* You cannot establish what a personal conviction is if you do not have clear doctrine. We must be careful not to blur the lines between our doctrine and our personal convictions. We do not want to be like the Pharisees who taught the commandments of men as if they were doctrines. Jesus expressly warns of such behavior in Matthew 15:9. To the new Christian, we can cause much damage to them if we do not help them understand the doctrines that our faith is based upon. These doctrines are indisputable. These doctrines are the absolute minimum dividing line in our friendships and fellowships. The churches in the book of Revelation were reprimanded for not separating from those who had different doctrines from what the Word of God teaches (Revelation 2:14-15, 24; 2 John 1:9-10; Hebrews 13:9; Titus 2:1; 2 Timothy 4:2-3; 1 Timothy 6:3). While we deal with convictions in Romans 14, we find that Romans 16:17 tells us to mark those which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrines which we have learned. We are to avoid such individuals. Let’s be sure to stand unwavering in our doctrine.

1. **TO ESTABLISH WHAT A PERSONAL CONVICTION IS, WE MUST BE OBEDIENT SERVANTS.**

* In Romans 14:4, we are reminded that we are all servants of the Lord. He is the One who gives out the commands. Thus, we understand that if the Word of God says clearly that we ought to do something, there is no disputing of that. Again, a Biblical commandment is not something that is left up to personal conviction. If we love Him, we will keep His commandments (John 14:15). Paul himself was careful to clarify in the epistle to the church at Corinth regarding a personal conviction compared to a command (1 Corinthians 7:19-25; 14:34-37). Regarding circumcision, he acknowledged that it was primarily about obedience to the commandment of the Lord. We serve Christ (vs. 18). When it comes to obedience, we also understand that we have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. The Bible shows us that He is our teacher (1 Cor. 2:13). He gives us instruction. Thus, our convictions are affected by obedience to Him.

1. **OUR PERSONAL CONVICTIONS MUST BE HELD IN FAITH.**

* In Romans 14:5, the Bible tells us that it is important that we are fully persuaded in what we do and the convictions that we hold to. We are to do everything in faith. This is what verses 22 and 23 address. Whatsoever is not of faith is sin. That is the standard set for all of our decisions and convictions. Are we holding them in faith? The Lord does not want us to do anything for Him in doubt. He does not want for us to be unstable or fearful in our Christian walk. We must ask ourselves what is the motivator behind our convictions? We ought to be holding them unto the Lord. For the person who regards one day above another, does he do it with sincerity of faith unto the Lord? Regarding meat, Paul was fully persuaded by his faith in the Lord that the meats were not unclean to him (verse 14).

1. **OUR PERSONAL CONVICTIONS MUST BE HELD WITH ACCOUNTABILITY IN MIND.**

* In Romans 14:7-12, we are reminded that every one of us is going to have to stand before the Lord and give an account for our life. This truth ought to be a driver in our personal convictions. We know that we will be held accountable for what we have done with the life that the Lord has given us. We will be held accountable for the talents that we have (Matthew 25:15-28). We know that Matthew 12:36 warns us that we will be held accountable for every idle word that is spoken. With that in mind, we ought to definitely take good caution to the personal convictions that we hold to. While we may have liberty, we ought to consider whether each conviction we have results in something that is expedient to us for the cause of Christ. What would happen if we based every decision upon the thought of whether the Lord is pleased in what we are doing? I think it would probably alleviate much of the discomfort and difficulty that comes along with discussing the personal convictions that we each hold to.

1. **OUR PERSONAL CONVICTIONS MUST BE HELD WITH PEACE AND EDIFICATION.**

* In Romans 14:19, we are given the key to how to handle our personal convictions in relationship to other Christians. We are to handle them with peace in mind. The kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (vs. 17). We are to follow after the things which make for peace. Thus, we are to strive to not allow our personal convictions to cause contention and divisions among believers. To be sure that we do not take this idea too far in the wrong direction, the Bible then instructs us to follow after things wherewith one may edify another. If we give in to peace to the point where we are never edifying one another, then we are not being good friends and sharpening each other as we ought to. When you go to interact with others and follow through on your own personal convictions, consider whether you are helping to edify them to serve the Lord and also to keep peace. If you are trying to undermine someone’s own personal convictions all of the time, what edification are you providing to them in the Lord? (1 Timothy 1:4; Ephesians 4:29; 1 Corinthians 10:23; Romans 15:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:11)

1. **OUR PERSONAL CONVICTIONS MUST BE HELD WITH CHARITY FOR OTHER BELIEVERS.**

* In Romans 14:15-16, we see that the other ingredient alongside peace and edification that is needed with our personal convictions is charity. We ought to behave ourselves with love of others in mind. Imagine how frustrating and divisive the issue of meat eating likely was for both the Gentiles and the Jews. Do you think there was ever a desire for a believing Gentile to flaunt his meat eating in front of a believing Jew? How about for a Jew to look with disdain upon a Gentile as he was eating unclean meat? This one issue had a real chance to flare up animosity and bitterness between these two parties. Knowing this, the Bible warns in verses 15 and again in 20 not to destroy the work of God over meat. While the eating of unclean meat is not sinful, Paul warns that it would be evil to eat unclean meat for the purpose of offending another brother in Christ. Again, this is a call to check our motives in how we handle our personal convictions. Are we handling them with charity in mind for our fellow Christians? (1 Cor. 13)

1. **OUR PERSONAL CONVICTIONS MUST BE HELD WITH REGARD FOR WHAT IS GOOD.**

* James 4:17 tells us that to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. If we hold a personal conviction that something is good and profitable for us to do in following the Lord, then we ought to follow through with that and do it. Likewise, we ought not to cast a stumblingblock in front of others as they seek to do good in their service to the Lord. To be clear, this is not speaking to private interpretations of the Scripture (2 Peter 1:20). We know that it is not good to do that which is right in our own eyes (Judges 17:6). This is regarding those things where we do not have a clear Scriptural command on, and we are left to determine with the Holy Spirit’s leading what is good and profitable for us and our families. Simply put, personal convictions are a result of Holy Spirit conviction. Thus, if we do not do that which we know to be good to do, we are quenching the leading of the Holy Spirit. We then will harden our hearts and sear our conscience to what the Lord wants for us to do. Let’s hold to our personal convictions with faith, charity, peace, edifying, accountability, and a desire to please God.