

From chapter 12 the apostle is marking out our path as redeemed saints in a wicked world and our relationships with one another as members of one body. We are gifted to serve, as loving human beings loving one another and even loving our enemies. Our walk is not conformed to the world, but transformed, more and more like Christ over time walking with Him. And our lives are to be above reproach morally and ethically, alert and active in serving the Lord. There is no room for compromise or laxity regarding moral uprightness or for unrighteousness in our conduct.

But there is one more very important aspect of our Christian lives to consider. Tolerance. Our acceptance of one another's differences in personal conscience while living for and serving the Lord. (Tolerance has become a byword of the world nowadays. Much evil is allowed, practiced and even celebrated in the name of tolerance. This happens in all facets of secular life where the whole concept of absolute truth and knowledge is not only seriously questioned but denied. [Truth is not tolerated.] Even in so called science the blinders are on regarding any thing to do with the idea of creation. The history of man outlined in Romans one, two and three is repeating itself again. But as the last few verses of chapter 13 clearly show God has not lowered His moral standards for those saved by grace. We are not to tolerate sin!)

In uniting us together in love God has not removed our personal responsibility to walk with the Lord in the details of our lives that are, what might be termed, "morally indifferent." There are many things in our daily lives and our whole outlook on life, that will differ in each other though all of us are Christians. Things such as personal diet, occupation, home furnishings, make or model of car, vocation, marriage, size of family, choice of school, job, family outings or vacations, clothing styles, etc., can all vary widely without being immoral or unrighteous in nature. Some of our differences will naturally lead to "incompatibilities" among us and perhaps friction. When religious practices differ strong feelings can arise. Feelings which will tend to separate us from one another. While sadly there are indeed issues that must separate professing Christians from one another we must be very aware of the difference between these and those issues of "moral indifference." How do we know the difference? This is what Paul speaks to in chapter 14 through 15:13.

Several principles are laid out and illustrated with examples.

First we are to be accepting toward one who we observe to be "weak in the faith." We might regard one who personally observes a dietary restriction for conscious

sake as weak. Maybe he is weak. But he or she is still God's child and is faithfully attempting to please and serve God the best he knows how. He answers to God not to me. If he strays into sin I am to go after him to retrieve him. Otherwise I am to avoid disputes over unimportant differences in thinking and daily life. I certainly have no place belittling him and judging him. He answers to the Lord for his conscience and decisions. I am to get along with him and he with me and each of us allows for the other's "weakness." (He or she may actually regard me as "weak in the faith." Maybe I am.) I walk with him and he walks with me. I love him and he loves me.

A recently converted Jew might retain an aversion to eating pork. That is to be expected if the person had been deeply "religious" as was Saul of Tarsus. Or he may have unconverted relatives and friends that would be irretrievably offended if they saw that rituals and customs were being snubbed. Paul deals with that in 1Corinthians 9.

19 For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

20 And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; 21 To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. 22 To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23 And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.

Persons converted out of Catholicism or other ritualistic "Christian Churches" may also keep days or refrain from meat on certain days. Their love for the Lord is strong, though uninstructed. These habits will tend to drop off as these "weak believers" learn the extent of their newly acquired liberty in Christ. Liberty from putting themselves under Moses' Law or some other self imposed standard or rules of godly behavior. While some believers call that "legalism" that term is not found in scripture. The liberty found in Christ is real. However "liberty" is not to be forced against the "weak" believer's conscience. To do that is sin, for it seeks to lead one of God's own to act against his own conscience toward his God and Savior. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin," v. 23. A vast comprehensive principle is presented here. We are each the Lord's. We are privileged to LIVE! Intended to LIVE! To LIVE unto the Lord. Live and walk with a good conscience with Christ our Lord and Saviour. What a wonderful truth. Each of us is to have, and actually can have, a good conscience before the Lord.

Mankind acquired conscience, the knowledge of good and evil, through the first sin in the garden of Eden. One's

For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.

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conscience is easily defiled (dirty) and if left uncleansed and unchecked becomes seared – without feeling.

Titus 1:15 *Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.*

1Timothy 4:2 *Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;*

But a believer can exercise the conscience and can be assured that it is indeed clean.

Hebrews 5:13 *For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. 14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

Paul strongly exhorts us not to judge or condemn a brother in Christ. How can we, saved by grace, set at nought our own fellow believer – our brother who was saved by the same grace, the same faith, the same Lord and the same death on the cross? Do we dare usurp Christ's authority and Lordship over His own people? Won't He hold each of us to account for our lives before Him? Has He died for us, bought us with His blood, and we not be held responsible to Him for our daily lives? Make no mistake, our sins are already washed away by His shed blood. Yes, we will, each and all believers, stand before the Judgement seat of Christ but not to be judged and condemned for our sins. He will review our lives with us rewarding what was for Him and cleanse, burn off, what was not. He cleanses us, prepares us and clothes us to enjoy eternal life in heaven with Him. The sins we are aware of here in this life we are to confess now and be forgiven and cleansed right now.

John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

When we reach heaven, those sins we haven't confessed here will be brought before us and freely confessed. We will be cleansed. We will then have a perfectly pure conscience forever. Will there be shame? Tears? Yes! Why? Tears of gratitude and worship for His love and grace in dying for our sins and drawing us to Him. And to Him for tolerating our bad manners and hardness of heart since. The Good Shepherd indeed!

Other scriptures touch on other aspects of this Judgement Seat before which all believers will appear. It is clearly distinct from that Great White Throne that awaits those who die in their sins, Revelation 20. Those there will be judged according to their works as recorded in the books God keeps on them. But Christ bore God's judgement for the sins of those whose have put their trust in Him. **EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW!** For He is worthy.

Philippians 2:1 *If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, 2 Fulfil ye my joy, that*

ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. 3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. 4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. 5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. 9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: 10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; 11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus Himself gives us a rich insight into the coming judgement.

John 5:20 *For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. 21 For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. 22 **For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:** 23 That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. 24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth {on*} him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. 25 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. 26 For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; 27 And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. 28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, 29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. 30 I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.*

*["on" is not in best translations]

The Judgement Seat is also spoken of in 2Corinthians 5 as the judgement seat of God. It is Christ sitting on behalf of God who gave Him, as man, authority to judge. There we receive rewards or not according to the deeds we have done in the body. In 1Corinthians 3 the Judge purges away worthless works we have attempted using unsuitable, perishable materials. We ourselves are saved but maybe as through fire. But **then** shall **every** man (believer) have praise of God, 1Corintians 4:5.

Every knee shall bow! Be there to bow at the first Judgement Seat. Don't be too late!

By Ron Canner, February 13, 2008