

“Building up and Accepting One Another”

One question that nearly every Christian asks at some point in his life is, “When the Bible doesn’t speak about a given issue, how do I determine what is right and wrong?”

Now, first of all, in this age of relativism and denial of absolute truth we believe that everything that the Bible (especially the New Testament) says is right or wrong is absolute. All the commands and all the prohibitions are to be obeyed. What God commands is always right and what he prohibits is always wrong. About this there should be no argument. For example--

By way of review, in Romans chapters 12 & 13 God has commanded many things: These are *always right*. We are commanded to—

- Fully surrender our lives to the Lord
- Use or Exercise our spiritual gifts for the benefit of others
- Hate whatever is evil and cling to whatever is good
- Be devoted to one another in brotherly love
- Prefer one-another in honor
- Bless those who curse you
- Be in subjection to the laws of the land
- Pay your taxes
- Love one another

At the same time, some things are *prohibited* and therefore *are always wrong*. We are commanded **not to**—

- Be conformed to the way of thinking in this age
- Not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought

- Not to lag in diligence as we serve the Lord
- Not to be haughty in mind
- Not to pay back evil for evil or take our own revenge
- Not to any provision for our sinful nature

However, some things are not specifically covered. In those cases—

How do I determine whether or not something is right or wrong for me?

How do I decide about things that the Bible does not specifically mention?

What about substances? Foods for example? Health foods? Fast foods? Diets? Drinking wine or alcohol? Social drinking? Tobacco use?

How about Entertainment? Participating in sports or other activities on Sunday? Watching sports or TV. Movies at home or in the theater? Dancing? Card Playing? Pool? (right here in river city)! What about swimming? (Mixed bathing?).

Social Relationships: Dating or Courting? What to wear? What is appropriate and what is not? What is modest and what is not? Attending parties given by unsaved neighbors? Going with the guys to happy hour after work?

Religious activities: Home schooling, Private or Public Schooling? Weekly church attendance? Sunday School? Wednesday night prayer meeting? Sunday night church? Exactly how much money to give? Daily Devotions? The kind of music we sing at church? Whether or not we allow instruments in church?

In all these areas and more the New Testament is not specific. In all these cases that case you look for *principles from God's Word* and accurately apply them to the decision making process to determine whether something is right, wrong, or simply morally neutral (neither right or wrong).

Christians have differing opinions *even differing convictions* on some of these things – and they may be in the same church. None of these are supposed to be allowed to divide us- but far too often they do! In fact, some churches have whole denominations based on one of these issues! This is one of the *most sensitive* areas in churches today, and it was in the First Century as well.

We saw, last week, what Paul said in the first 12 verses of Romans chapter 14. From 14:1-15:7 the Apostle Paul is laying out the answers to the questions we are asking.

By way of Review— There is one Command vs. 3 and several reasons-

On matters where the Bible is silent, we are not to pass censorious judgments upon each other's convictions and opinions. The one who doesn't indulge tends to judge the one who does as "unspiritual." The one who indulges tends to despise the one who judges him.

So does that mean that everybody can do whatever he pleases?

Does it mean that we are free to do anything the Bible doesn't prohibit?

Not exactly? Beyond the specific law of the New Covenant, there is another principle that believers need to take into account: **The Law of Love. Whenever you make a decision ask yourself these _____ questions.**

1. Can what I am doing harm another person's potential for spiritual life or growth?

Never do anything that will hurt another person's *potential* for spiritual life or growth. That is what Paul means by the figure of putting an obstacle or stumbling block in a brother's way.

We were talking about this passage Friday night and my brother in law, Mike, shared a couple of incidents that illustrate it. Before Mike was a Christian he was a hard partier and a drinker in college. He drank vodka like soda pop and got blasted. When he became a Christian he gave up that lifestyle completely and became a tea-todler. After a time he grew in his Christian life and was appointed a Sunday school teacher in his church in Anna, Illinois. One afternoon he was having a meeting at Ramada Inn with some other men who were drinking and he, like them, had a frosted glass – but he was drinking Seven-up. One of the boys from his church worked at that restaurant and saw him there and *assumed* that he was drinking alcohol with the rest of them. That boy was a young Christian who looked up to Mike and it devastated him. He was shocked that his spiritual leader would do that! It got to the pastor of the church and Mike spent some time trying to clear it up and restore respect in the eyes of his class. He learned from that situation that it was important to avoid even the appearance of evil.

Read Verse 14: It is not the substance itself. It is what that young Christian thinks about the substance- that is the problem.

The issue is simply that-- as long as there are fellow Christians whose spiritual growth might be hindered, the believer is to be more concerned about that Christian than he is about his right and freedom to indulge! That is the Law of Love.

Read vs 15 We need to be careful about the choices that we make in every area lest it hurt others. This goes beyond brothers even to the world. Mike went on to share with me a second story.

He was attending a family wedding and he went to the punch bowl for a drink. He looked at the bowl of red punch and felt revolted because in college he got so drunk on red punch one time and so sick that he can't look at without almost gagging. So he went for the yellow punch, Got a glass for himself and my sister and headed back to the table.

Across the reception room his unsaved family members starting waving their hands and all over and telling him something. He thought, "what's happened?" He went over there and they said, "Didn't you see that bottle by the yellow punch. There's alcohol in that punch. Now they weren't saved. They were drinking the yellow punch, but they had the idea that Christians don't drink. They were watching him because they knew he was a Christian. In their minds, it didn't fit.

Now Mike had the freedom to drink that punch. One glass of punch wouldn't make him drunk, but it would ruin his testimony to his unbelieving family that he was trying to win to Christ! Their expectations were – right or wrong – sincere Christians don't drink! If Mike drinks – They lose respect and the impact of his testimony for Christ will be

destroyed. His family will say, Sure, just another hypocrite!
It could destroy any hope of family ever coming to Christ!

- (1) **Can this harm** another person's *potential* for spiritual life or growth.
2. **By doing this am I serving Christ and putting kingdom interests first?**

Read vs 16-17

The chief concern in my life ought not be MY own desires and freedoms, and rights and pleasures, but Christ's concerns. A neutral item, can become a moral item if it makes the cause of the kingdom suffer. There are bigger issues at stake than my personal enjoyments. Many Christians have forgotten that this life is a battle ground, not a playground! In the words of Neil Postman (1985) we in America are *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, while we are *Slouching toward Gomorrah*.

The emphasis in the Postmodern church today [Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz*] is on so called Christian freedom, which is really just license to do whatever you want—to a point. In a review Shane Walker comments, some of his readers will walk away even more confused, but more resolved to get another tattoo, another piercing, grow those dreads, attend another anarchist protest, or say another profanity. They will learn that watching *South Park* is not so bad, having crushes on lesbian pop stars is cool, and that smoking pot is an ambiguous moral question. Taken in isolation these are petty sins, but as a lifestyle they draw people away from Christ by confusing who he is and

inhibiting the joyful freedom experienced in obedience to him.

This is counterfeit spirituality. Our first question to ask about anything we do is “Will this please God?” Do I have a clear conscience before God in this?

Read vs 18.

3. The third question we need to ask is “Does this make for peace in the body of Christ and for the building of other believers.

Read Vs. 19-20

The world worries about “how cool” they can be. That’s not our concern. We’re concerned not about how I come off, but how Christ comes off when people look at me?

Walking in love means that you evaluate every thing you do by the effect it may have on others.

Do not destroy him for whom Christ died with your food 15
Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food- 20
You and I may have our own opinions and convictions, but for the benefit of others and for their good, we set them aside.

Chapter 15:1-6 summarizes the point and sets the perfect example before our eyes.

If you consider yourself having grown beyond a baby Christian, you ought to bear the weaknesses, failings foibles and convictions of others and to strive to please your neighbor rather than yourself.

A few years ago there was a good man in our home the congregation in Springfield, Illinois. He was a nice Christian man who lived a good moral life, but he had one failing- he

was totally convinced that the only version of the Bible that could be used was the KJV. He believed that the Apostles used the KJV and no amount of argument could persuade him. He had his mind made up and refused to be disturbed by the facts that KJV came into existence in 1611 and has been revised many times since. He would go ballistic if you argued the point with him, but otherwise he was ok. Now he never taught a class and he attended the pastors SS class (who happened to use the KJV) so the issue didn't come up – much-! So the people of that church accepted him – weird as he was on that point- uninformed as he remained and they just avoided it or smiled when he went off on his hobby horse- and literally bore it- for his sake.

Paul takes to Christ the ultimate example of Jesus Christ, God the Son, who pleased the Father *all the way to the cross!* *Jesus is the example of one who did not please himself but lived his life for the good and benefit of others –*

It is the goal of our faith that we accept one another just as Christ accepted us to the glory of God. The goal is Christian unity and love that accepts one another instead of judging and condemning one another.

CONCLUSION

Is this how we are at West-Plex Community Church? Although differing in opinions and convictions are we able to so accept and love each other that we can with one voice glorify God together. Do others see the unity of the Holy Spirit preserved here in the bond of peace? Or are we critical, censorious, fault-finding and concerned about pleasing ourselves rather than others? In view of the way that Christ has loved us and loves our brothers, how can we do anything that would harm even one of these little ones?

Let us determine to live under the law of love, Never to do anything that might **harm another person's potential for spiritual life or growth?**

Let us so value the ones for whom Christ died that we place their spiritual interests above our own temporal pleasures.

Let us pursue the things that make for peace and the building up of one another.

Let us accept one another just as Christ accepted us, to the glory of God. If this is to happen, we need God to change our hearts.

Chorus Change my heart of God.

Benediction: Rom 15:5-6