

SERMON APPLICATION GUIDE

Romans 14:1-12

Ice Breaker: What is one evidence of God's grace you've seen this week?

Ice Breaker: What's one non-essential food item you wouldn't want to live without?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. **Context:** What is the dispute that these Christians seem to be quarreling over in our text?
2. How does Paul want us to understand who is "weak" and who is "strong" in this church? What characterizes them both? Is one group of Christians innocent or guilty? Why or why not?
3. Both the "weak" and the "strong" Christians are struggling over an issue of conscience. What is your conscience and how does the bible talk about it? Read these passages and make notes of how the Bible talks about conscience: **Acts 23:1, 24:16, Romans 2:14-16, 1 Corinthians 8:7, 10:29-31; Hebrews 9:14, 10:22; 1 Timothy 1:5, 4:1-3; Titus 1:15-16.** *For further study on conscience see recommended resources below*
4. What has shaped the consciences of these Jewish and Gentile believers? What are the factors that shape our conscience? What ought to be primary shaper of our conscience?
5. How does Paul address this difference of conscience between these believers? What does he command both sides to do?
6. Why do these believers not need to pass judgement on one another? How is it that both these groups of Christians can honor the Lord even if their consciences are different?
7. Take some time as a Small Group to identify some current issues of conscience (things Christians can disagree about) and gospel issues (things that all Christians must agree). *We will talk more about this in week 3 of this sermon series.*
8. What does this passage apply to the issues of conscience we face today in the church? How can we make sure we don't despise another believer over an issue of conscience?
9. What does it look like to honor Jesus when you are aware or unaware of someone's difference in conscience?

Further Resources on Conscience:

- [Conscience](#) by Andy Nasselli (available at the book wall)
- [Finding the Right Hills to Die On](#) by Gavin Ortlund (available at the book wall)

- [How Can I Love Church Members with Different Politics?](#) By Jonathan Leeman & Andy Naselli (available at the book wall)
- [The Art of Turning: From Sin to Christ for a Joyfully Clear Conscience](#) by Kevin DeYoung

Clarifying Conscience by Eric Swanson

Definitions of Conscience

“The part of the mind that makes you aware of your actions as being either morally right or wrong” – Merriam-Webster Dictionary¹

“Faculty within humanity that assesses what is good and what is bad” - Kevin DeYoung²

“The conscience is your consciousness of what you believe is right and wrong” –Andy Naselli & J.D. Crowley.³

Conscience Clarified: The Nature of Conscience

- 1) Only humans have the capacity for conscience.
- 2) Both Christians and non-Christians have a conscience. (Gen. 1:27, Romans 2:14-16, Psalm 139:13-16)

“or when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.” (Romans 2:14-15)

- 3) Conscience is a gift from God. (Rom. 14:22b)

“Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.” (Romans 14:22b)

¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conscience>

² DeYoung, Kevin. *The Case for Conscience*. Sermon delivered, October 16, 2011. University Reformed Church, East Lansing, Michigan. <https://www.universityreformedchurch.org/sermons/the-case-for-conscience/>

³ Naselli, Andy & Crowley, J.D. *Conscience*, Crossway Publishers: Wheaton, Ill: 2016.

- 4) Uniquely personal to you but it is not secret.(I Cor. 10:29, Romans 14, I Cor. 8, I Cor. 3: 4:4)

"I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience?" (1 Corinthians 10:29)

"...God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus." (Romans 2:16 ESV)

"Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart." (1 Corinthians 4:5 ESV)

- 5) Your conscience will accuse and excuse you.

- 6) Your conscience is guide.

- 7) Your conscience is not infallible.

- 8) Your conscience can change (Romans 8:29, I Peter 1:14-15, Rom. 12:2)

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2)

"And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done" (Romans 1:28)

Five Kinds of Conscience

- 1) An evil conscience (Heb. 10:22)

"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." (Hebrews 10:22)

2) A seared conscience (I Tim 4:1-2, I Thess. 5:19)

"Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared..." (1 Timothy 4:1-5)

3) A Defiled conscience (Titus 1:15-16, I Peter 4:3-5)

*"To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their **consciences are defiled**. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work." (Titus 1:15-16)*

"for the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." (1 Peter 4:3-5)

4) A Weak conscience (I Corinthians 8:7,12, Acts 10:9-16, Rom. 14:23)

"However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled." (1 Corinthians 8:7)

"But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." (Romans 14:23)

"Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ." (1 Corinthians 8:12)

5) A good & clear conscience (Acts 24:16, I Tim 1:5, Heb. 9:14, Heb. 10:22)

"So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man." (Acts 24:16)

"The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." (1 Timothy 1:5)

Cultivating a Clean Conscience

6 Conscience Imperatives

1) Listen to your conscience

"Conscience can't make a wrong thing right, but it can make a right thing wrong" – Mark Dever

8 questions to ask when deciding whether or not to indulge in an activity⁴

1. Am I fully persuaded that this is right?
2. Can I do this unto the Lord?
3. Can I do this without being a stumbling block to my brother or sister in Christ?
4. Does it bring peace?
5. Does it edify my brother or sister?
6. Is it profitable?
7. Does it enslave me?
8. Does it bring glory to God?

2) Seek to mold your conscience by God's word

"Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen." ⁵

- Martin Luther (1521, Diet of Worms)

3) Don't despise a sensitive conscience

4) Pray for an alarmed conscience

"Keep back your servant from presumptuous sins, let them not have dominion over me." (Ps. 19:13)

5) Confess and repent when your conscience rightly condemns you (1 John 1:9)

6) Rehearse the gospel daily, always (Romans 8:1, I John 3:19-22, Heb. 10:22)

⁴ John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinber, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL; Crossway, 2010), 53-55.

⁵ Roland H Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martyn Luther* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950), 182.

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1 ESV)

Conscience in Community⁶

1. Welcome those who disagree with you. (Rom. 14:1-2)
2. Don't look down on those who may have a weak conscience. (Rom. 14:3-4)
3. Those who have put restrictions on their conscience, do not judge those who partake in their freedoms. (Rom. 14:3-4)
4. Each person must be fully convinced in their own mind. (Rom. 14:5)
5. Assume other are partaking and refraining for the glory of God. (Rom. 14:6-9)
6. Don't judge others in matters on opinion for we all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. (Rom. 14: 10-12)
7. Don't let your freedom destroy the faith of a weaker brother. (Rom. 14:13-14)
8. Remember that the main goal in the church is to build one another up in Christ. (Rom. 14:16-21).
9. If you have freedom, don't flaunt it; if you are strict, don't hold others to the same standard. (Rom. 14:22a)
10. A person who lives according to their conscience is blessed. (Rom. 14:22b-23)
11. Put others before ourselves as Christ did for us. (Rom. 15:1-6)
12. When we welcome one another in we bring glory to God. (Rom. 15:7)

⁶ This section taken from: Naselli, Andy & Crowley, J.D. *Conscience*, Crossway Publishers: Wheaton, Ill: 2016.