

A Blameless Conscience Despite Different Convictions In The Body

by Jeremy Utley

This sermon emphasizes the importance of handling differences in convictions within the church community with care and love. It highlights the need to prioritize unity and consider the weaker members, focusing on being willing to be weak for the Lord's sake and being considerate of those with more restrictive convictions. The speaker shares personal experiences and insights on how submitting to the weaker brother can lead to growth in righteousness and deeper spiritual understanding.

Scripture: Romans 14:13, 1 Corinthians 8:11, Romans 14:23, 1 Corinthians 8:13, Romans 14:15, Romans 14:4, Romans 14:23, 1 Corinthians 8:9, Romans 14:13

Topics: "Unity in Diversity", "Consideration for the Weaker Brother"

Description

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Transcript

Hi church family, nice to see everybody today. I wanted to talk today about some practical question that's come to my mind as we live in close proximity to one another. One of the beautiful privileges, one of the incredible gifts of God in the church is we get to see one another's lives.

As we've heard Jesus said to those who inquired with him, he said, come and see. And as we've heard, we in the new covenant, when we're sincere disciples, if someone has a question or someone wants to know what Jesus is like, or what the life of Jesus looks like, we should be able to say, come and see. And as we live together, as we walk together in fellowship, and as we seek to be united, what I've realized is we can come and see different things.

And here's what I, here's what I mean. Let me just define that for a second. Our goal is the same.

We all are striving. It's on the banner outside of the building here. It's on our website.

Our goal is Romans 8, verse 28 and 29 to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ and also to be fully functioning members of the body of Christ. So as it relates to our goal, we should be perfectly united, but there are areas in which we won't be perfectly united, namely matters of conscience, matters of conviction. There are certain areas where, that the Lord has allowed to remain gray, that aren't totally black and white, that aren't totally clear what quote unquote the right answer is.

And what I've noticed in my own life is, as I have come and seen in other people's lives, sometimes things are different. Sometimes my convictions are different than theirs. And what I wanted to share today is that even though there's variation in matters of conviction or in gray areas, we should be careful to be on our guard.

And what I mean by that is you can think about, there's two different kinds of differences in conviction. There's a difference in conviction where my convictions are stronger than someone else's. So maybe there's a brother or sister who feels that something is wrong and I don't think it's wrong.

And so my, or sorry, that would mean their convictions are stronger than mine. But then on the other side, there may be areas where my convictions are stronger, meaning I think something is wrong, but someone else doesn't think something is wrong. Whatever it may be, any area where there's permissible differences of opinion.

And what I wanted to talk about today is practically speaking, how do we conduct ourselves in the gray areas? Practically speaking, how do we conduct ourselves when we have a difference in conviction? When I have less freedom in my spirit than another brother in regards to some activity or something like that, the Bible calls that being weak. And when I have more freedom in my spirit, I feel more permissiveness in some, in regards to something that Bible calls that being strong. And one of the things that's very clear, if you look with me at Romans chapter 14, that I don't want to talk about, but I'll just mention because it's kind of the foundational truth.

Romans 14, there's two chapters that I want to look at today. One is Romans 14 and one is 1 Corinthians 8. But in Romans 14, if you look with me at verses three and four, Romans 14, verse three, the one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat. And the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats.

For God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servants of another? Or what we could say is, as God's servant, who are you to judge another one of God's servants? You aren't the master. To his own master, namely God, he stands or falls.

And he will stand for the Lord is able to make him stand. And again, if you look with me at verse 13, it says, therefore, let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this. And so what I want to say is one thing's crystal clear.

When we have differences in conviction, we must be careful not to judge one another. And that's not what I want to talk about today, but I just want to mention that because the Bible is very clear on that. In matters where there's permissible differences in sin or matters of conviction, where there's permissible differences in conviction, the temptation will be there to judge.

And we have to be very careful to not judge. As I said, that's not what I want to talk about today. Judgment is wrong for sure.

I remember once in, I think it's in Hero and My Sons, one thing Brother Zach mentions is someone who judges another person, it's worse than committing adultery. So I can say, hey, I don't lust with my eyes. I'm very careful not to commit adultery.

But if I judge my brother, even because of a matter of permissible difference in conviction, it's worse than committing adultery. So the fact that I'm not going to talk about judging doesn't mean it's not important. It's actually very important.

But what I want to talk about is, practically speaking, what do I do when I'm weak? Josiah, would you mind to put up the first slide? Practically speaking, what do I do when I'm strong? It's almost like, okay, it's almost like there's an arm wrestling contest between the convictions here. What do I do when I'm on this side, when I'm weak? And meaning my convictions are greater than someone else's. And what do I do when I'm strong, when my convictions are maybe lesser than someone else's? And I want to talk about both of those things.

Because I have, and the reason I'm sharing this today is because the Lord has been leading me in this in my own life. So it's not ideas, it's what the Lord's actually been teaching me. So I'm going to share with you something that the Lord's been teaching me.

So let's start with, what do I do when I'm weak? When, what do I do when someone else's convictions are looser than mine? Someone maybe thinks something is fine to do, but I don't. What should I do? What should you do, children, if you feel like something's wrong, but someone who's a Christian, who's in CCF with you, who says, hey, it's just fine. But I think, I don't know if that's fine.

What should I do? Here's what came to my mind. When I'm weak, don't act like I'm strong. If I'm weak, live according to the conviction, the conviction the Lord has given me.

You can go to the next slide, I think, Josiah. You should, if there's a battle and you find yourself as the weak one, does that work? Yeah, that's it. That's it.

Good job. Yeah. Go with the weak side.

Say, I'm going to live according to that higher conviction. So, you know, the Holy Spirit gives the example of eating meat, sacrifice to should we eat meat or should we not eat meat? And what he says is someone who's weak in faith says, I can't eat meat. That's a, that's a high conviction.

Someone who's strong in faith says, I can eat meat. There's no such thing as an idol, right? And what does the Lord say? What should we do if we feel eating meat is wrong? Just to use that example. But another brother or sister says, there's nothing wrong with eating meat.

We have a difference in conviction and both of those convictions are allowable by the Holy Spirit. What should we do if we feel eating meat is wrong? We should be willing to be weak. We should not eat meat.

Even what, but even if your brother or sister who knows a lot more than you do says, Hey, there's nothing wrong with it. You can totally do it. We should live according to the conviction that God has put on our hearts.

And it says here, if you look at me at Romans 14 and verse 23, it says, he who doubts is condemned if he eats because his eating isn't from faith. Whatever isn't from faith is sin. So what we see there is if I, if I

think eating meat is wrong, as an example, if I think eating meat is wrong, but I, but I, but I'm at a potluck and I see some brother that I respect eating meat, I go, well, if he's doing it, I might as well.

That's, that's wrong. When I'm trying to act like I'm strong, I go, I'm just going to imitate somebody who I think is strong. And I'm just going to eat meat because they are.

And I guess it's okay. That's not what we should do. When we're weak, don't act like we're strong.

Be willing to be weak for the Lord's sake. It's very important to be willing. If the Lord has put a conviction on my heart, even if nobody else shares it to be willing to be weak for the Lord's sake.

And what I've noticed for myself is because I've seen that, you know, we live in close proximity with one another. There are things where people have differences of conviction. And what I've seen is for, and I'm just speaking from my own life, when, when I have a conviction about something, but I allow it to be a little bit loosened because someone else maybe doesn't share it, I find that my conscience is burdened later.

My conscience testifies to me, you shouldn't have done that. And there's a cloud in my conscience and it's not worth it. I've never compromised my convictions and felt good about it later.

And I haven't been able to reassure myself saying, Hey, this person who I really admire says this is okay. My conscience still doesn't give me rest. And what I've learned is the most precious thing is a clear conscience.

And even if everybody thinks something's okay, if the Lord puts a burden on my heart that something's not okay, be willing to be weak. And the reason what I've noticed is I become self-conscious. I don't want to be the restricted one.

I don't want my Lord to appear to be a Lord of less liberty than theirs. So what do I do? I, I, I make a compromise. I don't want to be the kind of, the kind of Christian who has a bunch of rules, right? That's how it feels in that moment.

But the Lord has encouraged me be willing to be weak for my sake. If I put a conviction on your heart, be willing to be weak for my sake. So if I'm weak, be willing to be weak.

If my conviction is higher than other people's don't lower my standard, no matter what others say. That's again, not in judgment, not at all, but say, Lord, it's before you, before his own master, he must stand. I'm not going to stand at the judgment seat before anyone.

I'm going to stand before the Lord. And ultimately the Lord and I know what he's put on my heart. And there's no reason to sacrifice a conviction that he's put on my heart just because I'm a little embarrassed or self-conscious or think maybe I just don't know as much.

That's what the Lord's taught me. And I've made mistakes in this area. So I'm speaking from a place of, I have compromised my conscience thinking, well, if somebody else thinks it's okay, it's okay.

And it's not gone well with me. And as I've sought the Lord to say, Lord, what's wrong? He says, you were living according to the standard of someone else's faith. You can't do that.

You have to live according to the light that I've given you. So that's the first thing is when I'm the weak one, what should I do? I should be willing to be weak. What about the other side? If you go to the next slide, it

should just be the arm wrestles again.

Okay. What about when I'm this guy or this gal, when I'm the strong one, when I feel a sense of liberty, when I feel a sense of permission, or to flip it around, when I sense from a brother or sister, their convictions are more restrictive than mine. They don't feel good about doing something that I feel totally fine doing.

What do I do then? I have freedom. They have a hesitation. And, you know, a lot of times the way it comes is, you know, in close relationships, someone might casually say, hey, what do you think about eating meat? You know, or have you ever wondered whether eating meat's appropriate? You know, the very kind of casual comments.

I'm just using that as an example. You all know I'm from Texas. I'm a barbecue lover.

So meat is not the point here. Please don't talk to me about meat. No, I'm kidding.

I'm just joking. But I mean, just using that as the example that the Bible gives, somebody can kind of casually say, hey, what do you think about this thing? And it's clear their conviction is more restrictive than mine, perhaps. Here, I've noticed a tendency, just like when I'm weak, I have a tendency to be embarrassed, and I don't want my Lord to be a Lord of restriction, and I tend to want to compromise.

Here, when I'm strong, you know what I want to do? I want to get defensive. Hey, whoa, whoa, whoa. The Bible doesn't say anything about meat.

What are you talking? Whoa. And I want to make an argument. That's my flesh.

That's a temptation of my flesh. And I want to, and especially, by the way, if I perceive, maybe there's some immaturity there, or maybe there's a little bit of weakness there. Some people don't know all the things that I know, right? That's what we can think.

If you look with me at 1 Corinthians chapter 8, these, by the way, I'm just going to look at a few verses in these two chapters, but if the Lord has put this question on your heart as well, I would encourage you to really study these two chapters, Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians chapter 8. I'm just looking at a few verses, but they're very, very helpful, I find, in practical application in the context of church life. But in 1 Corinthians 8, if you look with me at verse 4, it says, therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there's no such thing as an idol in the world. We know that there's no such thing, and that there's no God but one.

But, so we know something. And somebody says, hey, what do you think about eating meat? And I go, in my heart in that moment, I go, they have a weak conscience, but I know there's no such thing as an idol. What do I do when I know? And I use air quotes deliberately, because what do we really, let him who thinks he stand, take heed lest he fall.

And whenever that tendency to think, I know, comes in, look with me at verse 1. Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we have knowledge, but knowledge makes arrogance, and love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he is not known as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he's known by him.

And when we do have knowledge, the liberty, sorry, what do we do when our knowledge or the liberty that we feel surpasses someone else's? Someone else feels a hesitation where we feel freedom. To me, what the Lord has spoken to me, and again, in practical situations I've been experiencing in the last couple of weeks in my life, the question is, what do I value more? Being right or being considerate? It's true, there's no such thing as an idol. It's true, meat sacrifice to an idol is nothing.

But what about this brother for whom it seems to trouble them? Do I want to make my stand on my knowledge, or do I want to stand on the law of love? And I found, especially when I'm strong, to use that strong arm, when I'm strong, I can have a tendency to think that strength is the answer, but it's not. If you look with me for a second at Romans 14, just go back to Romans 14, I apologize to flip back there, and maybe hold your finger on 1 Corinthians 8 if you can. But in Romans 14, in verse 13, it says, therefore, let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this.

What should we determine? Not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. I know, Paul says, and I'm convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but to the one who thinks it's unclean, it actually is unclean. And if because of food, your brother's hurt, you're no longer walking according to love.

And then look at this word it says here, don't destroy with food him for whom Christ died. So three words stood out to me in these three verses. One is determined.

I want to be determined in my heart, what? Certainly not to not judge, but also to be careful not to cause someone else to stumble. When there's a difference in conviction, what matters most to me? Hopefully it's my brother's conscience being clear. Determining your heart, not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block.

And then the second word is, I should still be convinced. I know, and I'm convinced, verse 14. It doesn't mean that my belief or my understanding has to change.

I should still be convinced. That's fine. But then verse 15 says, don't destroy with food him for whom Christ died.

Don't destroy your brother. And if you look with me back at 1 Corinthians 8, in verse 11, he says, through your knowledge, he who is weak is ruined. So we have in Romans 14, don't destroy your brother.

And in 1 Corinthians 8, it says your brother will be ruined. It's a remarkable statement from the, you know, Paul, the apostle Paul, who knew that no meat was wrong. You know what he says? He says, look at verse 13 here in 1 Corinthians 8, verse 13.

If food causes my brother to stumble, I'll never eat meat again. That's again, as a Texan who loves barbecue. What a statement.

I'll never eat meat again. Yeah, that's how much I value. Does he value being right? No, he values his brother standing without a defiled conscience himself.

And so when I'm strong, will you go back to the slide for a second? When I'm strong, which should win, my strength or my brother's weakness? What should win? Next slide. My brother's weakness. When I'm strong, next slide, please.

Be considerate of the weak. Be considerate of the weak when I'm strong. Maybe you can click one more slide.

Here's, sorry. Yeah. I, you know, in the world, what is the motto in the world? May the best man win.

I was thinking about this. What could be the motto in the church? Let the weak one win. Let the weak one win.

If you're weak, be weak and be willing to be weak for the Lord's sake. Don't compromise your convictions. If you're strong, be considerate of the weak and say, I'd rather not even eat meat.

This is probably, I'm not, this isn't theoretical. It's very practical for me in my life. And you know, I'll end with a short story, which is, um, there was, there was a time when someone who, you know, I, I, you could say is weaker.

And I use again, air quotes deliberately because, um, we should be wary of any, any feeling about being dismissive of someone else's conviction. Anytime we think, oh, that's cause they're weak. First of all, take a, take a pause and really examine your heart.

Um, but that being said, if someone has a more restrictive conviction without weak, almost feels like an insult. So if we say a more restrictive conviction, I had an experience recently, a couple of weeks ago, someone had a more restrictive conviction and it, it came to my mind. It came to my, um, to my, uh, understanding that there was a more restrictive conviction.

Um, they were questioning something that I was genuinely fine with. Never had a second thought of, about this thing in my entire life. And they're questioning something.

And there was that tendency to want to be defensive, but I set it aside. But with the help of the Holy spirit, the Lord had me set it aside and I really took it before the Lord. I said, Hey, this thing, what do you think about this? And you know what I learned? They weren't weak.

They were right. The thing that I felt freedom in regards to wasn't right. I just never really examined it in the light of the Lord's purity.

And when I brought this thing that a weaker brother, you could say, brought to me to the Lord, the Lord said, yeah, you shouldn't do that anymore. And that which was liberty to me was actually sin, but I never know it. I never knew it.

And, um, my honest testimony since then is that I feel my spiritual life has progressed by submitting to the weaker brother, so to speak. My, my life's progressed and I really thank God for that. In that case, he wasn't actually weaker at all.

He was just right. He was more righteous than me. And, and, and that difference of conviction allowed me to grow in righteousness.

And what it, what it showed me and what it encouraged me with was the Lord honors those who honor him. And as I sought to honestly examine Lord, what's right here, Lord showed me that my brother's right. And, um, what started out as an opportunity, what I thought was just going to be an opportunity to honor someone else, um, ended up being deliverance from unconscious sin for me.

And I praise the Lord for that because now I have light where I didn't have light before. And if I had just allowed myself to be defensive or just kind of, you know, taking a stand in my strength or my knowledge, I would have missed the opportunity to grow in Christ likeness. And so I praise the Lord that while we have unity of spirit, while we have unity of purpose, we all want to become more like Jesus Christ.

We all want to be fully functioning members of the body of Christ. If you're a member of NCCF, that's what you've signed up for. I want to be made like Jesus.

And I want to help you become more like Jesus. And I want to do my part. I want to be a steward of the grace that God has entrusted to me and the gifts that God has entrusted to me for the building up of the body.

We're all aligned there. Yet God in his wisdom has allowed there in the midst of that alignment to be all sorts of seeming misalignment. And to me, it's very helpful to know in the church, the weak one should win.

This is never about pointing fingers. It's never about saying something outwardly. But it is a matter of the heart.

In my heart, if I'm weak, am I happy being weak or am I embarrassed? And in my heart, if I'm strong, am I ready to yield or do I want to be right? These are eminently practical things that the Lord has been dealing with me with. And I hope they're helpful because especially, yeah, restrictions are lifting. We're gathering together more.

We talk about all sorts of things. We do all sorts of things together. Let us be determined not to judge one another and not to put a stumbling block in one another's paths.

And let us be open to learning as I learned this week. Wow, something that I've always never had a problem with. I realized that's sin and I need to think about that differently.

And I pray and I've already seen the Lord's helping me in a way I never even knew I needed his help before in this area. And I do. And he's helping me.

But I believe he's helping me because I chose not to glory in strength. So I praise God for that. I really do.

I pray the Lord would help us all to be united in that consideration of whether it's our own weakness or the weakness of others, that we'd be united in being considerate of weak members, truly. May the Lord help us. Thank you.

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