

Conscience - Part 4

by Dai Patterson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of humility and love in relationships, and the need to be persuaded in one's own mind.

Scripture: Romans 14:1-19, 1 Corinthians 8:6, 1 Corinthians 12:12, 1 Corinthians 12:27

Topics: "Church Unity", "Christian Liberty"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the importance of unity and understanding within the church. He emphasizes the need to receive and embrace those who may be weaker in faith without passing judgment on their opinions. The speaker highlights the spectrum of believers, ranging from the strong to the weak, and encourages everyone to find their place along this spectrum. He emphasizes the importance of being fully convinced in one's own mind and not imposing one's beliefs on others. The sermon concludes with a reminder to be open to changing one's mind and being willing to see God at work in different groups within the church.

Transcript

I want to begin with one of my quotes. You'll like this one, I'll like this one. This is a real gem.

Listen to this. It concerns John Knox. You've all heard of John Knox? The great Scottish reformer.

And John Knox was travelling around Scotland, preaching, seeking to see the Spirit of God to reform the church in Scotland that was very much dominated by Roman Catholicism and by Queen Mary, who of course was an avid Roman Catholic. And there came an occasion when Queen Mary and John Knox met face to face. And she said to Knox this.

Having listened to his preaching and listened to the things he had to say, she said to him, My conscience is not so. And Knox replied, Knox must have been a brave man. Knox replied, Conscience, Madam, requires knowledge and I fear that you have none.

How about that? He was a brave fellow, wasn't he? I tell you what, he was persuaded, absolutely persuaded in his own mind that what he believed was the truth. That's the kind of line I want to take this evening and consider the relationship between the conscience and knowledge. Conscience, Madam, requires knowledge and I fear that you have none.

And you and I can only function properly and our conscience function properly when we have knowledge. Now, the danger with a statement like that, of course, is that all I have to do is to keep adding knowledge to knowledge to knowledge to knowledge to knowledge and before long I am going to have myself a perfect conscience and everybody is going to recognise in me such authority and wisdom and power that I'll be top of the pile. I'll be number one.

And, of course, you will be well aware, I am sure, there cannot be anybody in the room who has not read Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 that knowledge, you've got it, knowledge puffs up. And knowledge on its own, as of itself, and the acquiring of it for its own sake is void of a principle that will keep the man who knows in absolute humility. I am convinced that perhaps the greatest hallmark of a man who truly is a man of God and by the use of the word man I include, of course, all the ladies, is this, that he has humility stamped across his living.

He does not come across as being in any way arrogant. He does not kind of hang his knowledge out to be admired and he does not demand that what he knows has to be the standard for everybody else. He has discovered that over and above and perhaps beneath what he knows is a principle called the love of God.

And I want to go into two chapters in the New Testament, the 8th chapter of the 1 Corinthians letter and the 14th chapter of the Roman epistle. And I want to look at those two chapters partly because within them we will find some principles laid down which will avoid schism in the church. The church is prone to fragment and you ask yourself, well why? I guess everybody in the room would be able to argue the case from their knowledge of the Bible that the church is meant to be like a body.

Christ the head, we the members, every member fitly joined together all functioning under the direction of the headship. Is there anybody who has never heard such a case presented? I guess everybody must have done. And yet the reality of the thing is far from the ideal.

Now why is it? What is the problem? The principles laid out in these two chapters I think, I hope will be of some help in reconciling some differences that can so easily arise. Now the two chapters present to us a spectrum and at the one end of the spectrum you have those who are described as being strong and at the other end of the spectrum you have those who are described as being weak. And in between you have all categories of people.

Everybody in this room, somewhere along the way you fit in between this end or this end. I'm not asking you to identify exactly where you are and I'm not asking anybody in this room to identify where anybody else is on it. That's what we love to do.

Well I think Brother So-and-so, he's way down there. And as for her, well I suggest I object on the scale. And then of course all the people that we admire we put at this end and we walk around in their shadow thinking that they're Mr. or Mrs. Wonderful.

And I know it sounds a little funny but let me tell you something, there are people who do it. And everybody in this room, you need to recognize the uniqueness of who you are. And wherever you are on the scale does not matter.

Well it does. But the wonderful thing about the scale is this. That those who are at the strong end never get to the end and those who are on the weak end never fall off.

They're on the weak end and they've got a way to go. But go they will if they will but understand that they are to become men and women in their own right. God delivers us from cloning.

You know that Dolly is dead, don't you? Dolly the sheep that is. Just in case you didn't know. She was a clone.

She's dead. I don't know where the ones that she was or the ones she was cloned from presently is but Dolly's gone. Don't be a clone.

You have got to learn to be a man or woman in your own right. And one of the things that you are going to have to come to terms with is this. That in your relationship to the Lord you have got to be persuaded in your own mind.

We are going to note that statement in the two chapters that we're going to look at. I have to be persuaded in my own mind. Now thank God for brothers and sisters who can add something to my life whereby I can come to a place of persuasion.

But in the end I must be persuaded and the moment that I am I will act according to my persuasion. As a man thinks in his heart, so he is. That's taking that out of the Proverbs and it's not a very good thing to take out because the passage has to do with surveying not so nice people.

But the principle still applies and is true that as I think so I am. And if my thinking is uncertain and unsteady if I am unpersuaded about certain things then okay I have to face it. Let me give you an example of what I mean.

When I first became a Christian I came under the influence of all kinds of opinions on the subject of millennialism. Now if you're thinking, I've never heard of millennialism you haven't missed much. But I came under this view and that view and the other view.

I read some of the brethren opinions and I came across quotes from Mr. Scofield and the Scofield Bible and if you're used to reading the Scofield Bible can I just let you know that the notes at the bottom are not inspired okay just in case you thought that they were but they're not. Now then I thought well you know is this bit right and that bit right and I heard somebody else and then I got hold of this book and that book and I read and in the end you know what I was so jolly confused I thought I'd put this to one side and I left it and I came to no view or opinion for years and years. And you think oh that's very unspiritual of you brother.

Because I knew within ten minutes of being a Christian that this was it. Well that's very nice for you. But I discovered I didn't and I had to listen I had to learn and the thing that I did more than anything else was I asked the Lord Himself please will you come and open my understanding.

Did you notice when George read at the very beginning of the meeting from Colossians chapter 1 did you notice what Paul prayed for and have you noticed when he writes his letter to the Ephesians he's praying the same thing he's asking oh God I pray I pray for these dear ones that you give them a spirit of wisdom and understanding. I wondered for years how do I go on in my Christian life? Do I kind of add to myself some of this and some of that a little more of the other do I somehow get prayed for by some brother or sister who is far more spiritual than I and somehow they will impart something to me.

I discovered this and I thank God for the discovery everything is by the opening up of the understanding and I see now I've been talking about the conscience and at the very beginning, Saturday night I mentioned that the word is made up of two words to see and the word with to see alongside of and the word to see, to understand, to know is an intuitive seeing it's not anything to do with knowledge gained but a seeing that comes from somewhere within and the penny drops and you think ahhh and when you've seen like that then you've really seen and until you see like that you are still trying to work your way in to something, through something but the moment the penny drops the light comes on, doesn't it? and you think, Lord, I can see it yes! now that's that's what happens within the conscience there's a place of seeing and somehow all the darkness the uncertainties are penetrated by the light of of the Spirit of God dawning within the understanding and the conscience and you see and then it's settled now poor old Queen Mary boy she really got told, didn't she? by Mr.

Knox Madam you don't know what you're talking about now I want to talk about this that the principles are the principles which operate within the conscience whereby mine and yours can be adjusted, readjusted so that we go on and our understanding becomes clearer I don't know about you but this morning following the ministry I sat on my seat and I'll tell you what I wanted to do I just wanted everybody to be quiet well, not everybody was but I wanted just to be absolutely quiet somehow somewhere inside me I could see something and I just I just wanted to keep it and hold it and look at it and something just happened inside and I just didn't I didn't want to sing or whatever I just wanted to gaze upon something that had opened up inside of my understanding now those moments are most

precious let me just make a comment and pass on those are the moments to treasure I believe more than all the singing and clapping and whatever else they go on in meetings and I love that but that for me is far more of eternal worth I've seen something Lord, I didn't see before something of you something of your grace something of your beauty something that is related to you not that you can do for me I wonder sometimes if we ever stop and consider how selfish some of our Christian praying can be Lord, I want this, I want that I want the other one of the things maybe that we need to do is to see for example in the Revelation what happened to John? he just he said I saw him and I fell down at his feet as though I were dead and he came and lifted me but it was the seeing of him and that is

what I believe the Spirit of God is constantly wanting to do, to reveal to make him increasingly real now let's read a little bit, shall we? let me begin in the Corinthian chapter the eighth of the first epistle and if you want to get your finger into chapter 14 of Romans and keep your fingers between the two we'll flip back and forth a little bit now the subject is or the background is not really particularly relevant to us because it has to do with things offered, sacrificed to idols and I guess there's nobody in this room probably who's come out of that background I don't know that, but I would assume looking around that most of the folk in this room have not come from that kind of background but at the time that Paul was writing plainly the Corinthian people had come out of the most

gross idolatry and it was idolatry that was so blatant it was on street corners they had kind of marble things set up on the junctions of streets with a statue on people had them in their homes as well as of course the temples to which they went it was everywhere it was inculcated into the whole of society and idolatry was just part of the norm something that perhaps we would find somewhat difficult now concerning things sacrificed to idols now please notice he says we know that we all have knowledge now we all have but the knowledge that we all have is not the same knowledge and some are at the end of the scale and their knowledge is perhaps limited and you have those at this end of the scale and perhaps their knowledge is far greater this is what he says knowledge makes arrogant but

love edifies now please note knowledge in and of itself does not edify it may be able to inform but it does not build up not in and of itself now the statement that Paul makes is we know we know that we all have knowledge now if anyone supposes that he knows anything he has not yet known as he ought to know therefore including himself in the statement he recognises that he's going on I haven't made it I haven't got to the end and then he makes a statement in the third verse but if anyone loves God whether his knowledge is limited, whether his knowledge is great, if anyone loves God he is known by him and that's a great thing to take note of, that wherever I am on the scale God knows me and he has no favourites, he prefers none above another whether I'm on the bottom end or the top end

that love of God is to be experienced and known and enjoyed and says Paul he who loves God God knows him that's a great thing to just take to heart isn't it wherever I am you know me nothing is hidden from you, you'll know perhaps where my thinking is unclear you'll know where I'm uncertain about things, you'll know Lord perhaps where I've got difficulties hang ups areas that need to be put right readjusted but I'm so grateful that you know me and I want you to know Lord that I love you now he picks up then and says therefore not the therefore because of what he's just said therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols we know that there is no such thing as an idol you think well what does he mean? well he's writing to Corinthians, there were idols just everywhere, what

does he mean by saying that there's no such thing as an idol? what he's tried to say is that the idol in and of itself is nothing now I know people would say oh well hang on a minute brother, hang on a minute it's what's behind the idol it's the thing that's the power that's behind it you see and that immediately kind of puts people oh dear well then there must be something in it now Paul says now listen there's nothing in it there's no such thing as an idol in the world and there is no God but one, now he's declaring what he knows and he has said so, he declares we know now we have knowledge that this is the case oh you might say well doesn't everybody have that knowledge? no they don't that's difficult for us isn't it because we would say well surely there can't be anybody so daft, so

dim so slow as to think that there's anything in the idol but you and I must understand the culture into which Paul is writing and the fact that there were people who'd made a response to the Lord whose whole life had been contaminated had been based upon seething powers that idols had and their whole life was influenced now you might say well that doesn't happen today oh don't you believe it I'm amazed how many people begin their day with their horoscope it's amazing you know who think that everything somehow is governed by the stars and they cannot begin their day without doing so ladies read it in their ladies magazines they begin the day with their daily mirror and they have to make sure they know what it says no one like that in the room is there oh good if there is well let me just

make a suggestion to you that after the meeting you come and get prayed for and let the thing be dealt with because there is nothing in it it's a lie and a deception so Paul says in verse 5 for even if there are so called gods whether in heaven or on earth as indeed there are many gods and many lords yet for us there is but one God now will you please note that he immediately identifies him as the father what an emphasis that's been on the weekend he's the father he's not the almighty he's not the power somewhere in the cosmos he's not some power hiding, veiled behind an idol he's the father and I love the way that he makes the statement so that those who are reading this and perhaps are having some uncertainties and concerns about their position in relation to idols immediately are

brought to the place where they can see for themselves I've been fathered by the true and the living God Sri Ram yet there is for us one God the father from whom are all things and we exist for him and one Lord

Jesus Christ by whom are all things and we exist through him then he says however not all men have this knowledge now here is a statement that describes the spectrum some don't have it and some do Paul himself let me turn you into the Roman epistle for a moment, let me read you this from chapter 14 and verse 14 and this is switching just a little from the business of idolatry to eating food offered to idols but he says in verse 14 I know and am convinced how about that isn't that great to live in certainties within your own heart and mind and to be persuaded and according to your

persuasion you will then be able to live freely as unto God except that there is another governing principle the one of love that may cause you to have to adapt alter a lifestyle in order not to cause offense to another but he says I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself but to him who thinks anything to be unclean to him it is unclean now how do you deal with, how do you handle people who hold a different position to you over some issue in this case in the biblical example to do with idols and eating things to idols now in our day we could perhaps present some different scenarios for example and these are examples that I come across and had to kind of talk to people about there are those who let's put up the spectrum down this end of the scale they do

not have a TV will not have a TV will never look at a TV and at the other end you've got those who do and you've then got in between a whole variety of people who will say well I've got one but I don't look at this and I don't look at that and I don't look at the other and you've got this huge spectrum of people and they are all of them calling themselves Christians and how do you manage to somehow fuse them together so that they can live together enjoy each other's company find Christ in one another but this one says well that's my position and I'm not budging and this one up here says well this is my position and I don't understand why you hold your position and you down here say well I don't understand why you hold yours the one down here says well my view is spiritual and yours is

worldly and the one up here says well maybe you can apply the same principle to things like well ok alcohol and you touch upon things and when you do you begin to think oh boy maybe we should just keep off these subjects and in some ways it might be wise to keep off the subjects because again you've got a great big spectrum there's the one at one end who says never touch it let me tell you a funny story this is a hoot I tell you I'm glad he's gone to be with the Lord but on the wedding day my in-laws who both passed away in Pai came out of a of a background an army background and both her mum and dad were very very very heavy drinkers I guess you probably would describe them as being alcoholic and we were married in Exeter and in the Methodist church that is no longer they've taken it

down and built flats there and I remember that Pai and I were married in August and then three weeks later there was another marriage and then three weeks later there was another one and each of each of the weddings we were told by the the church authorities well of course there's no alcohol and we said that's fine we don't want any anyway anyway there was reception time and people were giving their speeches wishing Pai and I and all the rest of it and I was the reception was a very informal thing and people were wandering around and just chatting and they'd taken a plate got some food to eat off the table over here, they were just mingling and completely unknown to Pai and I me in-laws who were definitely outlaws had sneaked in a crate of whatever it was and I was standing by the piano

that was in the hall in this place and there was this gentleman who'd just conducted the marriage service and he had a glass of orange juice and somehow or other the orange juice had got contaminated and he picked up his glass of orange juice and I was just standing right by and took a drink of this thing and I heard this ooh what's wrong with this brother? and he put this down and I discovered afterwards that one

of my in-laws had obviously put a little something into their orange juice and he had picked up theirs by mistake and had taken himself a drink and discovered it wasn't quite what he thought it was but I can remember said gentleman years back at the brothers thing saying while I was brought up in East End of London, never never, never, never has a drop ever touched my lips and I

thought I'm looking forward to telling him I guess he does I guess he does but what a huge issue it can become and people can be divided people can become passionate about issues that for them are important and because they are passionate and are convinced that their particular lifestyle is correct they then have the immense difficulty of being able to embrace anybody whose lifestyle is in any measure different and we're going to notice in a moment or two that Paul talks about those who are weak and those who are strong let me take you back into the 8th chapter of 1 Corinthians and note in the 7th verse that not all men have this knowledge but some being accustomed to the idol until now eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol and their conscience being weak is defiled now please take

note of it their conscience is weak now how do you define a weak conscience? plainly if it's a weak one then at the other end of the scale would be a strong one how do you define a weak conscience? now I'm going to make some suggestions you might accept them you might not, you might think I need to go and think about this one but let me just make them I think that the weak conscience is a conscience that is legalistic now why do I make such a comment? partly because of the statement that we have just read that here is a person who is unable to eat because the food has been sacrificed to an idol they used to set up the butcher shops very close to the temples because there the animals would be slain, the sacrifices made, the offerings given and then the meat that was unused would be brought

out and it was right close to the temple and would be sold off and people would know that was the place to go to buy a cheap junk it was just freshly slaughtered, reasonably inexpensive and the place to go.

If of course you had the sort of thinking that was well let me use the word legalistic, you would think well I'm not going to buy that I know where that's come from I know where that's been I know what that's associated with and therefore the person who thought such would refrain from buying because they were not able to step outside of the way of thinking and simply realise this is just meat it's nothing other than meat and the idol that it's supposedly been offered to is nothing God has given us, as scripture says meats to eat food provision, he has done it, therefore this is of no consequence to me but not everybody thought the same and you can see, at least I imagine you can see, how incredibly difficult that could be within the setting of a Corinthian church where there could be

immense possibilities of division and division will be promoted by and provoked by two things the legalistic mind that is unable to see beyond the limits of its own thinking that cannot understand the freedom that another may have to eat and then on the other end of the scale you've got the strong conscience that looks down upon and ridicules the weaker this is what Paul had to say in the opening verse of chapter 14 of Romans he says this now accept the one who is weak in faith now please please, please, please will you notice and let's avoid being patronizing we understand these they don't really understand like we do but we're going to kind of take them in for things eventually they'll learn eventually they'll grow up so the strong can be very patronizing here and sort of somehow think

that it's very spiritual of them to take in these weaker ones who don't really understand listen to what he says you are to accept the one who is weak in faith but not for the purpose of putting him right now that's one of the great troubles with those who've got some knowledge we're going to take we'll receive them but

the first thing we do is we sit them down and we make sure they get a lecture and they get proper instruction on their on right understanding of the principles which are causing them to be narrow minded and legalistic now let me tell you something, you try that and you've lost them you've lost them but you think to yourself well we can't let that go we don't want that kind of thing coming into the church but I guess in any church you've got the spectrum and sometimes you

know we are a little afraid to talk about things because we intuitively know I think I'm up here and he's down there and if I raise the subject I'm going to get a lecture or I'm going to get a kind of the legalistic mind or perhaps the one down here thinks I'm going to be sat down and I'm going to be instructed in the right way to live my life now I have got no rights no authority over the way that you live you are to be persuaded in your own mind let each man in the 5th verse of chapter 14 Paul says it let each one be fully convinced in his own mind the word fully convinced means to be filled up as with something that overflows something watering until you are so persuaded that every other view is being washed out now please you may remember that there was a comment made by one earlier

in the week that if what was the bumper sticker you read about changing the mind if you haven't changed your mind recently how do you know you still got one? there we are if you haven't changed your mind recently how do you know you still got one? none of us know as we ought to know we are constantly having to rethink, readjust consider exactly where we are and how our conscience is functioning and it could be that the one who has allowed something has got to rethink his position but all that those who consider themselves to be strong do not take the week and use them as a means of promoting their point of view notice he says in that first verse we are to receive them I've got the word accept in my bible in this American standard and it's a little bit, a little bit weak I don't want to

just accept you, I've got to receive you and that's a much stronger position, I've got to be able to take you to my heart and receive you you may have some wacky ideas as far as I am concerned you may not be as knowledgeable as me you I may think that I have a slight edge over you in terms of bible knowledge but if I am not able to receive you, I am aware and pretty instantly aware that in my conscience there's something wrong not with you my brother or sister but with me and we have to learn how to receive listen to this in the opening verse of chapter 15 still in Romans and I would suppose that Paul considered himself to be strong and he said now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not to please ourselves are you beginning to kind of grasp the

spirit of this and you may remember whichever session it was I mentioned this that chapter 12 of Romans and through 13 which is to do with being submissive to governments and powers into 14 which is to do with principles of conscience in relating to eating of this or not eating of that into chapter 15 it all is the practical outworking of being justified and sanctified it has to do with the condition of the mind and you will remember that the conscience is a faculty of the mind we noticed it in the book of Titus chapter 1 verse 15 the mind and the conscience go together and over and over and over again in chapters 12, 13, 14, 15 Paul makes reference to the mind listen to this in verse chapter 15 let me read verse 5 and 6 and 7 to you now may the God who gives perseverance and

encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus now what does that mean to you that you've got to think like me else there's no ground for unity and yet we've seen established the fact that you've got the strong, you've got the weak, you've got this great spectrum how are they to be of one mind now to be of one mind is not dependent upon knowledge because some have and some don't and we've plainly had it presented to us in scripture, some have got knowledge of the idol,

some don't have knowledge of the idol, some think this way Paul says I'm persuaded that nothing's unclean I'll enjoy whatever's put before me and if it's meat that's being offered to an idol and I'm not aware of it I'll sit and eat and enjoy mind you he said if I know it has been

and I know that could cause offence I won't eat it I won't eat it because I think it's contaminated and I won't eat it in case I might pick up a devil now you, did you know that amongst the Jews that was one of the reasons why they insisted on the washing of hands if you did not wash hands and you may remember they challenged Christ over it how is it that your disciples don't wash their hands before they eat and the idea was the thought was you could somehow pick up something demonic if you didn't and there is a name given to the actual demonic thing and I've forgotten what it's called but that doesn't matter but they actually thought that kind of way now you might think how absolutely stupid I hope you would but they thought that way and not everybody had knowledge how can we be of one

mind if we don't all have exactly the same knowledge and are at the same position because we're not are we we are not how can we be of one mind well let me without going to it just remind you I'm sure let this mind be in you now in this New American Standard Version there's a phrase which I somewhat like it says this, let this attitude be in you what attitude? everything will depend upon the attitude of mind if the weak conscience brother who operates within the legalism of his mind, I can't step outside of this, I'm safe in here, I can't understand why brother you do or you don't have a TV or you take a glass of something or other this is my position ok then let that be your position but listen, you respect will you, the one who is not holding the same position as you and have an

attitude of mind that receives because if you don't we're on a pathway for division and I can think of of a fellowship I know, well in fact it doesn't, it no longer functions, it stops the leadership of that particular fellowship would openly preach against things like television and make it a public statement that such things were, well, either sinful or devilish or whatever so anybody who was in that particular fellowship soon discovered well either I've got to get rid of my or I've got to go and such ministrings ends up producing divisiveness how do I receive, how do I receive you as a brother, you as a sister, if the knowledge that you have is not the same as the knowledge that I have perhaps I might consider myself to be freer than you, but now comes for the strong one the greatest

of dangers because he can use his liberty and cause offence to the weak brother and cause him to stumble and damage him now what a remarkable spirit and attitude to live in Lord I want to live my life never to damage my brother never to hold an attitude of mind which is judgemental never to bring him in and sit him down and seek to persuade him that his position is ridiculous and legalistic and narrow minded and how about the brother or the sister who does have this very narrow way of seeing things and the way they see things may be the consequence of the way they've been brought up, it may be something to do with their personality but I know folks and I think it's so very very sad who have decided well I'm leaving this church because not everybody reads from the authorised version and I

know that people who read churches because they don't break bread and have one cup, they have little individual ones so I can't be part of this or in this particular church they have music and I don't like the music very much so I'm going and they can only operate within the limits, the parameters of that mindset and if the church or the group that they're in is not prepared to fit into their scheme of things then they're going so how difficult this all is isn't it?

How do we find ourselves able to operate together to be of one heart and of one mind listen to the statements here in the 14th chapter of the Romans we've noticed let's go back to the beginning now receive the one who is weak in the faith, receive him, go on but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions why? we are so prone to do it especially if we've got some knowledge and we think we know a little better than they one man has faith that he may eat all things but he who is weak eats vegetables only now please note, Paul is identifying who are the weak and who are the strong it's not open to debate, it's not open to kind of well, you know, I think the one who eats only vegetables is strong because he's refusing to eat no, no, no the one who is weak in conscience is unable to eat of the meat, so he is a vegetable eater only but now he says let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat and I have I think if I were to be real honest I have had difficulties in areas where I have come across people who do not understand as I do and I think to myself, come on and my attitude has been one of holding them just there and I have to confess that has been an issue in my own life and I looked down upon them and thought them to be somewhat, if not stupid rather slow and how can you be so blind as not to see not over the issue that Paul is presenting here, but over some other issue now says this man, listen, you are not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats for God has accepted, received him now that's a wonderful thing to take note of and if I can but see wow, Lord you received this man with all his quirks, with all his oddities you received him therefore it is absolutely incumbent upon me that I receive him, I take him to my heart now let me suggest something to you, that you try and do that on the natural level and ere long you are going to have a huge blow up with that individual it ain't going to be long before you are finding I can't live with this man I wish I'd never let him in I wish he'd never come to our church, why did he go somewhere else and be a pain and of course none of us in this room would ever think such things but I am not to have an attitude of content Lord I will need grace upon grace here I will need the power of the love of God poured out in my heart to be able to live this way I don't know whether you are honest enough to admit to it but you will not be able to do this this is a standard when it comes down to the real nitty gritty practicalities that you will not be able to live up to unless it be by the love of God, unless the attitude of your mind is the attitude of Christ who came for the purpose of providing a way whereby men may return to and know their acceptance by God.

I'm accepted and if I am accepted I've got to know that I must accept you not must in the sense that it's a duty but must because the love that embraced his heart and enabled him to embrace me has got to operate in me and I'm talking about something that I believe is one of the most powerful things that a man or woman can experience because we do naturally find each other difficult. There is nobody as perfect as me and I've got to tolerate now of course you wouldn't say that we wouldn't almost dare to think it but in attitude that can come through and all that the Lord should by his grace and by the power of his death and resurrection life operating in us give us the ability to embrace the brother the sister who doesn't think like we do.

Let's be careful that we don't think that the brother or sister is not a brother or sister either because that can happen where they can't be there can't be there and I have noticed that attitude and for those of you who are from kind of fellowship circles I've noticed that attitude can be in fellowships so somehow we are some elite group who've got something and all the others have got nothing at all. It's not true. I know that what I have and I have received from my involvement in fellowships I treasure and I really treasure it and I believe with all my heart that the gospel and the truth of that gospel that I've received over the years for me is priceless and I will not give it up for any lesser thing but how wonderful to be able to see Lord I can see you operating here, working here and maybe the brothers and the sisters in this and this and this group perhaps they are not as far on as you maybe not but how wonderful when you can receive them.

Brother! and you can hold them sister! and you can embrace them with all that you understand and you recognise that they don't and I want to know the power of that kind of spirit and attitude operating in the church let's come to an end in a moment verse four of Romans 14 who are you? that's a good question who are you? who do you think you are? who are you to judge the servant of another to his own master he stands or falls and stand he will he's not going to fall off the scale he's not going to fall off he is going to stand and stand he will for the Lord is able and listen he's not going to stand because you have persuaded him that your position is right and his is wrong I have come to the conclusion that the only way that any will be persuaded is when I can speak the truth to them in

love and once they know that love is the governing principle of all that I have to say and that I'm not looking for one-upmanship I'm not looking for you to join my persuasion so I can say there we are Lord I've got another one in I showed them Lord but that love is the great persuader of truth and listen one he says he will stand he will I think we are very very sceptical so often unless brother you come to our position you're not going to stand you know and I have heard that kind of comment made publicly unless you you'll fall away you'll be in trouble and it's almost as if it's almost as if somebody someone wanted to curse the other because they've not shifted their ground and come to my position what arrogance it is God is able to make him stand amen that he is it's not up to you and

it's not up to me so he says the Lord is able to do it wonderful to discover God's ability well he's made you stand hasn't he and if he can do it for you with all your quirks and oddities he can do it for them too can't he one man regards one day above another another regards every day alike let each man be fully convinced in his own mind amen that I treasure that statement I think is wonderful and oh my dear brother and sister tonight you and I need to grow up to grow up into the fullness of all that God has got for us in Christ we need to have our understandings open to who he is what he is what he has done and to be fully persuaded that Lord this is the way for me now please do not think will you I hope you don't think that that means to say that you never go and talk to anybody you

never seek somebody's counsel or you want to share something with a brother or a sister if we really are members one of another we would want to we would not want to be in isolation we would not want to be doing this will because we believe it's God but maybe there is some light that somebody can show upon something some aspect or attitude that we have because our judgment is not always right is it we would like to think it is but I think it's wonderful when we can go and absolutely open our hearts one with another with our brothers and with our sisters there is something lovely about that do you know what you are saying you are saying brother I am trusting my life to you what an attitude I am trusting myself to you I want you just to share with me what you will what you think let me give

you just an illustration of what I mean it's perhaps not quite in line with this but like some of you know that pain, my wife has been unwell and she had about 18 months of suffering from a clinical depression that's caused because of menopause and we kind of kept it between ourselves we wanted just to keep it and let nobody else know we struggled along with it for a while and in the end it was just becoming unbearable and I said to her one day love I really do think I need to share this with the other elders in the church and she was not feeling very good and she kind of said oh what will people think what will people say how will we be able to hold our head up and we will be judged and there will be the legalistic ones who will say you know you've got to believe God and you've got to

fight it and we've been through that and got nowhere with it so I talked to my the other elders in the church and we met and I just said guys before we go I wanted to tell you something and I just opened my mouth

and I began to speak and I tell you what it's been a long time since I have wept in fact Pei described it as waving she said to me what was that noise I said it was me she said what are you doing so I said I just told the fellows about how things are and I said everything just broke and you know what all they did was to love me not one not one voice kind of said oh well what a weak individual you are right down the end of the scale you shouldn't be in the ministry but they just love me and oh what a release and a relief to be able to talk to my brothers I find that wonderful I

think we are prone if we're not careful to lock these things up to hold these things and partly because we're afraid we might be judged but oh the love of God that doesn't pass judgment don't receive one another to judge says Paul listen somebody observes the day somebody doesn't somebody eats he says somebody doesn't verse 7 for not one of us lives for himself who do you live for who do you live for for your point of view for your opinion to be heard do you live in order to gather around you those who will be persuaded in the same way that you are my friend you will be a lonely man or woman if you do we've got to learn to embrace to receive one another verse 10 but you he says why do you judge your brother now listen Paul is writing to the Roman church and he's aware of the real

possibility of this taking place why do you do that or you again why do you regard your brother with contempt for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God and verse 12 each one of us shall give account of himself to God then listen therefore let us not judge one another anymore now stop it now that's what he's saying stop it now don't do it anymore he largely says that's possible I've held this brother in my view in my mind and I judged him I think he's this this whatever now says Paul stop it now why because God's accepted him and you must verse 13 therefore let us not judge one another anymore but rather determine this not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way finally I'm not going to stop finally in verse 18 for he who in this way serves Christ how do you

serve Christ you've got to serve him in this way for he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men isn't that a lovely final statement men will approve of you they will approve of what you have to say they will approve of your manliness or womanliness because you're serving Christ in this way and never out of your mouth comes an unkind word about your brother whether he be weak or whether he be strong whether he be of your opinion or whether he be not but you serve Christ in this way now how do we serve him? how do you serve him? like this holding everybody as precious, receiving them to yourself not seeking to impose upon them your particular viewpoint not wanting them to be fodder so that you kind of, you know, gain them to your opinion they're not opinion

fodder but they're a brother to love a sister to love the other day I commented that I was talking to a friend of mine who's been in a church where there'd been some difficulties and he made the comment to me, let me just repeat it as I close, he said to me when you die, whatever happens to kindness and over and over again that word comes back to me be kind one to another are you being kind when you judge your brother? are you being kind when you somehow just keep them at arm's length because you're not quite sure whether you're going to get a lecture, whether you're going to get a point of view that you don't hold? how do you do it? well, I guess the only way to do it is the way that Christ perceived you with open arms on a cross willing to embrace you with all your sin and me with all

mine, and to love us, and to love us, and to love us I know that we should do the same, God give us consciences which are adjusted, able, enlightened to look upon the life of another and not judge them, not think anything of them other than, oh Lord you've received him you've received her and I will too all right, let's pray Lord we're so very aware that in a setting like this it's somewhat easy we're all nice to one

another we eat round the tables together, we chat, we're all nice to one another, but we've all got to go home, and we've all got to mix with people, and we've all got to interact with those who do not have the knowledge or the lack of knowledge that we do.

I want to ask you Lord, that you put in me the attitude that was in Christ that you will give lords of my brothers and sisters the ability and we thank you that you have declared that you can enable us so that we can receive one another. I confess Lord, I don't always find that easy I don't, I find there are some with whom I find it difficult and I need Lord to find that place in the love of God where my heart will embrace all.

I wonder sometimes, Lord, if even praying like that is a bit high in the sky is it possible and yet Lord, I know that that's at the root of the way that church life is to be, and that the that our relationship with each other is to be receiving one another. Oh deliver us Lord from wanting to impose a point of view and somehow gain a bit of one-upmanship you caught us to walk in this lovely lowly way loving all Grant to us Lord the ability, will you please give to us the ability I want to live that way I want Lord to have the witness in my own heart I want to have a good conscience whereby I can live my life with a love unfamed and a faith but genuine and know that my attitudes towards men and women are what you would expect of me so Lord we just come and ask you just ask you as we were encouraged yesterday, just ask you Lord and in asking we thank you Lord that we can make our approach directly to you and our request directly to you knowing Lord that what we ask for is most surely your will for our lives absolutely certain of it Lord, of that I am persuaded I am convinced this is the way to live therefore grant that to us Lord we ask it now of you just as we close in Jesus name, Amen

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