

Each One Should Be Fully Convinced in His Own Mind

by John Piper

Having a conviction on non-essential issues helps you to act from faith and not from doubt, and it honors God.

Duration: 39:39

Scripture: Romans 14:2-3, Romans 14:5, Romans 14:10-12, Romans 14:17-19, Romans 14:22 - 15:2

Topics: "Christian Living", "Glory Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses how Paul addresses a seemingly insignificant issue in the church regarding meat and vegetable eating. Despite the small nature of the dispute, Paul uses weighty biblical truths to address it. He emphasizes the importance of not despising or passing judgment on those with different dietary preferences. Paul then brings in the concept of life and death, highlighting that our actions should ultimately glorify God and be done in service to Him. The preacher encourages the congregation to focus on the big things about God rather than getting caught up in minor disagreements.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at www.DesiringGod.org Romans 14, 1-9. As for the one who is weak in the faith, welcome him, but do not quarrel over opinions.

One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls, and he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes a day observes it in honor of the Lord.

The one who eats eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord.

So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. Life and death, resurrection, belonging to the Lord, living to the Lord, to His glory, dying to the Lord for His glory.

These are weighty things, glorious things. Oh, that I might be faithful in my words and in my affections to this weighty truth. So come, Father, and help me and help us, those who listen, and help me as I speak.

Fill me, I pray, with your Holy Spirit, that I might speak the word of God with boldness and faithfulness and clarity and compelling, convincing, convicting power. Leave me not to myself, I pray in this moment, nor any in these pews. Come, O God, I pray, and work for the salvation of sinners and for the strengthening of saints and for the purity and the peace of your church.

For the magnifying of Jesus Christ, in His name we pray, Amen. Today we deal with verses 5 through 9 of this passage because we've been over verses 1 to 4, you may remember, a week or two ago. But let me review a moment with you.

The striking thing back in verses 1 to 4 was that Paul used huge biblical theological truths to deal with little church squabbles. Verse 2, the issue was, one person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. So we've got tensions in the church over meat-eating and vegetable-eating.

Good grief! That's small, that is really small. And Paul takes it up. His exhortation is negatively, verse 3, Let no one who eats despise the one who abstains.

Let no one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats. That's the negative exhortation. Don't despise, don't judge.

Positively, it's in verse 1, be welcoming, be accepting, receive one another. So that's the situation and that's the exhortation. It's not a big deal eating meat or not eating meat, for goodness sakes.

But, such things in marriages and in families and in churches have often caused the bitterness to arise in relationships and breakdown in associations and splits in churches and terrible disputes and disrepute brought upon the name of Christ. So it's not a big deal, but it can become a big deal if the right framework, the right theological, biblical framework isn't in the church for dealing with these tensions over non-essential things. And that's what this chapter is all about.

So, last time we saw Paul brought out three big guns to deal with a little thing. Number 1, verse 3, second half of the verse. He says, don't pass judgment on the brother, for, here comes the big gun, God has welcomed him.

That's the meaning of Christianity. Justification by faith alone. God welcomes sinners because they believe in him.

They cast themselves on him. Not because they get all their opinions immediately corrected. And if God has accepted, watch out if you don't.

That's big gun number 1. Secondly, verse 4, who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. So the second big gun is, every Christian has a master. He will give an account to the master and it isn't you.

That's big gun number 2. Back off. Big gun number 3 is in the second half of that verse 4. Paul's strong convictions concerning the perseverance of the saints. And he, that is this person you're disagreeing with and getting bent out of shape about the way he's handling meat or vegetables.

And he will be upheld. Literally, will be made to stand. For the Lord is able to make him stand.

He pulls out the big gun of the sovereignty of God in the life of the saint. To see to it that the saints endure to the end and pass muster at the judgment day. They will stand.

They are mine. Now those are mighty big guns to deal with meat. Good night.

So I close that message by saying that I hope the atmosphere at Bethlehem is that people walk in and what they see on the table spread is big things, not little things. That the feel of this church is they are preoccupied with the big things about God, not the little things about disputed opinion. That was message number 1 on Romans 14.

Today, we turn to verses 5 to 9. And what we find is that Paul does exactly the same thing again. He takes up an unbelievably little no count issue. And then he pulls out life, death, resurrection to deal with it.

What's the issue? Verse 5. One person esteems one day better than another, while another esteems all days alike. So that's the first issue. We got disagreements here in the church over which days to celebrate and what to do on them.

Now, what I've decided to do, God helping me, is next week take up the larger entire issue of Sabbath keeping. So if you're wondering, is that meant here? Sunday observance? May I postpone that and just devote the whole message to it next week because I think it's worth a message. Instead, let's just see this verse for now as the big, broad issue of disagreements over what days.

I'll give you some examples. I have known Christians who believe it is wrong to celebrate Christmas. I have known Christians who believe it's wrong to celebrate Easter.

I've known Christians who believe it's wrong to celebrate birthdays. We live next door to a person who believed it was wrong to celebrate birthdays. So we've got a lot of other issues besides Sunday.

Even today, back then, they had more. You can hear them in Galatians 4.10 where Paul says to the Galatians, listen to this, you observe days and months and seasons and years. I'm afraid I've labored over you in vain.

That's Galatians 4.10. Listen to Colossians 2.16. Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival, a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. It was a big deal back then.

For some, it's a big deal today. So the first issue is days, holidays, celebrations, special days. Should we march in a parade for the 4th of July? It's all about independence and Christians are dependent people and such things.

The other issue is in verse 6, second half of the verse. It's about eating again. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God.

While the one who abstains, he got eaters and abstainers, not eaters. Abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. So we've got two issues in this text, days and food again.

Doesn't say what food, just there are squabbings, disagreements in the church. It's threatening the peace of the church and Paul takes it up. Now in the first text, the way he responded to this was, don't despise each other, don't judge each other, be welcoming to each other.

He gave big three arguments. God has received the brother. God alone is his judge, not you.

And God will make him stand. Now here, in 5-9, he does something very different, but also very much the same. He says in verse 5, second half of the verse, each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

Now that's a remarkable statement, because it seems to make matters worse. One person esteems one day above another, verse 5. One person esteems one day above another. While another esteems all days alike, each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

I did not expect Paul to say that. He's not saying this as a kind of concession, like, okay, if you have to have an opinion, have an opinion. He's saying, get an opinion.

Isn't that remarkable? Get a conviction on this. This is not permission. This is command.

This is what you should do. Have a conviction. Let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind.

Now that word, fully persuaded, used one of the time in Romans, chapter 4, verse 21. I'll read it to you. Abraham grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

That's the word. So this is a big, strong word for Paul, and it's not just reserved for big things. He wants us to get an opinion.

Get a conviction about little things. It's the same idea as down in verse 23 of chapter 14, where he says, whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

So get rid of your doubts. Get a conviction. Act from faith in what you believe is right.

Somebody else may choose another way. Now, the reason I did not expect him to say this is because, as far as I can tell, it's only going to make the matter worse, not better. Right? Here you have a bunch of Christians disagreeing over what days are sacred and what to do on those days.

And you've got a bunch of Christians disagreeing over meat and vegetables and what to eat. Maybe, you know, just health things. Probably not.

Probably some meat offered to idols or somehow compromised meat, you know, that sort of thing. And they really have some strong feelings about this, because if it weren't causing any problems, he probably wouldn't have mentioned it. And so the first thing he said was, don't despise each other, don't judge each other, don't accept each other.

But when he gets to this unit, I would have expected him to say something like, lighten up! Lighten up! It's a little thing. Don't sweat the small stuff. And he won't say it.

He says, get a conviction. That's just like trying to put out a fire with gasoline, isn't it? Just take a bucket of gasoline and say, get a conviction, all you disagreeers. Get strong convictions.

I'm not getting this right away. Okay, all you squabblers, over less important issues, let's all get firm conviction. No wafflers here, no fence-sitters, no shilly-shallying.

Everybody come to a clear conviction. Everybody take a stand. My, my.

So, let the Bible be the Bible. I don't tell him how to run the show. I conclude that the way for disagreeing Christians to get along with each other in a truth-honoring, Christ-exalting way is not to breed an atmosphere of indecisiveness on minor issues.

The answer to judgmentalism, the answer to despising another Christian, the answer to not accepting is not vacillation, wavering, indecisiveness, uncertainty. Those things might create peace. Indecisive, non-opinionated people tend to get along pretty well.

Opinionated people, decisive people, certain about what they're doing, being right, don't get along very well. And that's the kind of people he's saying we're supposed to be. I think that's amazing.

Because he is trying to help us get along. So he must have another way forward here. He must, when he considers two risk factors.

You've got a risk factor of breeding, sounds really modern to me, breeding an atmosphere of indecision. An atmosphere of, I'm not sure on a lot of things. I don't take a stand on many things.

The risk factor there and the risk factor of, if everybody has a strong conviction about everything, there's going to be chaos and war all the time in this church. As Paul considers those two risk factors, he takes this one. And just pours the gasoline on this and says, get confident in your mind regarding your conviction.

I just am astonished by that. I'm really astonished by that. So, Paul, I ask, as I move through the text, astonished, what's your remedy? If it's not lighten up, what is it? And he's got an amazing remedy.

Totally unexpected. Just blows you out of the water. Christian community, as Paul understands it, is an amazing thing.

And it isn't rooted in shilly-shallying about all kinds of things. Paul, how are you going to keep us from hurting each other? How are you going to keep us from belittling each other? How are you going to keep us from biting and devouring one another? And his answer isn't become indecisive about little things. He's not going to solve the problem by saying lighten up or don't sweat the small stuff.

What's his answer? The first thing I'm going to say in response to that question is implied in the text and the rest of it is, I think, really explicit in the text. The first is this. What would we, or Paul, answer to the question, fully convinced of what? He says, each one should be fully convinced of what? And I would say three things.

One, what I'm about to do is not sin. Number two, what I'm about to do in day-keeping or meat-eating is honoring to God, not dishonoring. And number three, what I'm choosing to do here, and I'm fully convinced, is this is the best path for those, for me and my family, that I can think of right now.

I can't think of a better way to act than what I'm about to do regarding meat or days now. I can't think. Now, I said those three things carefully because I don't think one of them is, be fully convinced everybody who disagrees is wrong.

That's not one of the things you need to be fully convinced of. In fact, if you go that route, this text falls to pieces. You must be fully convinced, I'm not sinning, I'm honoring God, and as far as I can tell, for me in this situation and those I'm responsible for, this is the right, best way to act.

And if somebody goes another way, I don't get it, but that's the first step. Now, that's not the main solution Paul offers. You might think, well, that's enough, that'll solve it, won't it? That'll keep us from getting each other.

No, it won't. And I think Paul knows that it won't, because even though you may be theoretically open that people who act on an issue opposite of the way you've chosen to act, you may be theoretically open that they can do it to God's glory, and it's not sin for them, and it's the best way for them to act. But I don't think so.

I mean, I just came to my convictions with a lot of prayer and a lot of study and a lot of analysis of the situation, and I came to my convictions. It's not easy. It is not easy for me to think you, coming to an opposite conviction, may be pleasing God as much as I am.

That's really hard. Let's just be honest. That is hard, intellectually hard, emotionally hard, and Paul knows it, and therefore the guns have got to come out here.

The big guns are coming out again. He's not going to do a little psychological mumbo-jumbo, lighten up and don't sweat the small stuff. He's pulling big guns out of the artillery again.

What's he do? He's got a three-step amazing response to help us love each other when we have come to firm convictions about a nonessential thing, and they're the opposite of what people around us are doing. I'd be tempted to just make a long list of them right here that are in your life, but I'll let you fill in the blank. First, his first step is he simply makes the bald, radical statement that doing opposite things glorifies God.

Verse 6, The one who observes the day, observes it to the Lord in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord. Since he gives thanks to God.

While the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. Doing opposite things. Analyzing the situation about the meat and about the vegetables and one being fully convinced we shouldn't eat, the other fully convinced we should eat.

And both radically pleasing to God. Magnifying God. So he just says it.

He just says it. He doesn't argue for it yet. He just says, there it is.

That's the case. Some do it. Some don't do it.

The doers honor God. The don't doers honor God. Gratitude is ascending.

Glorification is happening. Praise God for all the opposite behaviors in the church over nonessentials. Because you can't apply this to everything, right? You're all sitting there kind of squirming like, ooh.

What things does he think you can't disagree about? Well, you can't murder to the glory of God. You can't steal to the glory of God. You can't commit adultery to the glory of God.

You can't be arrogant to the glory of God. You can't covet to the glory of God. And many other things.

However, there are hundreds of things in life we do disagree about. And some of us think those are pretty significant things, though they may not rise to the level of essential. And on those things, we're going to come to opposite convictions about what we should be doing.

So they can eat, and they can abstain to the glory of God. They can eat with thanksgiving to God. That's obvious.

And they can abstain with thanksgiving to God for all that God is to them to enable them to abstain and be totally satisfied. Nothing inferior about that affection. Step 2. He's just said the fact.

That's all he's done in verse 6. He's just said the fact. Opposite behaviors on non-essentials can glorify God. Now, we need help, Paul, because that's a pretty radical thing.

Easy to say, hard to live. Verse 7 to 8. He does something to me. I should stop being surprised, but it's surprising.

4. He brings out his biggest guns. None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. So, you see, life and death.

Bang! Life and death. He reaches to the ultimate. Life and death.

None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord. And if we die, we die to the Lord.

Now, why does he bring up life and death? I mean, we're talking about meat, Paul. Come on. Don't get so global here.

We're talking about small, non-essential things. Why do you bring in life and death? And I think the reason is that life and death are the ultimate opposites of eating and not eating. If you're alive, you have a body, and you can enjoy the pleasures of food and drink and exercise and sex and a cool fall air day.

I love Minnesota in the fall. Favorite time of year. I feel it on my skin.

I see the crystal sky. I love my physical experience of fall in Minnesota. I'm alive.

But if you're dead, your body is in the grave. And you don't eat or drink or exercise or have sex or feel the cool fall air on your skin. You're dead.

Death for a time before the resurrection is the ultimate abstaining from what the world offers. So Paul reaches for the ultimate life and death. And he says, both of them, as opposite as you can get.

Magnify God. Glorify Christ. None of us lives to himself.

None of us dies to himself. If we live our whole life, eating and everything is to the glory of God. If we die and lose all that, we lose it.

And fasten our affections on Christ in such a way that death is gained and Christ is magnified. And we die to the Lord, to the glory of the Lord. We display the glory of Christ by giving him thanks and receiving every good thing he's made and making him the giver of it.

And when we lose all that, we lose it all and we're dying in a hospital bed. And know that we'll never taste like that again until the resurrection. We say, to die is gain because it gains Christ.

So in living and eating, we can magnify him. And in dying and not eating, we can magnify him. And I think the argument of Paul is to these folks who are getting all bent out of shape about the possibility of whether or not people doing opposite behaviors as them can really be glorifying God.

He says, look, dead people can glorify God. And living people can glorify God. And if the dead and the living can glorify God, then the opposites of food and non-food can glorify God.

Celebrate the day or non-celebrate the day. He's pulling out the ultimate opposite, showing that in these two radically deep opposites, Christ can be magnified to say to us, you better look beyond your capacities to believe that this other person can glorify God and look to what God is saying about how he gets glory. He gets glory from the living and he gets glory from the dead.

And it doesn't get any more opposite than that. In Christ. That's step two.

To go to life and death as the ultimates of eating and not eating. Now, here's step the final step. Paul is not done.

He won't stop there. He's going to go to the greatest event in history. And he's going to give the deepest foundation for the confidence that opposite behaviors like life and death can glorify Christ.

Verse eight, middle of the verse. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end, Christ died and lived again.

That he might be Lord, both of the dead. And of the living. So if John Piper or somebody else asks.

Paul. How is it? How is it? That a person. Who is alive.

With a body. Can enjoy all these worlds. Good things.

And give thanks to God. And the person who's dead. Whose body is in the grave.

With no ability to eat. Or drink. How is it? That these radically different relationships to the world.

Can both display the glory of Christ. All answers. Christ died.

And he rose again. That he might destroy the power of death. And make the living his own possession.

Make the dead his own possession. So that the living display his worth. In how they use creation.

And the dead display his worth. In how they let go of creation. For the superior value of receiving Christ.

And so he takes us down from the bald assertion. Step one. Those who eat.

And those who don't eat. Eat to the glory of Christ. And don't eat to the glory of Christ.

You think that's hard? You think that's hard for you to get your head around? You think emotionally you ought to be able to handle that in the local church? Look. Life and death. The living can live to Christ.

The dead can live to Christ. Paul. That's step two.

Step three. Paul. How can that be? Answer.

Christ died for them. And he rose from the dead. He conquered death.

He made them his own possession. They live to him. They die to him.

He is magnified. And they're living and then they're dying. Nothing stops the King Jesus from getting glory from his own.

Neither life nor death. Nor eating nor drinking. Nor Sunday keeping or any other thing.

So sum it up with me. Paul is dealing with the disagreements over non-essential matters. Day keeping.

Food eating. He's saying not. Don't sweat the small stuff.

Lighten up. That's not his advice. His advice is each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

How are you going to act out of faith with regard to little things if you don't have a conviction about what faith calls for in your case? So be convinced fully. He knows that's really hard, Paul. I mean, you just poured gasoline on the divisiveness of this church to say everybody should get a strong conviction about this.

And he says, I know. I know. But frankly, the risk factor in a shilly shallying church with no convictions is greater than the risk factor of conviction laden people who know what I've just said here.

And so I'm taking you to three steps to learn how to be stunned at what God does through opposite choices. God, number one, receives glory from eaters and non-eaters. Day keepers and non-day keepers.

How so, Paul? How can this be? Well, look. Look at life and death. Life can bring glory to Christ and death can bring glory to Christ.

How can that be, Paul? Christ died. He came into the world to show this is possible, to make this possible. He took all the sins upon himself of his own people.

He died. He shattered death as he rose from the grave and he made all of those for whom he died his own possession so that they live for his glory by eating and they die for his glory by letting goods and kindred go. This mortal life also.

And so. And so what should I say to you? As I end. Well, I will not say, lighten up, Bethlehem.

Don't sweat the small stuff, Bethlehem. Be indecisive and vacillating and shilly-shallying. I will not say that because that's not what Paul says.

You know what I think I should say? Stand in awe of the risen Christ. That's what I should say. Stand in awe of the risen Christ who came into the world, took our sins upon his shoulders, suffered infinitely for us.

And in taking hell and sin and suffering and death upon himself, shattered it all and said, it is finished. And rose triumphant and said, now I'm taking a people for myself. And when I take them, they live for me.

They die for me. They eat for me. They don't eat for me.

They keep days for me. They don't keep days for me. I'm massively central in all their lives.

And those who get a handle on this will find the emotional wherewithal to get along with strong-minded people. Namely, everybody. It's another way forward.

Not an easy way. Just the biblical. Christ exalting.

Truth honoring. Oh, Father in Heaven, I am one of the opinionated types. My need is to bow before this text and hear.

Don't despise. Don't judge. Don't reject.

Embrace. Not by forsaking conviction. But by exalting the risen almighty Christ who can make opposite choices read down to his glory.

So I pray for this pastor and all our staff. I pray for this people. There's some indecisive folks here and there's some really opinionated folks here.

And I pray for humility to abound and conviction to abound. In Jesus' name, amen. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper, pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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