

## Romans

**Romans Chapter Fourteen    Romans 14:1-23**

**July 10, 2011**

This is lesson number 96 in our exposition of the Book of Romans.

**The Theme of the Letter**

**Romans 1:16-17**

“For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is the **power** of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the **righteousness of God** is **revealed** from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ ” Romans 1:16-17

**Title: The Will of God in Matters of Conscience.**

The Book of Romans is quite wonderful.

Of course all of God’s word is wonderful but we have in Romans the most perfect manual for the life of the believer in Jesus Christ.

When you buy a vehicle or appliance or electronic equipment you get an operator’s manual. If you ignore the manual you will invite serious trouble.

God has given believers an “operator’s manual” and we are learning the will of God for believers in all situations.

We have the true Gospel from the OT Scriptures. We have the bedrock doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone; which if a person denies they deny the only way to be saved. But saving faith necessarily results in obedience unto sanctification, and so we not only have the doctrine or teaching but we have the will of God in the matter of true worship.

True worship is not liturgy although the liturgy may be perfectly well intended. True worship is our reasonable service and is how we live our day to day lives. There is much more worship in our way of life than in any church activity, as excellent as that church service may be.

In the first chapter of the Book of Romans after declaring that the Gospel is based on the OT Scriptures we are told very honestly by the Holy Spirit that our standing before God is one of condemnation.

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Condemnation means that a person remains under the wrath of God unless and until God does something for that person.

All men are guilty and condemned because of the one sin of the one man.

The sin of Adam is imputed or charged to every person. Sin is then compounded by our personal transgression of the law of God and there is absolutely nothing that you or I can do about it in our own ability and power.

Unless and until God takes the initiative to save a sinner that sinner will remain in a state of condemnation.

Then we are also told through the Gospel message that there is another Man, Christ Jesus, to whom God the Father gave a people before God ever spoke the world into existence.

And in the fullness of time Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Jesus Christ lived as a true Man and He fulfilled every condition of the law of God required of us. Jesus died in the place and stead of sinners and He was buried and on the third day He came forth from the grave according to the OT Scriptures.

He ascended back to the Father and he will return for His people at the end of this present age. And until then:

**Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.**

Faith in Christ is the only way to God and that faith is the only way to have the righteousness of God given freely to you. **The just shall live by faith.**

**Justification by Faith alone, in Christ alone, according to the Scriptures alone, in order that God alone gets the glory!**

When the Holy Spirit convinces a person of their personal sin and guilt and enables that person to receive the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ they are born of God and become a new creation in Christ Jesus.

That brings us to the true worship of God.

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As a new creation in Christ, Christians begin to live their lives as Christians by presenting their bodies as a living sacrifice to God, which is their reasonable service or worship.

Remember that everything from Chapter 12:1-2, to the end of the Book of Romans is about how to worship God.

### **Romans 12:1-2**

**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**

And so beginning in Romans Chapter 12 we have the perfect will of God for believers in Christ Jesus as they worship together in the church and as they exercise their various spiritual gifts for the benefit of the church.

But we cannot stay together with the church all of the time. We must go out into the world and continue to worship God by the way we live in the world.

In Chapter 13 we have the perfect will of God for the believer under authority. According to Romans Chapter 13, a Christian worships God by submitting to the authority that God has placed over them. The Christian cannot decide which laws and ruling he will obey. Only if the authority commands you to go against the clear word of God may you refuse to obey.

If you disobey the authority you must expect to suffer the consequences.

And Chapter 13 also teaches us that a Christian worships God by being a good neighbor.

**Today we take up Chapter 14** where the apostle brings us back into the church and deals with some of the things that the devil uses to split churches.

The devil cannot take away your salvation but he can cause the church a great deal of suffering if you allow him to make you so hard to get along with that you make **matters of conscience** a test of fellowship.

The Bible warns about schism, the breaking apart of a local church. People leave the church in anger and in disappointment.

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### 1 Corinthians 12:20-26

**20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. 23 And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty, 24 but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, 25 that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.**

\* \* \*

Let me tell you about a couple that I know. This husband and wife both claim to be Christians and they go to church every Sunday and Wednesday. They seem to be decent people and after he was saved I have never heard that he has ever been in any kind of real trouble. They seek to find ways to be helpful to other people and not just to members of their own church.

But there is one thing about them that really bothers me. Do you know that they do not celebrate Christmas like real Christians are supposed to do? They don't decorate their house and they don't even put up a Christmas tree or exchange gifts with each other.

So I am not sure they really are Christians because they don't even recognize the day that Jesus was born. I have even heard the husband say that no one really knows the day that Jesus was born. But everybody knows that Jesus was born on December 25<sup>th</sup>.

**So let me ask you, can anyone be a real Christian and not celebrate Christmas Day like you are supposed to do?**

Real Christians?

The Book of Romans has much to say about who is and who is not a real Christian. The Spirit of God through the Bible leads the real Christian.

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There are two areas that we must consider:  
Morality and Matters of Conscience.

### **Morality:**

**There are certain thoughts and actions that are always wrong.**

Adultery, and murder, and stealing, and lying, and coveting, which Paul named in Chapter 13, are always wrong in any context under any circumstances, for all people.

You cannot rationalize your situation in life and violate these and other specific commandments and expect God to accept it. If the Holy Spirit is leading you will not continue in sin and you will not try to use the superabundant grace of God as an excuse for continuing in sin.

### **But then there are matters of conscience:**

These are things for which there is no clear word of God. And that is where the devil will try to cause you to assume a wrong attitude and cause harm to a sister or a brother in the church.

These are the things that usually cause problems in the church. A church like Vineland Park Baptist will rarely split over the Gospel. You have been taught the truth of the Word of God. You know the Gospel and you will not compromise the truth of Jesus Christ.

**But we are not immune from schism.**

The Bible teaches us here in Chapter 14 how to guard against wrong attitudes in **matters of conscience.**

**Paul refers to here to ‘strong’ believers and ‘weak’ believers.**

It always occurs to me when I read this passage how dangerous it is for me to think that I fall into the category of a ‘strong’ Christian. The truth is that there are certain areas in which I am, in fact, mature and ‘strong.’ Yet there are other matters in which other people would judge me to be ‘weak’ and they may be correct.

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These matters of conscience were a real problem in the church at Rome and these kinds of things still cause grief.

Is it wrong to eat meat? Is a vegetarian a more spiritual person?

Well, what about meat that has been offered to an idol?

What is the proper day to meet with the church?

Are any days in the year 'special' days?

Is Christmas Day a special day?

Is Easter Sunday a more holy day than any other given day in a year?

The church at Rome was made up of Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians. A man or woman raised in Judaism who became a Christian could not immediately throw off the tradition of Sabbaths and festivals and special religious days. The man or woman raised in a pagan household could not be expected to adopt the Jewish traditions.

So what should the church do about food and religious days?

These kinds of things are **matters of conscience** although Paul does not use that specific phrase.

**How do we in this age know what our attitude should be in matters of conscience?**

Well, it is not always easy but there are certain **principles** that are laid down in Chapter 14 that if followed will help us keep the devil out of the life of the church. See if any of these things cause you to cringe or to feel uncomfortable? You know that what you have always been taught is the only way, right?

**Keep in mind that we are still learning how to worship God.**

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E.g., in the book on Singing in the church, Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes that we should never use a saxophone in a worship service. "Their sound is primitive." [p38]

He makes a good case but he did not convince me that the sound of a well-played saxophone is evil. How should we decide what to do if someone wants to play a saxophone to the glory of God?

Churches divide over music [psalms only, traditional hymns or contemporary praise songs]; over instrumental accompanists or none at all.

### Follow along in your Bible as I read Romans Chapter 14:

**Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. 2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. 3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. 4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.**

**5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. 7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. 8 For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. 9 For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. 10 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. 11 For it is written:**

**"As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God."**

**12 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. 13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.**

**14 I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.**

**15 Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.**

**16 Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.**

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**19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. 21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. 22 Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.**

**23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.**

If Vineland Park Baptist or any other local church is going to worship God in Spirit and in Truth we must learn certain **principles** in matters of conscience. **Not only learn them but also obey them.**

The commandments or the moral laws that have to do with loving God **supremely** and loving our neighbors **equally** are not negotiable.

But there are many things that are **matters of conscience** and the apostle is warning us not to assume the position of being a judge over another Christian's conscience.

**Much of the remainder this outline was taken from  
“The Gospel As It Really Is”, by Stuart Olyott.**

We are dealing here with the subject of Christian liberty and ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ Christians.

When the **strong** Christians see a **weak** Christian avoiding certain foods and observing special days the strong Christian tends to think:

**“How silly they are.”**

When the **weak** Christians see the **strong** Christian doing things that they think are wrong the weak Christian tends to think:

**“How worldly they are.”**

Now keep in mind the strong Christian and the weak Christian are not disagreeing over moral issues because God's word is very clear. Their differences are over **matters of conscience.**



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When Paul wrote this letter you could go to a market and buy meat that had been offered as a sacrifice to an idol. This would be the very best meat you could buy. Some believers would buy it and enjoy it and not give a thought to the fact that it had been used in idol worship. Meat was meat.

But others could not forget that the meat had been used in idol worship and thought that somehow the meat itself was tainted and they could not eat it with a clear conscience. Some refused to eat any meat at all.

There was a sharp disagreement in the church over what should and what should not be eaten.

In the same way there were differences concerning the festivals and religious days. Jewish Christians felt as though the Sabbaths and festivals that they had been taught to observe should be a part of their Christian worship.

Gentile believers had no such tradition and were completely indifferent to Jewish holy days.

What about you and me here in the Year 2011? Ask yourself how did you decide what is 'right' and what is 'wrong' when it comes to certain foods and days. You can not accept or reject matters of conscience because of what the Bible teaches about them because it simply does not tell us.

What happens is that you learn from your parents, you learn from your early church experience, and from friends, and from other sources, but not from the Bible.

**Important: The First Day of the Week is not an issue here.**

The early church accepted the First Day of the week as a day of worship.

The **strong Christians** did not observe any other special days. Saturday, which had been the Sabbath, was just another day to them. The same was true of Passover and the other festivals.

But the **weak Christian** did not feel so free. They had always observed the Sabbath and could not in good conscience just begin to ignore that day.

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And so there were considerable differences among the early believers as to which days were special and which days were ordinary days. It was so serious that the church was in danger of schism.

Chapter 14 is the answer to **matters of conscience**. Paul primarily addresses the strong believers but his counsel cuts both ways. When my brother and I differ over a matter of conscience, how am I to treat him?

### **FOUR RULES**

The **first rule** is in verse 1 and it is summed up in the word “*receive.*”

Your brother may be weak but he is your brother.

Receive him on equal terms. Do not fall into the temptation to reject him.

Do not try to force your point of view on him. Simply receive him as a brother in Christ.

In matters of conscience we may discuss the matter and examine the Scriptures but we must not try to force our brother to agree with us and thus violate his own conscience.

The **second rule** is “*do not despise.*”

The strong believers are prone to do this and verses 2-3a points this out.

The strong Christian must be very careful not to think any less of a brother just because he has ‘hang-up’s’ or scruples [doubts about what is right].

What Paul is saying is that your brother’s scruples are just as valid as yours are therefore “*do not despise*” your brother.

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The **third rule** is *do not judge*.

This is the temptation of the weak and verses 3b-4 gives the rule.

The weak Christian tends to be legalistic and fixed on a 'touch not, taste not, and handle not' approach to Christianity. They are so sure that they are right that they tend to pass judgment on anyone who does not agree with them.

But if God has received this person who are you to judge him?

He is answerable only to God and not to you. Stop acting as if you were his master, and be sure that your attitude is not less receiving than God's.

The **fourth rule** is that "*each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.*"

Verse 5 says that instead of watching the other person to be fully persuaded in what you are doing and that what you are doing is with a clear conscience.

Do not agree with a brother just to be accepted by him if the thing in question bothers your conscience.

**I will keep reminding you that this is about how to worship God and how to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.**

### **Four Rules:**

*receive*

*do not despise*

*do not judge*

*each person must be fully convinced in his own mind*

**After the Four Rules, Paul now gives us Three Reasons.**

The **first reason** is *God has received him*.

Back in verse 3: It is God that has received him. Am I more strict than God?

The strong Christian must not think they are glorifying God by disowning those whom God has accepted. And the weak Christian must not think that they are glorifying God by being stricter than God Himself.

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The **second reason** is that “*he behaves as he does out of regard for the Lord.*”

This point is covered in 6-9.

Why does one believer keep certain days in a special way, but another believer does not?

Why does one believer eat anything and give thanks to God, while another believer avoids certain foods and also gives thanks to God?

**The answer in all cases is to please the Lord!**

How can we criticize the behavior of someone who does what he does to please the Lord?

None of us lives to himself [7-9].

The chief aim of the believer is to please the Lord.

This points out the absolute **authority of Christ** and is the **third reason** for the behavior that the apostle has commanded.

Paul touched on it in verse 4, and now mentions it again in vs.10-12.  
***Your brother is Christ's servant,*** and is answerable only to Him.

How can you set yourself up in judgment over your brother? The truth is that we shall stand, not before each other, but before the judgment seat of God.

Once more Paul refers to Isaiah:

**Isaiah 45:23**  
**I have sworn by Myself;**  
**The word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness,**  
**And shall not return,**  
**That to Me every knee shall bow,**  
**Every tongue shall take an oath.**

Each one of us will give an account of himself directly to God.

There is a lot that I don't understand about the 'judgment seat of Christ.'

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**John 5:22-23 “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”**

For the genuine believer this will not be for final salvation or for condemnation because Paul has already said,

**“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” [8:1]**

Just know that you are not the judge of another believer and that you will stand before the Judge of this universe, Jesus Christ.

In matters of conscience, no believer is answerable to another believer.

In matters of moral law, the local church has the responsibility to administer the restorative discipline of admonition, suspension, or excommunication as prescribed in the NT. But this is not to be carried over into matters of conscience.

Under no circumstances is my conscience to be imposed on another. Nor is his conscience to be imposed on me.

That means that Christian liberty is to be both valued and preserved.

Ignorance of the apostle’s teaching has led to the conscience and liberty of some to be trodden on by others.

That said, it is sometimes necessary for me to impose **voluntary** restrictions on my liberty in the interest of Christian love.

For example, the Christian who has no scruples about eating meat offered to idols should not eat the meat in front of the weak Christian.

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### *A WORD TO THE STRONG*

Those who enjoy Christian liberty are warned not to spend your energy and time pointing out how silly and unnecessary is the scruples of the weak.

Your interest should be in the spiritual progress of fellow believers.

**Cf. vs. 13 & vs. 21.**

**13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.**

**21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.**

Your concern should be for your brother's welfare. You do not want to be the cause of your brother to lose sight of his faith.

Let's take an example right out of Southern Baptist life today.

### **What about drinking wine?**

Most Southern Baptists have been taught that the Bible commands total abstinence from all alcohol. Most Baptist church covenants have a section about abstaining from the use of or sale of alcoholic beverages.

Some scholars have gone to great lengths to try to show that the wine used in the Lord's Supper was not fermented or at least that it was so weak that it was not really wine at all.

You simply cannot make that hold up. What do the warnings in First Corinthians 11, about getting drunk at the Lord's Supper mean if the wine they were drinking could not make you drunk?

There was an instance in the church at Franklin, TN. We made our own unleavened bread and used wine in the Lord's Supper. There was a man who left our church because he said he did not want his daughter to become a drunk by taking the Lord's Supper. I won't go into all the ramifications of what is wrong with that. However, we did offer to provide grape juice for his family so as not to violate his conscience. He would not come back because we used wine.

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**Please listen carefully to me.** I am especially concerned that our young people hear me correctly. I am not encouraging anyone that has scruples about drinking wine to begin drinking.

Wine and beer and whiskey have brought great damage and heartache to many people and to their families. My advice is to leave it alone and not even start experimenting with alcoholic beverages.

No one has ever made a conscious choice to become a drunk. But many people have become drunkards.

My advice is not academic; I used to be a drunk.  
When the Lord saved me he gave me the grace to stop being a drunk.

Now the Bible is very clear about **drunkenness**.

### *1 Corinthians 6:9-11*

**9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, 10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.**

### **1 Corinthians 5:9-11**

**I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. 10 Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner — not even to eat with such a person.**

The teaching of the Bible is not total abstinence of alcohol but it condemns drunkenness. **God saves drunkards and they become former drunkards.**

Another thing. In the spirit of this Chapter I am not trying to change your convictions or scruples. All I am doing is telling you what the Scripture teaches because it is a matter of conscience mentioned in this chapter.

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Paul said he had not shunned declaring the whole counsel of God.

If I avoided this issue I would not be an honest preacher of the Word of God.

**Cf. vs. 15 & vs. 20 & 22.**

**15 Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.**

**20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.**

**22 Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.**

A word about the phrase “**Do not destroy**”.

Destroy cannot mean to cause a brother to lose his salvation.

Not even God takes away what He has given in grace.

Paul says that we should enjoy our liberty but that we should not parade it before others or to impose it upon those whose conscience would be offended by doing the things that we enjoy.

At the same time we should not grumble and complain if our brother’s weakness curbs our own liberty.

### **Vs. 16-19**

**16 Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. 19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.**

Consider **curbing** your liberty as something done for Christ. Serve Christ in this way and thus worship Him with your body.

Although your liberty is precious it is not something that must be preserved at all costs. What **must be preserved** at all costs is the peace and spiritual development of the church. Let us be concerned about building up the church.



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### A WORD TO THE WEAK

Most of this chapter has been addressed to those who enjoy their liberty. But the weak, with their overly sensitive consciences have not been left out.

#### Cf. 14 & 20b & 23

**14 I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.**

**20b All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.**

**23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.**

**We must be very careful not to measure sin only in terms of outward acts. A perfectly legitimate act wrongly motivated is sinful.**

**A believer is not to engage in any course of action as long as he nurses any scruple, qualm, reservation, or doubt, or hesitation about it.**

**Under no circumstances is he to violate his own conscience.**

**What liberty we have in Christ Jesus.**

I must remind you once more that we are not in the realm of moral law. We are in the realm of matters of conscience.

**I am free up to the point of causing my brother to stumble.**

Martin Luther on Christian liberty:

**“A Christian man is a most free lord of all, subject to none.”**

Of Christian charity he said:

**“A Christian man is a most dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”**

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**The balance of these two principles is the will of God for us in all matters of conscience where Christian consciences differ.**

In summary:

**Moral laws are never up for debate.**

**In matters of conscience, each person must be convinced in his or her own mind.**

**No one should try to force his or her views on another person. Discuss what the Scriptures teach but the final choice in matters of conscience is entirely up to you.**

**A word of extreme caution is called for before we can end this lesson.**

**When you do anything that violates your own conscience, anything that you believe to be wrong, it is sin for you.**

My prayer is that we [me and you] learn how to be a church.

We are making progress but we have not finished the race.