

## **DO ALL THINGS TO PLEASE CHRIST** **Romans 14:22-23**

**by Dr. Jack L. Arnold**

This is our last message on “doubtful things,” things neither inherently sinful nor specifically commanded against in Scripture that may become sinful if the Lord convicts the individual conscience or if the practices become stumbling blocks for a weak brother in Christ.

A list of doubtful things would include different things in different cultures, but in America it frequently includes such things as television, movies, dancing, drinking alcoholic beverages, smoking, gambling, and participating in certain kinds of amusements. The Bible specifically tells us that many things are sin — such as lying, cheating, gossip, sexual perversion, judging, bitterness, worry, hatred, prejudice, envy, murder, laziness, drunkenness, etc. — and God’s moral law will never change. However, we must deal with doubtful things on the basis of biblical principles because there is no right or wrong in these matters. They are a matter of conscience.

It has been interesting to note the reactions of people over the years as we have studied and taught this subject. A person once said to me, “You never tell us what is right or wrong in these doubtful things. One minute you say we have liberty, and the next you say we should restrain our liberty.” He was coming to understand doubtful things, and my answer was that his conscience would have to guide him in these things. Another person said, “Pastor, I think I understand this teaching on doubtful things — it is all right here,” and he pointed to his heart. This man had learned his lesson well, for he understood that the Christian is to do everything to please his Lord and to love his brethren in Christ. It is not the act but the attitude!

### **REVIEW OF THE ARGUMENT IN ROMANS 14**

In Romans 14:4-12 Paul has exhorted the weaker brother, whose conscience will not permit him to do certain practices, not to judge the stronger brother who exercises liberty in the area of doubtful things. He assures the weaker brother that every Christian will someday give an account of his life to Christ.

In Romans 14:13-21, the stronger brother is not to look down in contempt at the weaker brother. Rather, he must exercise his Christian liberty within the bounds of love. It is love that motivates the stronger brother to set aside his liberty in doubtful things because he is concerned for the welfare of his weaker brother. He will put no stumbling

block in the way of the weak; he avoids wasting a life or destroying the work of evangelism in the local church.

### **FAITH PLEASES GOD — Romans 14:22-23**

To this point Paul has given us two laws to govern our attitudes about doubtful things: the law of conscience and the law of love. Now he sets forth a higher law: faith. Whatever is not of faith is sin. In other words, we should do all things to please the Lord Jesus Christ:

“That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10).

“And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 John 3:22).

If we are not pleasing the Lord in the area of some doubtful thing, then we should not practice it.

“Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God.” The strong believer may have definite convictions about freedom, and rightly so. However, he is to refrain from using his freedom if it will be a detriment to other weaker Christian brothers. The mature believer’s happiness is in knowing he has freedom, not necessarily in exercising it. One does not have to exhibit his liberty to prove he has it.

“Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.” The stronger brother has freedom of conscience in doubtful things, and a knowledge of this brings inner happiness as he revels in the grace of God. He is not bound by legalism but bound by love.

“And he that doubteth is damned [judged] if he eat, because he eateth not of faith.” The weaker brother should not practice any doubtful thing if his conscience is convicted that it is wrong for him. A good rule of thumb is “When in doubt, don’t.”

“For whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” An attitude of faith will solve the problem of doubtful things. Whatever we do in these things must be done to please the Lord. If we can’t do a thing to please him, then we ought not to do it. We will all give an account before our God.

The area of doubtful things must be solved on the basis of biblical principles. Here are seven basic ones:

### *The Principle of Liberty*

“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any (1 Cor. 6:12).

“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not” (I Cor. 10:23).

All doubtful things are lawful for a Christian to practice. In themselves, these things will not disturb one’s relationship to the Lord. Grace gives a person much Christian liberty.

### *The Principle of Love*

“Judge ... that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way ... But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably [lovingly] ... It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak” (Rom 14:13,15,21).

“But take heed lest by any means this liberty of your’s become a stumbling block to them that are weak” (1 Cor. 8:9).

Because the brother who understands Christian liberty loves his brother who does not understand, he willingly sets aside his freedom to help the weaker brother understand grace and to keep him from stumbling.

### *The Principle of Expediency*

While the Christian has liberty, sometimes it is not expedient or practical to exercise that liberty. For example, although a Christian may be free to drink wine in America, in my estimation it is frequently not expedient for him to do so. Alcoholism is a plague in this country. Statistics indicate there are millions of alcoholics in the United States. More money is spent on booze than on education.

### *The Principle of Edification*

Whatever the Christian does should be done to build up, not tear up, our Christian brethren. Any act that hinders the growth of another Christian is wrong.

### *The Principle of Self-control*

A Christian should not allow himself to become a slave to any fleshy appetite or habit. Christian liberty does not mean that one becomes a slave to habits; it means that one is a slave to Christ and is free to serve him. When a doubtful practice becomes a slavish habit, it must be forsaken. It is possible for a Christian to be a slave to tobacco or television or any questionable practice, but the Bible teaches that Christians are to be slaves to Jesus Christ and that one cannot be a slave to Christ and a slave to some habit at the same time.

To recall the earlier example of drinking wine, a glass of wine is not forbidden in the New Testament. In fact, Paul even mentions that a little wine is good for the stomach, like medicine (1 Tim. 5:23). Biblical prohibitions are against “much wine” (1 Tim. 3:8; Tit. 2:3). However, when alcohol becomes a compelling or controlling habit, he has been brought under its power or influence, and this is sin. In the same way, if one cannot make it through the day without coffee, he has been brought under the power of the mild drug caffeine. These things are not bad in themselves, and the proper use of substances like alcohol and caffeine is not wrong. When these things become controlling influences in one’s life, however, they cross the line into sin.

### *The Principle of God’s Glory*

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

Whatever a believer does must be to the glory of God. If God cannot be glorified by an act, it is best not to do that thing.

For instance, if we want to go to a movie, we are free to do so, but we should ask ourselves if our viewing it will glorify God. Will it corrupt our minds or stir our inner passions to lust? We must learn to be selective in movie going.

Dancing is another such issue. It is not sinful in itself, but dance clubs and parties frequently include much drinking and immorality, and the question is whether one can glorify Christ there. When I was first saved, I knew that I had the freedom to attend my fraternity parties, but I didn’t want to go because of the drinking, immorality, and loose talk. My flesh wanted to go, but my mind and heart told me that I couldn’t and glorify Christ. I had been bought with a price, Christ’s death, and I was to glorify Christ in my body.

### *The Principle of Supreme Sacrifice*

“Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend” (1 Cor. 8:13).

“For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law of Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you” (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

“Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (1 Cor. 10:33).

Because of his love for Jesus, his brethren, and the unsaved world, the Christian will go to any length, involve himself in any hardship, and impose upon himself the strictest discipline in order to reach men for Christ and to build men in Christ.

## **CONCLUSION**

Personally, I believe that more people have been driven from salvation in Christ because of Christian legalism than for any other single reason. People have confused giving up some external act with becoming a Christian.

The Bible teaches that salvation is attained by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. You cannot work for salvation. You cannot give up something and thereby become a Christian. You must acknowledge that you are a sinner, separated from God and headed for eternal judgment, and then entrust yourself to Jesus Christ who alone can forgive your sins and give you eternal life. God wants you to come to Christ just as you are. Then he will make you to be the man or woman he wants you to be.

Jesus Christ never said that you are to give up sin to become a Christian. He said you are to receive him as your Lord and Saviour, and then he will make you a Christian. Is Christ your personal Lord and Saviour?