

Does It Really Matter?

Part 1

Romans 14:1-12

October 16th, 2011

We are in the last section of the book of Romans. This is referred to as the application part of the book. Do you remember that big “therefore” in Romans 12:1? Well, everything Paul says towards the end of this letter to the church in Rome is based on everything he has said in those first 11 chapters. But now in Romans 14:1-15:13, Paul is talking about the same subject. We will study this whole section of Scripture over the next few lessons and ask ourselves: Does It Really Matter?

In the spring of 1980, I began dating my wife Celisa. After several dates, she told me that she wanted to take me to meet Grandfather and Memish. Now, in the short time that I had known her, I realized how important Memish was in her life. Because her mom and dad had separated while she was little, she spent a lot of time at her Memish’s. In her mind, Memish practically raised her. Knowing how important my grandparents were to me, just knowing that she wanted me to meet Grandfather and Memish meant I was in. She really liked me and this relationship was probably really going somewhere! I would start calling them Mr. Charlie and Memish.

I publicly surrendered to preach shortly after we were married, but I had told Celisa while we were still dating that the Lord was calling me to preach. It wasn’t really what I wanted to do, but I knew that God was going to win one day, so I thought she and her family should know. I remember coming into Mr. Charlie’s house one night and I had barely got

in the door when Mr. Charlie met me and said these words: "Do you think it's wrong to play cards?" I was not expecting that question. Before I had time to answer, Mr. Charlie told me to sit down and that there was nothing wrong with playing cards. He pulled out a deck of playing cards and put Celisa across from me, Memish across from him, and then he began to deal me in on a game that I knew quite well called Pitch.

Now, what was amazing about this was that in my family at my Granddaddy Bogard's, you didn't play cards. I never personally sat down with my Granddaddy Bogard because my mom was the youngest of eight kids, and by the time I came along, my granddad was old. But I knew this; the family had such a deep respect for Granddaddy Bogard that we never questioned whether or not it was ok to play cards, especially at his house. We just didn't do it. As a matter of fact, I remember collecting baseball cards, and when I would spend time with my grandparents in the summer, I remember having to ask my granddaddy if it was ok and then let him examine the baseball cards. I was relieved when granddaddy said it was ok for me to bring the baseball cards to his house and I got to play with them. I gave this example because in the history of the Christian Church, there have been many divisions in bodies of Christ and in many personal relationships over different matters. So you have to ask yourself; does it really matter?

In England, during the Victorian Age of Europe, there were two great men of God. You may recognize one name, but you might not recognize the other. One man was Charles Haddon Spurgeon and the other was Joseph Parker. Charles Haddon Spurgeon and Joseph Parker were friends, and they were both influential preachers in England. God used them to lead thousands of people to Christ. In the beginning of their ministries, they would actually exchange pulpits. As they continued to grow in the Lord, the day came where they had a public disagreement. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, in public, in his pulpit, called out Joseph Parker over the issue of the theatre. Joseph Parker happened to be a man who enjoyed the theatre, and Charles Haddon Spurgeon questioned his commitment to

Christ as a minister because he acquainted himself with the theatre in London. While at the same time, Charles Haddon Spurgeon thought nothing of puffing on a cigar! As a matter of fact, Charles Haddon Spurgeon friends and critics questioned him many times about his use of tobacco. According to R. Kent Hughes, Charles Haddon Spurgeon would always answer, "I never smoke my cigar in excess". When questioned what he meant by excess, Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "Well I've never smoked more than 2 at a time."

In this section of Scripture, Paul is going to deal with things that are going to cause us, as Christians, to say...does it really matter? Now I want to be honest with you, at first we are going to say no, it doesn't really matter! But the moment we say it doesn't really matter, we are going to follow that no with a big yes; yes it matters!

This may sound like a gray area, but I am not saying that at all. We will unpack what Paul teaches in not just this section, but the entire section over the next several lessons. So, please hold your judgments until the end. When we get finished with Romans 14:1-15:13, we will understand that what you believe about some things do not seem to matter, nor whether or not you participate in them. But once you come to that conclusion, then you are going to turn right around and say yes, it does matter. Yes, it matters to other people what they believe about certain things. And because it matters to them, what they believe about that particular thing should matter to me. If it's a big deal to somebody else, it should be a big deal to me as their fellow brother or sister in Christ.

You see, it was a big deal to Mr. Charlie or he would have never asked me that question of whether I believed it was wrong to play cards. I did play cards with him, but at the same time, I would have never played cards in the presence of my Granddaddy Bogard because it was a big deal to him too. Does it really matter...no, and yes. Don't ever say it doesn't matter to you. It should matter to you because it matters to other people. We will

never know the disrespect and the harm that we do in the body of Christ when what other people believe does not matter to us.

Scripture

"As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to 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 the 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. For 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. Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us will give an account of himself to God."

Paul is dealing with matters of the conscience, matters of the mind. There are issues that some Christians wrestle with and they aren't sure where they stand at the moment. Other Christians may have already been there,

but whether they have or not, they know where they stand on those issues, so these are matters of the conscience.

Now, you have to be careful not to apply matters of conscience to two other matters we will deal with. I believe there are three very important matters in Scripture:

1. Matters of Doctrine

When it comes to doctrine, there are some that are essential. In those doctrines, we must strive for unity. We must strive to get everyone on the same page because they are that important to the Church. But even in matters of doctrine, some are more important than others. While it is essential for there to be unity in some doctrines, there can be liberty in other doctrines. In other words, there can be different opinions among the Church about that particular doctrine.

2. Matters of Morality

When it comes to the matter of morality, it is important that the Church be on the same page because we are talking about things that are right and things that are wrong; things that are sinful versus things that are not sinful. When the Church divides on matters of morality, it sends the wrong message to those outside the Church.

3. Matters of Conscience

These are matters of the mind, issues of conscience.

Matters of Doctrine

Now, back to matters of doctrine. I think it's essential that the Church be united on certain doctrines. Some of you might believe that some of the ones we will discuss are not essential. No, they are not essential to salvation, but I believe the Bible is clear in its teaching on these doctrines, and the Church must be unified in these.

A. The Bible is the inerrant, infallible, Word of God.

It is the written Word of God, and the sole authority of the Church. Don't confuse the written Word of God with the Living Word of God. The Living Word of God is Jesus Christ. But the record of Jesus has been clearly written for us in what we call the Bible. Our Bible must be a trustworthy document, inspired by God; breathed out of God. We must have so much confidence in it that when it speaks, we believe God is speaking. And when God speaks; that's it! If you don't like it; tough...You and I are not God. I am not talking about an interpretation of the Bible, I am talking about the Bible itself.

B. Jesus Christ is God.

True Christianity believes that Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, is God Himself, not a lesser God. There are cults in our nation and in our community who name the name of Christ, but they do not hold to the deity of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we do not consider them Christians.

C. Salvation is by grace through faith.

We do not believe there is liberty on this matter. There must be unity on this matter. The Bible clearly teaches that salvation is of God in the person of Jesus Christ. The only response a sinner can make after he has been wooed by God's Holy Spirit is the reaction of faith, and at the moment of faith, he is brought into a right relationship with God. Once that sinner has been transformed into a saint, we believe it is essential the Church believes that saint, that believer, is eternally secure, because his salvation does not rest upon himself, it rests upon Jesus Christ on the cross.

D. Baptism is by immersion for a believer to identify with Jesus.

It is important and essential that we all eventually come to the same belief about baptism. Because the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, Word of God, we must teach what the Bible teaches, and not what we believe about baptism; not what we want it to be, or what our forefathers thought about

it. In Scripture, baptism is clearly taught to be by emersion as a believer, not to become a believer. Baptism is for a believer who has had his sins forgiven to identify that the old man is dead and he is a brand new man because his faith is in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Baptism is not done to join a church; baptism is done to identify to the Church and the community that a person is in a right relationship with Jesus because of the finished work of Christ.

When it comes to matters of doctrines, I believe those are essential and there must be unity. But do not apply what Paul is speaking about in Romans 14:1-15:13 to matters of doctrine, or you will come to a wrong conclusion. There are many churches that are tolerant of wrong teaching for the sake of unity, and that is wrong. The Church must lay out clear doctrines for its people to follow. We hold our leaders and our teachers to this standard. You will never be in a teaching position or a position of leadership at Hardin Baptist unless you hold to these beliefs; we believe they are that important.

Matters of Morality

I am only going to point out two matters of morality because they are in the forefront of our society.

A. Abortion

Abortion is a matter of morality. It is the taking of a life, and it is wrong. The Church does not believe life starts at birth. The Church believes life starts at conception. Scripture clearly teaches about the sanctity of life from God's perspective. The Church must hold those views while at the same time ministering lovingly, patiently, and kindly to those who do not hold this view. But, you cannot apply the principles of this passage to abortion, and the Church cannot water down matters of morality.

B. Sexuality

Mankind did not set the perimeters for marriage, God did. God has clearly defined marriage to be between a man and a woman, a male and a female. This is not a matter of the mind and it is not a matter of conscience, it is a matter of morality. While the Church will be loving, kind, and patient, and we will truly minister to anyone who does or does not want redemption, you cannot apply the principles of this passage to homosexuality and heterosexuality. The Bible clearly speaks, and it is not a matter of conscience. I refer you back to the first matter of doctrine. The Bible is the inerrant, inspired, Word of God, and God has decisively spoken about certain things. If you do not believe this, then you are going to be in trouble when it comes to matters of morality. You are going to be influenced by your friends or your family, or somebody you work with. You are going to feel sorry for someone and try to see it from their perspective, and you are going to try to water down what God says. Please don't try to apply the principles of the matters of conscience to the matters of morality.

Matters of Conscience

Matters of doctrine and matters of morality do not fall under the principles in our text. In the context, I personally believe that Paul is dealing with matters of conscience, matters of the mind; areas that the Bible just doesn't directly speak about. Therefore, there are some things that Christians are going to disagree about. But when we disagree over these things, they should not lead to a division in the body or cause you to lose a personal friend over these issues!

As I go back over the Church since I've been alive, one of the things I saw the Church wrestle with is whether it is ok to play cards. But there was a time when Hardin Baptist Church wrestled with whether or not to have a piano in the Church. Hardin Baptist Church was one of the first and only churches in our area to have an organ. We actually had an organ before we had a piano. And when the Church got ready to get a piano, it almost caused a division in the Church. It was because part of the Church did not

believe a piano was of God. Most people did not believe a piano could be used in the service of God. You may not realize this, but at one time Hardin was the thriving metropolitan of what we now call Marshall and Calloway County. Because of the railroad, Hardin was the place to be. Hardin used to be famous for its roadhouses. So, Wadesboro Church decided to put a church in Hardin to influence the great metropolitan because they felt they were too far out from the city of Hardin to directly influence it. But guess what the Hardin roadhouse had? The roadhouse had a piano...therefore, the Church had an organ! In other communities, if the roadhouse had an organ, the church had a piano. We laugh now; that's humorous, but it wasn't humorous back in that day because people had strong convictions! The reason was because many men and women tied their belief about morality to their life before they got saved, and the one thing that influenced them a lot was a piano or an organ in a roadhouse. So a guy just couldn't come out of a roadhouse and go into church and hear that organ or hear that piano play. You say it doesn't matter, but it does matter!

I think another is dancing, and I still struggle with this. I desperately wanted to dance with my daughter when she got married, but I couldn't. It has been so engrained in me that dancing is not right. But I do not believe dancing is a matter of doctrine or an issue of morality, because King David danced before the Lord. I think it's a matter of conscience.

Another is Bible translations, wow...how divisive that has been! I've had some members of a certain church in Marshall County that have said, "Bro. Ricky, we sure would like to have you come and hold a revival for us." I said, "Man I'd love to come." They said, "You don't preach out of the KJV of the Bible." I said, "Man, I'll bring my KJV; I've got one!" I've never been invited, but if I was invited to speak in a church that was a KJV only church, I would take the KJV Bible. Because to me, this is not a matter of doctrine and it's not a matter of morality, it's a matter of conscience. You will never hear me badmouth the KJV of the Bible because it was the best translation available in its day.

Clothing is another matter of conscience. I was reared in a small country church. But when I went with my cousin Kenny in town to one of the city churches, I remember thinking that they were liberal and we were conservative. The reason I thought that was because the women wore dresses in our church, and I saw women in pants at that church. I had been taught women should not wear pants in church, and I thought that was a liberal church because of clothing!

I know there are some of you that would be more comfortable with me preaching in my khakis or in my jeans, and I do that occasionally. But I just want to be honest with you, I still love to preach in a suit. It's a matter of conscience. It's because I was raised to believe that when you come to the house of the Lord, you give God your best. If your best is a pair of jeans, wear your jeans. I'm not saying you should wear a suit to church, but it's a matter of conscience, not a matter of morality or doctrine.

Now, let me be really controversial here just for a moment, but we've just got to understand that the younger generation doesn't feel like we do about clothing. As a matter of fact, there are some kids who come to church here that wear jeans that cost more than my suit. There are some men that wear boots that cost more than my suit! There are some people who really get tore up when a young person comes into the house of the Lord and doesn't take his cap off. This is not a matter of morality, it's not a matter of doctrine; it's a matter of conscience.

- **Nonessential, But It Matters**

I will lay out some principles in the next few lessons in matters of conscience. But I want you to know what we are talking about here. We are not talking about matters of doctrine or morality. So do not apply what I will teach to the Bible, or Christ, the plan of salvation, the security of a believer, or to baptism. Don't apply this to abortion, homosexuality, and matters of morality. Keep this where it's intended by the Apostle Paul, and that is there are some things in the Church and in the life of believers that are nonessential! But because Paul says they are nonessential, that does

not mean they are not important. It doesn't mean they don't matter; they matter. This cuts two ways, because not only does it matter to me, it matters to your brother or sister in Christ. Paul is trying to get us to understand that if you are a mature believer, the most important thing is not what matters to you, but what matters to them. And because it matters to them, it should matter to you.

Weak and Strong

When I outlined Romans years ago to start this study, I thought weak and strong was referring to levels of maturity, but I don't believe that anymore. When you see the phrase weak and strong, this isn't referring to a mature person and an immature person, it's referring to a believer who is trying to make a proper decision about how to live out the gospel. There are some believers who are weak, meaning they haven't come to a strong conviction yet about certain things, and whether it's right or wrong to do them. Other people already have a strong conviction. Now, before you jump the gun and say that the people with strong convictions are the people who are right, you had better be careful, because not everyone has the conviction they have because they are seeking to honor the Lord. They have the conviction they have because that's just the conviction they have. And if you checked, it's what their daddy, their granddaddy, and their great-granddaddy believed. It might even be because it is a cultural or a regional thing. Some churches in Western Kentucky have a completely different view than churches across the river. Churches in other states have some beliefs that are completely contrary to what we believe.

Christians sometimes forget that we are not all at the same place in our walk. And the reason we are not all at the same place in our walk is not because one is more mature and one is less mature. It's because we didn't start at the same place, and we don't like to admit that. Some of us already had preconceived notions about certain things when we came into the Christian faith, and we started there. Others didn't start there; therefore, they are not where we are at yet.

In a grace church like this, I hear a lot about liberty and freedom in Christ. When it comes to sin, you are to exercise your freedom in Christ and live above sin. But do not claim Christian liberty in matters of conscience. Don't do something just because you believe it's ok to do it and claim that you are free in Christ. This passage teaches that we are not under the law of liberty when it comes to matters of conscience, we are under the law and the principle of love. How dare some of us exercise our liberty and destroy a fellow believer in Jesus Christ!

We will learn that the highest principle in matters of conscience is to be a believer who gets to a place in his life where he says he will not put a stumbling block or a hindrance in the path of a fellow believer. Paul got to the point to say, "I will not eat meat nor will I drink wine if it offends my brother." Are you there? There are some things that is not a matter of right or wrong to you; it is a matter of whether it is right or wrong to someone you are influencing with the gospel. Does it matter? Yes it matters!