

GUIDELINES FOR MAKING GODLY DECISIONS

Romans 14

INTRODUCTION

- A. Note Chart.
- B. Romans 14 – Background.
 - 1. Subject – personal convictions and the use of our freedom.
 - 2. Something right can be wrong. RO 14:1, 13.
 - 3. Examples – Eating food and observing days – RO 14:2, 5.
 - 4. As we make decision, what are key guidelines/questions to ask?
 - 5. Key benefits of using Biblical guidelines is: making better quality decisions, winning souls, edifying others, keeping us from bad consequences, and making us happy – RO 14:22.
- C. Romans 14 is NOT a chapter that:
 - 1. Justifies digression from doctrinal truth.
 - 2. Condone any doctrinal falsehood.
 - 3. Treats as indifferent or inconsequential doctrinal deviations such as instrument music and missionary societies.
 - 4. Justifies the social drinker in his infamous and iniquitous, his noxious and nefarious habit of imbibing the “water of eternal destruction.”
 - 5. Lends a syllable of support to the infallibility of the human conscience.
- D. If we would read this chapter with an open mind and a pure heart we would readily see that their chapter is a treatment of matters that are indifferent; matters that fall in the realm of human judgment.
- E. It was Paul’s purpose to show that all such were in the realm of opinion; and that the brethren should exhibit tolerance, patience, kindness, and forbearance.
 - 1. Paul writes with regard to those who are “weak” in the faith and admonishes the brethren to “receive” them, yet not for the sake of “scruples”
 - 2. There are at least two specific areas that come to the forefront, both having to do with delicate matters that might cause conflict between brethren and who are weak and those who are strong. Those two areas have to do with the eating of meats and the observance of certain days. These two areas are matters of opinion; matters that are neither right or wrong in and of themselves.
 - 3. Judging a brother over a position he had taken is strictly forbidden.
 - 4. Each man is to give an account to God for the decisions he makes with regard to these matters.
 - 5. Brotherly love is command toward all.
 - 6. Occasionally Christian love must give way to the liberty of a brother on matters that are expedient and/or optional.
 - 7. Each Christian must be confident in his own mind regarding the decision he makes in the matters under discussion.
- F. There is a similarity between 1 CO 18:1-13; 10:23-33; CO 2:16-21; GA 4:10 but it is not so much the similarity between these verses that is so apparent as it is the attitude on the part of Paul in addressing these matters.

- G. First, the admonitions within chapter 14 regarding tolerance for the “weak” brother do NOT apply when it comes to taking a strong stand against error. Second, there is another point of interest regarding this “weak” brother which the apostle writes. In RO 14; 1 CO 8; 10 the question that must be entertained is, “who is the weak brother?” What is it that makes him “weak”?
- Remember, that the church of the first century was made up of Jewish converts as well as Gentile converts. Those with Jewish background would have been accustomed to observing certain “holy days,” and abstaining from certain unclean meats, On the other hand those with Gentile background would have been very lax in their dietary habits, and likely would have observed few, if any “holy days” common to a Jews. It would be natural, therefore, for a Jew to seek to persuade, compel, and even coerce a Gentile convert to come into line with these old Jewish practices. On the other hand the Gentiles, having a pagan background, would tend to participate in the eating of certain meats that the Jew considered unclean, not to mention some other practices that the Jew might find offensive.
- Third, it is important to understand the meaning of “offended,” as used in this chapter. “Offended” is not to be taken in our ordinary sense of the word. It is not so much the idea of “upsetting” the brother, as it is the idea of causing him to “stumble” or “fall.” If I by my example or otherwise persuade the weak brother to eat meat when he thinks such is sinful, then I have offended my brother in the sense of RO 14; 1 CO 8; 10. I would have sinned for persuading him to violate his own conscience.
- H. Paul is addressing the participation in “something” that would bring upon the weak brother the guilt of sin, and thereby weaken his faith, and eventually lead to his stumbling. The chapter closes with a contrast between doing something of “faith” verses “doubting,” it would seem that the “offense” under consideration is that of causing a brother to participate in some action about which he had doubts, thereby causing him to sin.

DISCUSSION

- I. GUIDELINE #1 – IS IT OF FAITH? (Faith in v. 1 is used in the as one’s confidence in the fact that what he is doing is acceptable in the sight of God.)
- A. Faith is based on God’s word. We know what’s right or wrong from God’s word. RO 14:23; 10:17.
14:23 – “doubteth” and “not of faith” are equivalent. Here is a man who doubts; his conscience is troubled. In contrast is that man who “eatheth...of faith.” Here is a man who has no doubts about the eating of meats. He eats with a clear conscience. The “faith” under consideration is not “the faith,” i.e. the gospel, but a subjective faith that the man has with regard to a certain action. If he eats of that mean “not of faith,” or eats while he “doubteth,” that man is sinning.
- B. Example: Works of the flesh or spirit. GA 5:19-23.
- C. Remember: We must be fully convinced that we are doing is what God instructs. We should not have doubts.
- II. GUIDELINE #2 – WILL WE HAVE A FREE CONSCIENCE?
- A. A free conscience means we have no doubts in our mind that we are doing what God instructs. RO 14:20, 22.

14:20 – What childishness for a brother in Christ to ridicule, malign, and snub the brother who refuses to see eye to eye on such petty things as what meats he may have the “liberty” to eat. To push one’s liberty to the offense of a brother, and thereby cause him to stumble, is to wreck that temple that God has built.

14:22 – “Faith which thou hast” - here is another exhortation to the strong that they are not to parade their rights to the detriment of the weak brother.

- B. Remember: Our feelings must be based on knowing and doing what is right with God. This will result in happiness.

III. GUIDELINE #3 – WOULD IT CAUSE OTHERS TO STUMBLE?

- A. Don’t use our freedoms to lead someone to sin (i.e. idolatry, gambling, drinking, etc.). RO 14:13, 21.

14:13 – There are two senses in which the word “judge” is used in this verse. In the first instance the word is used to refer to censorious judgment; a kind of judgment that attempts to implicate a man’s motive, or perhaps even his heart. In the second instance the word has the idea of “to determine.” Paul is saying, “Do not continue to judge one another anymore; instead, determine that you will not put a stumbling block in the way of a brother.”

Rather than setting our minds upon the task of judging others, let us set our minds on doing all we can to avoid placing a stumbling block before others. Jesus likewise warned us against putting a stumbling block before other in MT 18:7-11.

- B. Remember: Consider the impacts of our decisions on others.

IV. GUIDELINE #4 – ARE WE FULLY CONVINCED AND HAVE NO DOUBTS?

- A. It must be absolutely good and we don’t question it. RO 14:5, 23.

14:5 – In those areas where God has not spoken, we are at liberty to take whatever course of action we deem expedient. We cannot set aside another day as a “holy” day without violating divine authority (like Christmas and Easter).

I may set aside a specific day as a day of study and meditation – first Saturday of each month – this is my day – “set aside” / “esteemed” as special – for a special purpose. But I do not have the authority to “esteem” that day above others?

- B. Example: Judgment Day! 2 CO 5:9-11.

- C. Remember: We should not question or doubt what we are deciding to do.

V. GUIDELINE #5 – WILL IT EDIFY?

- A. Our decisions will edify or tear down. RO 14:15, 19.

14:15 – A brother (this is a Jewish brother with a long history of having been taught that certain meats are “clean” and other meats are “unclean” – to eat would pain my Jewish brother – because of my action I have “grieved” my brother, and I am no longer walking in love.

14:19 – To “follow after” suggests the idea of active and intense pursuit. We are to make a diligent effort to practice those things which make for peace. There is much implied in this verse, not the least of which is the individual initiative of going to a brother with whom some difference exists and make peace with hm. In addition we are to pursue those things which edify and build up.

- B. Example: Applies to good and evil people. RO 12:17-18.

- C. Remember: Our decisions must be based on love and concern for other people's spiritual lives.
- VI. GUIDELINE #6 – WILL IT GLORIFY GOD?
- A. Our decisions must be acceptable to God and give Him glory. RO 14:18.
14:18 – The one who so serves God “herein,” that being in peace, righteousness and joy, is acceptable to God, and as a rule, is approved of men as well.
 - B. Example: Decisions to do good works should give glory to God. MT 5:16.
 - C. Remember: All our decisions should praise and please God. 1 CO 10:31.
- VII. GUIDELINE #7 – WILL THIS BE RECEIVED WITH GRATITUDE?
- A. Our decisions should cause people to be thankful. RO 14:6.
14:6 –A recent Jewish convert might regard the 7th day as a day of rest, while the stronger Christian would recognize the non-binding nature of those OT work restrictions. In either case, we are to respect the personal conscience of the other, so long as no Biblical principle is being compromised.
 - B. Example: Eating of foods. 1 TI 4:4.
 - C. Remember: Our decisions should result in thankfulness and gratitude by others and toward God.
- VIII. GUIDELINE #8 – IS IT A GOOD EXAMPLE?
- A. Our decisions should ensure our good example is not damaged. RO 14:16-17.
14:16-17 – The “good” spoken of here is our Christian liberty. We have been set free in Christ; we are to preach that liberty; we are to encourage others to enter into that liberty; we are to manifest joy because of that liberty. But, we must not take our liberty and push it to the point of causing a weak brother to stumble.
v. 17 – Jesus came to produce righteousness, peace, and joy. Righteousness includes all that God would have us to do in order to obtain and maintain a relationship with Him. The result is peace with both God and man, manifested in a joyful attitude. Righteousness has to do with our relationship to God; peace has to do with our relationship to others; joy has to do with our relationship to ourselves.
 - B. Example: We should be a good example in order to win souls. 1 PE 3:1; Cf. TS 2:7-8; 1 TI 4:2.
 - C. Remember: We must be good examples and maintain a good reputation among all people in order to save souls.
- IX. GUIDELINE #9 – WHAT WOULD OTHERS SAY?
- A. It is important what others think. RO 14:14, 1.
14:14 - The strong brother actually places a stumbling block in the way of the weak when he insists on having his way in a matter that is insignificant. So far as the eating of meats is concerned, there is nothing that is defiled, or unclean. The weak brother may have been ignorant of this truth and his abstinence was due to this lack of knowledge. But because nothing is unclean in and of itself, it does not necessarily follow that everything is clean for every individual. This is where the conviction of the individual comes into account. (Vietnam eating a dog/cat). That man who considers something to be unclean, though in fact it may very well

be “clean” in God’s sight, to that man it is “unclean.” I should respect his conscience.

- B. Example: The strong or mature (full-grown) should be mindful of how the weak or immature (babes) will respond to our decisions. HE 5:12-14.
 - C. Remember: We should care about what others may think or say about our decisions.
- X. GUIDELINE #10 – WHAT DID JESUS DO (WDJD)?
- A. We are to follow in the steps of Jesus and His example – WDJD. RO 14:8-9; 1 PE 2:21-25.
14:8-9 – Here Paul is speaking of our relations to the Lord. V. 8 explains v. 7. None of us lives to himself, for “whether we live, we live unto the Lord.” The Christian cannot cut himself off from any connection with the Lord and live his own life as he pleases.
 - B. Example: Jesus’ response to evildoers. 1 PE 2:21-25.
 - C. Remember: Use WDJD as a default question/guideline and follow His example for decision support.

CONCLUSION

- A. Chart – An Example of A Good Decision.
- B. Final Thoughts.
 - 1. In view of judgment, apply these questions/guidelines to major and minor decision of life such as movies, TV, reading material, marriage, dating, school work, spiritual matters, etc., RO 14:10-12.
 - 2. Happiness will result in a trained conscience using these principles and guidelines anywhere and anytime. RO 14:22.
 - 3. Remember: Decisions we make will affect our soul’s salvation. Note the good and bad decisions you have made. In view of judgment, be determined to make good decisions today!
- C. Beginning Chart.