

## "ROOM FOR GROWTH"

(Romans 14:13-23)

(Chuck Swindoll)

We must remember that some are stronger in their faith than others, but there is always someone stronger than we are. While we are compassionately limiting our freedom for the sake of someone else's weakness, another Christian is doing the same for us! Or do you think you're the most mature person in your community? I hope not. That's a sure sign of spiritual weakness.

Everyone has room for growth. Everyone is still learning to maintain balance. It takes a mature wisdom to know the difference between essential matters of morality and nonessential matters of conscience. It takes mature love to put one's own preference behind the good of others. It takes uncommon foresight to look beyond the immediate sacrifice of freedom for the sake of God's great plan for the world. It takes supernatural grace to give others the freedom to be different without suffering our condemnation. It takes love to let others be. So if you find yourself thinking less of another believer because he or she enjoys something distasteful to you, you are the weak-faith person in that relationship!

Paul, ever practical in his teaching, offered three simple reminders to help us maintain our own balance on the tightrope of freedom and to help others gain theirs.

First, *be considerate* (14:21). What you enjoy in the privacy of your home is entirely between you and the Lord. All things are lawful; not all things are constructive. Know the difference, and thank God for all the wonderful things He created for you to enjoy. When you are in public, don't restrict yourself unnecessarily, but be aware of the potential effect your actions have on others. Be sensitive to reactions, and graciously adjust your behavior accordingly.

Second, *be convinced* (14:22). Truth be told, many Christians are not clear within themselves what they believe, so they live in perpetual frustration trying to please everyone around them. But, as we discovered earlier, everyone is different and their convictions are contradictory. Please one and you're likely to displease another.



Instead, carefully examine your matters of conscience to be certain they are not indeed clear moral issues. Determine what Scripture has to say. Discuss them with trusted, mature believers. Consider the impact they have on others and yourself, both positively and negatively. Then, once you have settled the issue, you can enjoy your freedom with complete confidence. You won't need to react defensively, you won't have to convince anyone else, and you won't even second-guess yourself. Furthermore, that quiet confidence will allow you to let others be.

Third, *be consistent* (14:23). Consistently match your actions to your conscience. But don't be surprised to find that your conscience gradually changes over time. Some things that caused you no problem years ago irritate your conscience today. This is to be expected. Your conscience should never stop growing.

In my own experience, I have found that my list of universal standards has grown shorter as I have grown older. When I first graduated from seminary, I would die defending any one of a hundred different theological hills and had a long list of "absolutely essential" dos and don'ts. Today, my list is much shorter. On the other hand, there are several matters for which I once felt complete liberty, but now my conscience no longer allows me to participate in them. So—for me personally—those things are off-limits. Thankfully, I'm still growing up.

As our consciences are transformed by the Holy Spirit and become more mature, we are wise to heed them. However, that's not to say our developing consciences need to become anyone else's.