

## **Wisdom When We Differ**

**Romans 14.1-15.13**

**1 Corinthians 8-10**

One of the major themes of my life has been when the Bible gives no command or principle in non-moral decisions; therefore, the believer is free and responsible to choose his own course of action. Any decision made within the moral will of God is acceptable to God.

Part of God's design for the Church is that it should successfully manifest unity in diversity. It was his intent that people with divergent personalities, nationalities, gifts, abilities, tastes, and backgrounds should become unified in Christ without sacrificing personal distinctiveness (1 Corinthians 12.12-27; Colossians 3.11). What God desires is not uniformity of opinion but unity of relationship (Romans 15.5-7).

And so, instead of trying to eliminate divergence of opinion, the Holy Spirit has given specific instructions to guide our response to it. Most of that revelation is concentrated in Romans 14 and 15, and 1 Corinthians 8-10.

### **The Meat Debate**

This divine direction was occasioned by some specific problems that cropped up in the Church during the first century. Believers were lining up on opposite sides of issues where no definitive revelation had been received. The test case that eventually warranted apostolic comment concerned the propriety of eating meat. Out of that issue, Paul gives us governing principles for the exercise of Christian liberty in the social context of differing opinions.

1. Learn to distinguish between matters of command and matters of freedom (14.14, 20).
2. On debatable issues, cultivate your own convictions (14.5).
3. Allow your brother the freedom to determine his own convictions-even when they differ from yours (14.1-12).
4. Let your liberty be limited, when necessary, by love (14.13-15.2).
5. Follow Christ as the model and motivator of servant-hood (15.3-13).

### **Learn to Distinguish Between Matters of Command and Matters of Freedom.**

*“As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean.*

*“Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.” Romans 14.14, 20*

*“Be careful, however, that the exercise of your **freedom** does not become a stumbling block to the weak.* 1 Corinthians 8.9

*Don't we have the **right** to food and drink? Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living? 1 Corinthians 9.4-6*

*“Everything is **permissible**’ – but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is **permissible**’ – but not everything is constructive.” 1 Corinthians 10.23*

*For why should my **freedom** be judged by another's conscience?” 1 Corinthians 8.9; 9.4-6; 10:23, 29*