

A chicken will claw through hundreds of grains of chaff to find a kernel of corn.

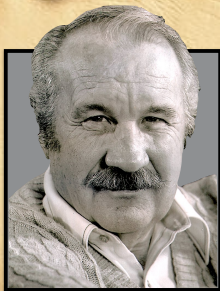
A Christian will claw through hundreds of kernels of corn to find a grain of chaff.

The first gift that many new Christians exercise is the gift of discerning sin
in other people's lives.

2 Samuel 24:14

"Then David said to Gad. "I am in great distress. Let us now fall into the hand of the Lord for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man."

for his plans for me will seem torturous.



Ray Steadman

"A favorite indoor sport of Christians is trying to find or create a community based around their personal preferences and call it "God's Kingdom."

It takes conviction to confidently discern differences.

It takes courage to boldly contest differences.

It takes character to graciously manage differences.

Sincere Christians have differing convictions on many spiritual issues.

- When should I **separate** from others who differ with me on spiritual issues?
- When should I **challenge** others who differ with me on spiritual issues?
- When should I **forbear** with others who differ with me on spiritual issues?
- When should I **respect** others who differ with me on spiritual issues?

What kind of differences do we face?

- **Orthodoxy** - differences in fundamental issues of faith and practice - bodily resurrection of Christ, grace toward sinners.
- **Carnality** - differences in life-direction - worldly mindset, behavior, etc.
- **Manners** - differences in what we consider proper - worship, diet, dress, politics.
- **Ministry** - differences in gifts, style, emphasis, preference, etc. - evangelism, teaching, social service.
- **Maturity** - differences in levels of spiritual growth - understanding of grace. - freedom, wisdom, Spirit leading, etc.

The church in ancient Corinth

Was tolerant
where it should
have been
judgmental

Worldliness
(immorality,
materialism,
pride)

Was judgmental
where it should
have been
tolerant

Spiritual gifts
(motivations,
ministries,
manifestations)

Differences between believers that need to be managed graciously.

- Charismatic vs. **non charismatic**
- Right brain (mystical) vs. **left brain (logical)**
- Law oriented vs. **Grace oriented**
- Calvinists vs. **Arminians**
- Informal worship vs. **Formal worship**
- Teetotalers vs. **those who drink alcohol**
- Political conservatives vs. **liberals**
- Simple life style vs. **affluent life style**
- Home school vs. **public education**
- Jew vs. **Gentile**

Romans 14

“¹ Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. ² One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. ³ Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him. ⁴ Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

“⁵ One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; ⁸ for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.”

Observations

- **The fact that there are differences among us is not necessarily the problem. The management of such differences is the challenge.**
- **The unity of faith that Jesus prayed for was to be achieved not in the agreement on every issue but rather in the way we managed our differences.**
- **The differences in view here are not with respect to the core issues of faith and practice but rather with peripheral matters - style, emphasis, and individual application of grace and truth.**
- **An individual's strong conscience is to be respected but kept private - not equated with God's will for all.**

- **Paul not only calls for obedience but offers a rational for it.**

⁴ Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

1. Our master and judge is CHRIST NOT HIS FOLLOWERS.

“⁷ For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; ⁸ for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.”

2. Our spiritual focus is CHRIST NOT HIS FOLLOWERS.

Paul is addressing individuals with differing consciences regarding Christian liberty.

Liberty

Strong Conscience ————— Weak Conscience

- **The weak can be deeply commitment to Christ and have a healthy character**
- **but be guided by a more conservative conscience.**

NOTE: This weakness can come from 1) lack of Biblical knowledge, or 2) personal vulnerability.

Paul is addressing the issue of love and character.

**Love
Healthy
Character**

Liberty

Strong Conscience ————— Weak Conscience

**Unhealthy
Character**

What does it mean to be “spiritually healthy”?

- **Spiritual health is measured not by knowledge but by loving character** (The ability to relate in loving ways to those who differ).
- **A conservative person can be spiritually healthy but with a restrictive (immature) conscience.**

Ephesians 4:15

“but **speaking the truth in love**, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

1 Corinthians 10

“23 All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. 24 Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor. 25 Eat anything that is sold in the meat market, without asking questions for conscience’ sake; 26 *for the earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains.* 27 If one of the unbelievers invites you, and you wish to go, eat anything that is set before you, without asking questions for conscience’ sake. 28 But if anyone should say to you, “This is meat sacrificed to idols,” do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience’ sake; 29 I mean not your own conscience, but the other man’s; for why is my freedom judged by another’s conscience? 30 If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks? 31 Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; 33 just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many, that they may be saved.”

What does it mean to be strong in faith?

- **To have an enlightened conscience with respect to our freedom in Christ.**

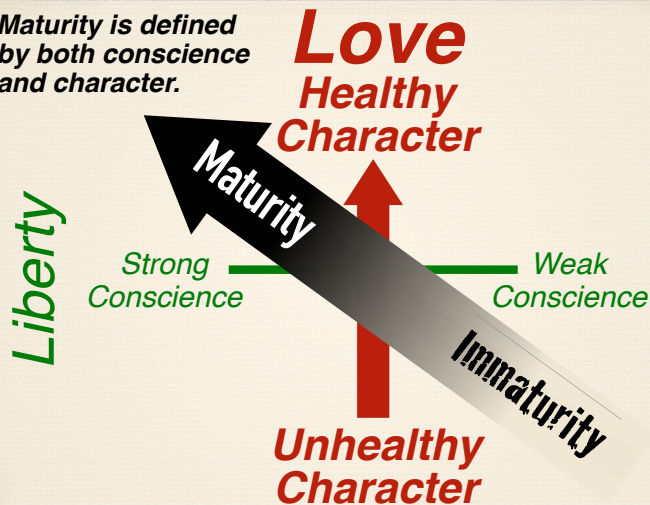
What does it mean to be spiritually healthy?

- **To be governed by a loving character - self sacrifice for the welfare of others.**

What does it mean to be a mature Christian?

- **To have a liberated conscience and a loving character.**

Maturity is defined by both conscience and character.



Considerations for application

- **Neither zeal nor knowledge equal spiritual health or maturity.** Passion can distort wisdom and knowledge can turn to pride.
- **Commitment to absolute truth does not mean that we can always know it absolutely.** Black & white convictions can be a sign of insecurity or poor self awareness.
- **Having strong convictions on minor issues is good if they are tempered with tolerance & respect.** Peacemaking is a function of respect and love.

- **Application of some truth is relative to the circumstances faced.**

In **Acts 16:3**, Paul had Timothy circumcised so as not to offend the scruples and custom (and perhaps prejudices) of those who knew his father was a Greek.

But in **Galatians 2:3-5**, Paul refused to circumcise Titus because there the heretics were insisting that circumcision was essential to salvation.

Tools for navigating spiritual differences between believers.

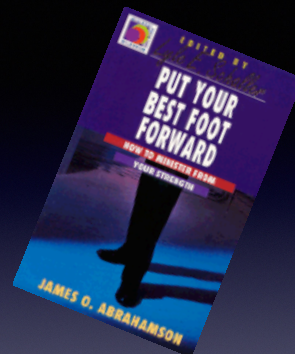
- **Look at the big picture.** Don't expect the church to have a messianic role in your life.
- **Major on majors not minors.** The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.
- **Be a peacemaker.** Know yourself, accept yourself, forget about yourself, and give yourself.
- **Live in the present.** Don't whine about the past or worry about the future so much.
- **Trust God in the dark.** Expect life to offer opportunities to demonstrate and develop virtue.
- **Be realistic.** The pressing issue and our response are significant but not as much as we might think.

- **Know and live within your own "faith boundaries."**

Respect the limits of your faith and the faith of others. Follow your conscience or change it.

- **Guard your tongue.**

Let your light (character) shine with how you speak about and to others.



Put your best foot forward without losing your balance or kicking your neighbor.