

Conscience Issues and the Church Family

Competing Realities

GOD'S GOOD CREATION AND
HUMAN CULTURE'S DEVELOPMENTS OF IT

HUMAN CULTURE'S ABUSES
OF GOD'S GOOD CREATION

1 Timothy 4:4 *For everything created by God is good*

1 Cor. 6:12 *All things are lawful for me*

1 Cor. 10:31 *whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

1 John 2:15 *If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

John 15:19-20 *If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.... they will also persecute you.*

The Call of Jesus

John 17:15-19 *I do not ask that you take [my disciples] out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.*

A Complicated Jumble

Ephesians 5:10 *try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.*

- 1. Since sinful distortions are a twisted version of godly creation, the Deceiver is always trying to blur any distinction.**

2 Cor. 11:14 *And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.*

Eph. 6:11 *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.*

2 Cor. 2:11 *We are not ignorant of his designs*

- 2. Since our flesh still experiences the appeal of the world, we can be deceived into or talk ourselves into approving what we should not.**

Our conscience can approve things it shouldn't approve.

Galatians 5:13 *do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh*

1 Peter 2:16 *Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.*

3. Since God's creation is so terribly misused, it's tempting to throw out part of God's good creation in response.

1 Timothy 4:1-3 Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

Our conscience can disapprove things it should approve.

The Counsel of Scripture

Conclusions That Differ

Church Discomfort

Comforting Reminders

1. **The Bible assures us this is normal.**
2. **This can be an indication that genuine community is happening.**
3. **This is evidence of your new life in Christ.**

Christlike Directions

1. **Remember the Creator.**
2. **Remember your Lord.**

Romans 14:9 *For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.*

3. **Remember the body of Christ.**

Romans 15:2 *Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.*

4. Learn from each other.

5. Keep growing in the Scriptures.

6. Remember the Gospel.

Romans 15:7 Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

Suggestions when some of your brothers and sisters *do* things you've never had the freedom in your conscience to do:

- Don't panic: the Bible tells us this is normal church life.
- "Welcome those who disagree with you," as Christ has welcomed you (Romans 14:1-2, 15:7)
- "Those whose consciences restrict them must not be judgmental toward those who have freedom" (Romans 14:3-4). Though it is possible that your brothers and sisters are actually sinning, the Bible tells us that in disputable matters we should first assume that they are partaking for the glory of God (Romans 14:6).
- "If you're strict, don't police others or expect them to agree" (Romans 14:22)
- Explore Scripture to see if your position is truly biblical (1 Tim. 4:1-5; Col. 2:20-23). I.e., be willing to consider the possibility that you are "weak in faith" in this particular area because you have forbidden something that God does not forbid.
- While you're exploring Scripture, don't go against your conscience (Romans 14:23).
- Be willing to let your brothers and sisters explain why they believe those things can glorify God – but don't just change your position because you want to fit in with them, or because others accuse you of being too strict or Pharisaical.
- Don't use someone else's freedom as an excuse for something you've always wanted to do. Your conscience position should only change based on Scripture, not what someone else does.
- If you learned that position from someone else, consider going back (if possible) and asking them why they have held to that position (for example, if your parents or a pastor taught a particular standard, but you don't remember their biblical reasons for it).

Suggestions when some of your brothers and sisters *don't do things that you've always done with a clear conscience:*

- “Welcome those who disagree with you,” as Christ has welcomed you (Romans 14:1-2, 15:7)
- “Those who have freedom of conscience must not look down on those who don't” (Romans 14:3-4)
- “If you have freedom, don't flaunt it” (Romans 14:22)
- “Gladly help the weak by refraining from doing anything that harms their faith” (Romans 15:1-6), while remembering that causing someone to stumble (or as some translations say, “offending” them) is not referring to making someone else uncomfortable by your freedom. It is referring to spiritually damaging them by leading them to sin against their conscience.
- Be willing to ask the Lord, “is that a biblical conscience position that I should adopt myself?” Have I been doing something that wasn't actually spiritually healthy?
- Don't be afraid to gently ask them to explain some of the reasons why they refrain from doing those things. If they have good biblical reasons, you might see some things that you hadn't thought about before. If they don't have good biblical reasons, God might use your gracious questions to help them recognize that (and become less “weak in faith” regarding that particular issue).
- Remember that each person has a unique spiritual story, and be respectful of the peculiarities that might arise from that story (they might not do something because of particular factors in their personal or family backgrounds).
- Don't just change your position because others might think you're more spiritual if you do.