

A SERIES OF DEVOTIONS BASED ON PAUL'S LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN ROME

HELP ME TO RESPECT THE CONSCIENCE OF OTHERS

Romans 14:14-15 "I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died."

In Romans 2:15 St. Paul wrote, ". . . the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.)" God has given all human beings a conscience. This inner-voice tells you what is permissible and is not, condemns you for sins you have committed, and calls you to repent of your sins. It is sometimes stronger in you and weaker in others and vice versa.

Because the varying strength of the conscience, what is a sin for one person is not for another. A strong conscience will see things as sins that a weak conscience does not. As a Christian, St. Paul's message in today's devotional verse is if someone's conscience tells them something is a sin, you whose conscience does not see it as a sin should be careful that guided by your conscience you do not do something that your brother or sister sees as a sin. In so doing, you create in that person great anxiety and a spiritual struggle. This, says St. Paul is failing to show that person your Christian love, care, and concern.

The specific issue St. Paul addresses in these verses is what foods a Christian can eat and not eat. Even though Jesus, as a previous devotion said, had abolished the Old Testament dietary laws, for some their conscience insisted they continue to follow those laws. For them to eat "unclean food" was a sin. For the person who knew and accepted Jesus' dismissing the dietary laws, they had no problem eating what was previously forbidden. However, for the sake of those who still followed the dietary laws, in love those Christians who no longer followed them should not flaunt their freedom in front of those whose conscience did not permit eating forbidden foods.

The writer to the Hebrews exhorts, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds . . ." (Hebrews 10:24) Titus 2:14 encourages

you to be zealous to do that which is good. This would especially be true in the eyes of your sister or brother in Christ.

Prayer: LORD, prevent me from sinning against another's conscience. Help me to respect support, and encourage my fellow Christians in their faith journey. Keep me from laying undo burdens on their conscience. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Son of God, eternal Savior, Source of life and truth and grace,
Word made flesh, whose birth among us Hallows all our human race,
You our Head, who, throned in glory, For Your own will ever plead:
Fill us with Your love and pity, Heal our wrongs, and help our need.

As You, Lord, have lived for others, So may we for others live.
Freely have Your gifts been granted; Freely may Your servants give.
Yours the gold and Yours the silver, Yours the wealth of land and sea;
We but stewards of Your bounty Held in solemn trust will be.

Come, O Christ, and reign among us, King of love and Prince of Peace;
Hus the storm of strife and passion, Bid its cruel discords cease.
By Your patient years of toiling, By Your silent hours of pain,
Quench our fevered thirst of pleasure, Stem our selfish greed of gain.

Son of God, eternal Savior, Source of life and truth and grace,
Word made flesh, whose birth among us Hallows all our human race:
By Your praying, by Your willing That Your people should be one,
Grant, O grant our hope's fruition Here on earth Your will be done.
(LSB 842)