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| - Car we drive | - Type of house we live in | because of sickness |
| - Movies we choose to see | - Retirement (do we? When? How?) | - Packing a gun |
| - How we celebrate holidays | - Level of security consciousness | - Dancing |
| - Smoking | - Mothers working outside of home | - How we care for aging parents |
| - Food choices (e.g., eating Twinkies) | - What our children do after HS | - What sports we play |
| - How we school our children | - Clothing styles | - How fanatical we are about sports |
| - Hair (beards, hair styles, etc.) | - Deciding when we stay home | - Hobbies |
| - Drinking alcohol | | - What we do/don't do on Sunday |

Observations

- Biblically-derived principles apply in all cases
- Different people will make different decisions in all cases, and think that their position is morally acceptable/right
- Christian liberty is not unlimited—there are bounds in each example in which Christian liberty does or doesn't apply
- These are areas in which disagreement can be strong and divisive if we're not careful
- Many of these things can become a part of church culture, even if they're not explicit teachings

Scriptural Guidance on Christian Liberty: Romans 14

1. Do not despise others who have a more sensitive conscience than you do (v. 3)
2. Do not judge those who do things that would violate your own conscience (v. 3)
 - V. 2 sets up the scenario: There is not uniformity of belief or practice.
 - Weaker brother: conscience is more sensitive
 - Stronger brother: Can participate to the glory of God
 - In this context, the above two commands are given in v. 3.

3. Make the effort to become fully convinced of your position (v. 5)
 - What does this tell us about deciding where we stand on an issue?
 - We should be fully convinced of where we stand. If we aren't fully convinced (i.e., if our conscience bothers us), we shouldn't participate, even if others are.
 - What does it take to be “fully convinced”?
 - May require some effort to study the issue (including scriptural principles)
 - Potentially surprising observation: Paul is, by implication, recognizing that two believers can come to two strongly held (“fully convinced”) positions that are different, and it's OK.
 - This is a big problem if we hold (by doctrine or by practice) that the essence of the Christian life is to live by a certain set of rules.
 - Important note: We will need to distinguish between Biblical truths and areas of Christian liberty.

4. Everything you do or don't do should be for the purpose of honoring the Lord (vv. 6-7)
 - Note that participating or not participating should both be done to the honor of the Lord.
 - This speaks of our motivation. What would be some other motivations for doing/not doing these things?
 - How can we discern our own motivation?
 - Prayer
 - Spouse/close friend may have insight
 - Must be able to explain how something honors the Lord (although being able to explain it doesn't guarantee that it's our true motivation).

5. We are primarily accountable for our own actions before God (vv. 4, 10-12)
 - In v. 4, the picture is of a servant looking at fellow servants—we are responsible to do what our master says to us, not to make sure that the other servants do what their master says to them.
 - v. 12 says we will give an account of ourselves to God, not that we should be primarily focused on others.
 - One exception (of sorts): Hebrews 13:17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.
 - Brings to mind the log and speck (Matt 7:3-5)

6. We should act in love, with others' interests in mind (vv. 13-15)
 - Decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of others.
 - We can “destroy” others by our actions in these things (v. 15).
 - This concept sounds easy in practice, but takes great discernment and wisdom to apply.
 - We should never flout our freedom before others.
7. The essence of Christianity is not strict adherence to a detailed list of do's and don't's, especially in areas that are somewhat extra-scriptural (v. 17)
 - Note that we are called to righteousness, so we still can't just ignore God's commands.
8. We should pursue a path that makes for peace and mutual edification (v. 19)
 - Can apply to what we decide to do/not do
 - Can apply more broadly to how we treat others in areas of Christian liberty
9. Keep a clean conscience (vv. 22-23)
 - Be more concerned about what God thinks than what man thinks.
 - If we act in a way that is not consistent with what we think, then we in a sense are our own stumbling block!

So What?

Having a healthy understanding and practice of Christian liberty is critical for the proper functioning of a body:

- If this concept is not practiced, then one of two things happen
 - Holding that small details are important, and everyone needs to be the same: There is an unnecessary push for uniformity and resulting focus on things that are not as important and often a legalistic spirit
 - Holding that small details are not important: Lack of thoughtfulness and intentionality in our Christian living

The concept of Christian liberty will result in a certain amount of tension, and healthy churches overcome that tension not by removing it, but by focusing on the things that bond us together.

Goal would be to be able to have civil and loving conversations with each other when we see differences (iron sharpening iron)

For Further Study

Sinclair Ferguson, “4 Principles for the Exercise of Christian Liberty”
(<https://www.ligonier.org/blog/4-principles-exercise-christian-liberty/>)