

SERMON NOTES:

QUESTIONS:

1. Where do you currently land on celebrating Halloween? What experiences or ideas have persuaded you of that conviction?
2. Read Romans 14:13-18, 23. For Paul, spiritual formation doesn't happen because an institution, leader, or community pressures us into it. It happens because we are personally persuaded by Jesus. As you think about your own faith journey, have you felt more persuaded of your convictions or pressured into them? What would help you work through those things until you were personally convinced?

3. What do you think is the relationship between our conscience and the Holy Spirit (see Romans 12:1–2; Romans 2:14–15; 1 Timothy 4:1–2; Hebrews 9:14)? What happens when we confuse the two?
4. Read Romans 14:19–22 and 1 Corinthians 10:23. How does Paul balance the freedom to enjoy and freedom to deny? It's common to pretend we share someone else's convictions to avoid tension, but what would it look like to limit what you do around someone *and* be open about your personal practice?

CASE STUDY:

Marcus and Elena have been friends in the same small group for a couple of years. During a conversation about dating and relationships, Marcus mentions that he doesn't believe sleeping with his girlfriend is necessarily sinful because the relationship is committed, loving, and headed toward marriage.

Elena pushes back. She believes Scripture clearly places sex within marriage, although when Marcus asks her to show him a verse that specifically says, "*Sex before marriage is a sin*," she can't point to one. Marcus says, "Exactly. I've prayed about this, and I don't feel convicted about it." Elena responds, "But your conscience doesn't get to decide whether something is sin."

As the conversation becomes more tense, their small group leader, Jordan, steps in. "Look at what we've been reading in Romans 14. God has accepted both of you. Each of us will give an account of ourselves to God, and Paul says, '*Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves.*' If Marcus has considered this before God and is genuinely convinced in his own mind, maybe we need to accept that his conviction can be different from ours instead of assuming ours is the only faithful one."

Chris, frustrated, jumps in. "Stop — Paul *also* says we're *supposed* to judge those inside the church. Romans 14 is about disputable matters. What if this isn't disputable? What if this is just sin?"

Then Maya speaks up. "But how do we know that? I know plenty of Christians who lived together or slept together before they were married, went on to have healthy marriages, and would say God has deeply blessed their relationship. If this is such a serious sin, why doesn't it seem like God treats it that way?"

What do you think? How would you respond?