



World Christian Fellowship

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Romans 124

Build one another without Offending Romans 14:13-23

Romans 14:13-23, *Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way. ¹⁴I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. ¹⁵Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; ¹⁷for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.*

¹⁹Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. ²⁰Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. ²¹It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. ²²Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. ²³But he who doubts is condemned if he eats,

because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

The Unity of Strong and Weak Believers.

There are two believers focuses on: the weak and the strong.

- The strong believer tends to just live his liberty to the fullest.
- The weak believer tends to be extremely confined.
- The weak believer looks at the strong believer and accuses him of being abusive of freedom.
- The strong believer looks at the weak believer and accuses him of being too narrow and not understanding what Christ has really provided.

There is a potential conflict.

Paul writes this section Romans 14:1-15:13.

Paul gives some principles.

Receive one another with understanding. (Romans 14:1-12)

Build up one another without offending, Romans 14:13-23.

Please one another as Christ did, Romans 15:1-7.

Rejoice with one another in God's plan, Romans 15:8-13.

1. Receive one another with understanding.

Why have we got to do this?

Four reasons we are to receive one another.

a) God receives them.

The Lord receives them.

V 2, *For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.*

V 3, *"For God has received him."*

The word "him" represents both the weak and strong.

- The one who eats let him not despise the one who doesn't eat.
- The one who doesn't eat let him not despise the one who eat.

If God has not made this a point of fellowship, should we?

Of course not.

- If the Lord receives the weak, then we ought to receive the weak.
- If the Lord receives the strong, then we ought to receive the strong.

We must learn to work together.

b) The Lord sustains each believer.

The strong tend to despise the weak.

The weak tend to condemn the strong.

V 4, *Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.*

What right do you have to evaluate somebody else's servant?

You have no right to evaluate someone else's servant.

God will make him stand.

God will hold him up.

Mind your own business.

We don't need to look upon the person who's free and have some ultimate fear that the same could happen.

c) Lord is sovereign to each.

A weak believer can be spiritual.

The Scripture teaches how important it is for you to keep a clear and a pure conscience so that the Spirit of God can subjectively move you by His power.

Are you going to destroy some weaker brother, pushing him deeper into his weakness because you force him to abuse his conscience?

Of course not!

Conscience is a very important tool.

Some people who enjoy freedom do what they do to please the Lord.

We don't do what we do for ourselves.

We do what we do for the Lord.

- We live to Him and someday we will die to Him.
- We have submitted to His lordship.

When we became Christians, we left the self-centred life.

We confessed Jesus as Lord.

- ✓ We are the Lord's.
- ✓ We are His possession.

This verse also affirms the deity of Christ.

d) Lord alone will be judge over every believer.

The Lord alone will be the judge.

V 10, *But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.*

Every one of us at one point in the future is going to bow the knee in the judgment of God.

Why do we open our arms and receive each other?

- ✓ Because God receives us,
- ✓ Because the Lord can hold us up and does,
- ✓ Because the Lord is the sovereign over each of us and
- ✓ Because He is the only one who has the right to judge.

Now Paul is going to tell us that we are to be concerned with building up one another.

Is it necessary to eat or drink or do whatever you do to prove you are strong?

No.

It is not necessary for a believer who is strong and understands his liberty in Christ to exercise that liberty to prove his strength.

In fact, he will demonstrate a greater amount of spiritual strength for the most part if he does not exercise that liberty.

For the sake of whom?

The weaker ones.

The issue is not whether we exercise our liberty but whether we possess that liberty.

When one abstains from the liberty that he has, it may be reflective of a weak believer who abstains because he doesn't understand his freedom.

Or it may be a strong believer who abstains because he does not want to offend a weak believer.

Do not want to conclude that to prove we are strong we have to somehow display our freedoms.

A church there will be weaker brothers, based upon their prior experience, will set limitations in their own conscience because they cannot believe they are free to do those things.

The stronger brothers out of love for the weaker brothers will wind up setting the same limitations.

There will come then a kind of conformity.

A kind of developing conformity so that as the strong in love confine themselves to that which will be tolerated by the weak. They build relationships with the weak that eventually will strengthen them and widen that scope of liberty.

It must be understood that our freedom is before God, whether we exercise it or not.

- You may in my own heart feel that you are free to do many things that you would never do because you don't need to do those things to prove that you are strong.
- Rather you need not to do those things to demonstrate your love for those who are weak.

Your liberty is **vertical**.

The liberty that I enjoy in my heart is before the Lord and in my heart before the Lord I know I have freedom.

But the exercise of that liberty is **horizontal**.

It is between a person and another person, and that is limited by my love.

Paul's concern from **V 13-23**, is not to make sure the strong really use their liberty to the limit.

Paul is not to have the strong flaunting their liberty and demanding their rights. But it is to teach the strong to restrain their liberty for love's sake.

There's a great difference between Christian liberty and the use of Christian liberty.

Christian liberty is an internal thing. It belongs to the mind and the conscience and has a direct reference to God. The issue of Christian liberty is an external thing when it belongs to conduct and has reference to man.

Since our liberty grows out of the teaching of the Word of God and the God who alone is Lord of the conscience, we should be willing to die for the maintenance of our liberty. But many a consideration should induce us to forego the practical assertion or the display of our liberty.

We have liberty in Christ.

But that liberty is controlled, and it is not necessary for me to flaunt that liberty, to demand that liberty, to even exercise that liberty to prove my strength.

Rather it is binding upon me to discern the spirit of those in my assembly who are weak and restrain my liberty in line with their weakness. So that I, in gaining their love, may move them toward a greater understanding of liberty.

The Bible places a lot of restraint on our liberty.
Paul only deals with couple of the restraints in verses 13 to 23.

There are others dealt with in other places.

Not for the purpose of self-deception.

1 Peter 2:16, *as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.*

You can use your liberty simply to cover over your evil.

You can be self-deceived.

You have this wickedness in your life, and you cover over your wickedness with the cloak of Christian liberty.

You may have a drinking problem.

You may be drunken from time to time.

It is sin, plain and simple.

But to cloak your drinking problem, you flaunt the fact that you are free in Christ to do whatever you want to do because drink in and of itself, the juice from the grape, is not inherently wicked.

Or you may be a television addict.

You may sit looking at that one-eyed monster till you are nothing but a zombie.

Whatever garbage parades across through your brain and then finishes out on the screen so that you compute all of it.

The truth of the matter is you are using your so- called Christian liberty to cloak over what is basically a sinful preoccupation with something that is sucking the life out of your spiritual development.

You can use liberty as a cloak to cover your evil.

So, liberty is not to ever be for the sake of self-deception or the sake of deceiving others.

Not for self-destruction.

There are some people who given certain freedom can use that freedom until it becomes self-destructive.

Tobacco leaves just hanging over those racks in those places where they dry. There was nothing particularly evil about that. There is nothing inherently immoral about cutting it up. There is nothing inherently moral or immoral about stuffing it in paper, sticking it in your mouth and blowing smoke. There's nothing inherently evil about that.

But when that little thing hanging out of your mouth is sucking out your very life and sucking out your energy and creating the shakes and totally dominating your life.

Then you have allowed that little thing that is not immoral to become the source of self- destruction.

1 Corinthians 6:12, *All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.*

If you suck that cigarette long enough it's going to hurt, you. Now in and of itself it isn't immoral, but it isn't smart either.

You could say the same thing about a movie or about a television or about anything like that, when it becomes something that literally destroys a person it becomes unlawful.

Self-destruction it is an abuse of that freedom.

1 Corinthians 10:23, *All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.*

It doesn't make sense to engage in all things if by engaging I cannot control those things. It's amazing how things can literally destroy people.

Not for self-bondage.

The purpose of Christian liberty is not to bring you under the control of something so that you become its slave.

Yet that can happen.

Do you know some people are literally controlled by chocolate? Chocolate is their master.

There are people who have trauma if they don't have their chocolate.

Some people are totally controlled by a soap opera. If they can't get home to see the next serial, they are miserable.

They are slaves.

They have been brought into bondage.

1 Corinthians 6:12, *All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.*

To be entangled by any.

- Man was created to be the king of the earth.
- Man was created to be the sovereign.
- Man was created and given dominion.

Because of the fall of man, have now had their dominion over him.

People are controlled by things.

They are controlled by cigarettes and candy and some people are controlled by food.

They literally live to eat.

Not for the sake of self-obstruction.

1 Corinthians 10:23, *All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.*

Our freedom is not to do the things that tear us down, that don't build us up.

Because I love my relationship to the Lord I am not going to get controlled by some things.

There may be things like recreation in your life that tears you down spiritually because it keeps you away from the people of God.

Television may keep you away from the Word of God.

Movies may keep you away from the Bible study.

Sports may keep you away from God.

These things that in and of themselves, if indeed they are not immoral.

But these kinds of things that tear us down.

Retard our development even though in and of themselves they are not moral.

We must recognize that we do not have freedom so that we may engage in that.

All those are personal.

I have liberty in Christ.

- But my liberty is not for the sake of self-deception, not to cloak my vice.
- My liberty is not for self-destruction, not to get me under habits that ultimately destroy my effectiveness for God.
- My liberty is not for self-bondage so that I can be controlled by something.
- My liberty is not for self-retardation so that whatever it is that I engage in literally pulls me down spiritually.

All are personal for me.

Paul talks about Christian liberty in Romans 14, not in the sense of how it affects me, but how it affects my brother and sister.

A very important dimension of understanding Christian liberty because it affects the church.

For other Christians, how we are to build up other Christians without offending.

This calls for limiting our exercise of liberty.

- Don't let anybody take your liberty.
- Don't let anybody threaten your liberty.
- Don't let anybody bind your conscience to things that are not in themselves evil.

But at the same time, you don't have to display that liberty to prove you are strong.

You don't want to do that because it may turn out to be bondage for your own sake and it may turn out to be unloving and divisive for the fellowship of believers.

How do we avoid offending each other?

How do we look at our liberty in terms of each other?

Key to this passage in V 15.

V 15, *Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are **no longer walking in love**. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.*

Whatever you want to do is be sure that your conduct in the exercise of your liberty is not unloving, is not insensitive to other believers.

If we can just make a positive out of that statement:

The goal of a strong believer is to conduct himself in love toward a weaker brother.

1. Don't cause him to stumble.

V 13, Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

"Therefore."

- ✓ Since the Lord receives each Christian, weak or strong,
- ✓ Since the Lord can hold up the strong and the weak,
- ✓ Since the Lord is sovereign to weak and the strong,
- ✓ Since only the Lord will be the final judge,

Therefore, you don't judge.

You just be responsible, not for judging or condemning.

Make sure you don't cause that brother to stumble.

It's not our task to sit on the throne or the bench and adjudicate.

It is not for us to render the verdicts of condemnation to those that we feel are deserving of such.

Let us not judge, *krinō*.

Let us not condemn.

After all the Lord's the one that's going to judge **(V1-12)**.

That is not our job.

The weak are not to condemn judge the strong, and that's what the tendency was we saw in the first 12 verses.

Not the strong to condemn the weak for their lack of faith and their small-mindedness.

Instead of that you decide.

It calls for action.

You decide.

Your decision should be this, I am not going to judge people.

I am not going to put stumbling blocks in people's way either.

That is going to be the preoccupation of my life.

The picture here is of a brother or a sister walking along the path of the Christian life and somebody putting something in their path to cause them to fall.

We don't want to be the source of trapping a Christian. Stopping them in their onward progress. Causing them to trip up and fall.

To cause them to fall into sin on the path of their spiritual walk. The injunction is not to injure someone in the use of our liberty by causing them to fall into sin.

Paul is dealing with some of the Gentiles in Corinth who had a lot of trouble eating meat offered to idols and drink offered to idols. Some of the more liberated brethren were not so concerned about that, thinking they could eat everything. They could because an idol was nothing anyway.

So, when you offered something to an idol, you offered something to nothing. It was inconsequential, but some of these pagans who had come out of these idol feasts had a hard time eating that. Because they were so long identified with the idolatry connected.

There was this potential conflict.

1 Corinthians 8:9, *But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.*

How does that happen?

1 Corinthians 8:10-11, *For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of*

him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? ¹¹ And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?

To spiritual devastation, spiritual loss.

Romans 14:

You make a brother stumble when you do this, when you go out and exercise your freedom and you do what you want to do and your brother seeing you free to do that says I must be free to do that, does that and his conscience is tremendously guilty because in his heart he believes it's wrong.

You have created a guilty conscience.

You have caused him to stumble and fall.

You may even have caused him to be thrown back into a pattern of sin.

It is possible that somebody seeing a liberated brother eat something offered to an idol could go back into an idol feast. Get caught up in the whole orgy, debauchery and get into a very disastrous situation. Because someone flaunting liberty gave him freedom to do what his conscience said he shouldn't do. His spiritual weakness wouldn't allow him to do without pushing him into sin.

People always ask me the question. Do I drink alcoholic beverages?

I don't know why that's a concern for people.

The simple answer is no.

There are so many reasons but one of those reasons is that give someone else the idea that that's what liberated Christians are free to do.

Recently someone asked me do I dance?

I want to tell you about my dancing.

If I wanted to dance with my wife at home that would not be sinful. Our boys would have certain laugh because it would be ridiculous.

But it wouldn't be sinful in and of itself, obviously.

But there is an environment that confines that is the believers for whom we set an example.

There are a whole lot of people taking your example who wouldn't be able to do that at all, for whom it would be a tremendous stumbling block.

When you trip up a believer and cause that believer to be a fallen believer on the road of spiritual progress, you have acted in less than love.

In order to build up our brother without offending him, we must be sure that we don't do anything that emboldens him to do something that will cause him to fall or stumble.

2. Don't to grieve him.

We are not to grieve our brother.

V 14-15, *I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.*¹⁵ *Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.*

My own personal intimate communion with the Lord Jesus Christ, He revealed this to me.

A unique privilege for a Scripture writer.

Paul tells them that I am not asking you to give up your liberty.

I want you to enjoy your liberty and understand your liberty.

I want you to know that this is not my opinion.

I know this because I have been convinced by the Lord Jesus Himself.

Even as he said in Galatians that his gospel did not come to him through human instrumentation but rather the Lord Himself had given it to him.

The strong are right.

Sin does not reside in things like food.

It does not reside in what's in a glass.

It does not reside in film, or electronics or games or recreation or activities. It doesn't reside in plants.

1 Timothy 4:4-5, *For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; ⁵for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.*

Titus 1:15, *To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled.*

Jesus Himself said, **Mark 7:15**, *"There is nothing from outside of a man that enters into him that can defile him."*

There is nothing outside of a man that entering into him can defile him. It's the things that come out of him that defile him.

In **Acts 10**, the Lord showed Peter the big sheet. "Rise, Peter, kill and eat," which is to say all the dietary laws of the Old Covenant are now set aside.

The word "unclean" means common.

Basically, it's the word for common but it came to mean impure or evil.

The strong are right but is it not true that not everybody can handle that.

1 Corinthians 8:4, *Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.*

He says an idol is nothing.

1 Corinthians 8:7, *However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.*

However, there is not in every man that knowledge for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol and their conscience being weak is defiled.

Not everybody can handle it.

You strong are right but not everybody's ready to handle that.

Truly godly person who understands his liberty should not be dissuaded against that.

But the people who are in ignorance don't need to be shown a pattern of behaviour that will cause them to stumble.

Rather they need not to be encouraged to violate what their conscience tells them. But they need to see an example of love that meets them on their own ground.

V 14, *but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.*

Sin as such is very explicitly defined in the Scripture.

We are not talking about those things that are basically sinful.

If I have any weakness, it may show up in the sense that I have a certain weakness about how I spend my time. I am not fully liberated in that area.

There are days when I decide I will take a couple of hours and do nothing, and I can hardly get through those couple of hours because I have such a guilty conscience.

Everybody's entitled to a few hours of breathing without be encumbered with some tasks to do."

But that points up to me something of what the conscience is like in a weaker brother.

If someone says that I never miss a morning with my family, without having my personal devotions in the Word of God. I get up every morning and I read the Bible and I have my devotions.

To which this reply came, "You are a legalist. You need to stop doing that so you can prove you are not a legalist. That's legalism."

If I remember the situation rightly, the person took that advice, did it and suffered tremendously from a guilty conscience.

Is it a sin not to have your morning devotions?

Surely isn't said to be in the Bible.

If in your conscience it would be wrong and you don't do it, then you are going to suffer with a guilty conscience.

V 15, Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.

Would you want to cause your brother to grieve?

To be upset?

Because in his own heart, his own mind, in his own conscience, he believes he has done something that's wrong.

Whatever tends to make anyone violate his conscience tends to the destruction of his soul.

He who helps, whether wittingly or no to bring about the one is guilty of aiding to accomplish the other.

The Lord wants a clear conscience.

You never want to train anybody to violate conscience.

You don't want to learn to violate your conscience.

1 Timothy 4:2, You don't want to train yourself to ignore your conscience.

When a stronger brother comes along and somehow tempts by his liberty a weaker brother to violate his conscience, when that weaker brother violates that conscience, that weaker brother will have a painful, bitter sorrow in his own heart.

He will feel guilty and instead of helping him grow in his spiritual life, it will push him back. Because then he will be even more afraid of liberty. It will be a greater threat to him.

V 15, *Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love.*

How would a weak brother be grieved?

A weak brother would be grieved by just simply seeing a strong Christian do what he felt was wrong.

If you are strongly convinced that something is wrong, not something sinful, but something that they do and you see these people do it, it's going to grieve you. You are going to be grieved over their liberty which you see as an offense.

This weak brother is not just grieved because you do it, he's grieved because you have led him to do it, too, and it's violated his conscience.

By following your instruction or your example, he does what he believes is wrong and then must live with the remorse and the guilt of his conscience.

He forfeits the peace and joy of his Christian walk.

So, you set your life in a path so as not to grieve people and cause them sorrow because they have followed you into something their conscience didn't allow them to do.

We have got to get close enough to each other to know where we are.

Implication is that we have got to know the hearts of the people around us so that we can be sure that we walk in love toward those people, in selfless self-denying agape.

We never want to lead a believer to fall into sin.

We never want to grieve a believer by having him violate his own conscience.

3. Don't destroy him.

V 15, *Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.*

Don't make him stumble,

Don't grieve him, and

Don't destroy him.

When you cause a believer to stumble or to be grieved, to violate his conscience, it can bring about a certain effect that is here discussed with a very strong word.

Can you offend a believer?

Can you look down on a believer and despise a believer and lead a believer into some kind of sin to the degree that they will perish forever in hell?

No.

It is talking about some kind of spiritual loss, some kind of spiritual disaster in their life.

It could be the leaving of the church.

It could be the loss of their joy, the loss of their effectiveness in ministry.

The same term is in 1 Corinthians 8.

1 Corinthians 8:11, *And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?*

We know we're talking about a believer, he's called a brother and it is said he is one for whom Christ died, to identify him as one especially beloved and belonging to the Saviour.

When you cause your brother to stumble, when you cause your brother to be grieved, or when you cause your brother to lose some spiritual blessedness, you have not acted in love.

How can you do that with your food, which is emblematic of your liberty?

A liberated Jew who hogs a pork chop in the face of a newly converted Jew.

Or a liberated Gentile who eats meat offered to idols in front of a newly converted pagan who came out of that very idol system.

How can you use your food to cause such spiritual loss for some weaker brother or sister?

Don't plunge them into spiritual devastation for whom Christ died."

Almost a repeat, of **1 Corinthians chapter 8**.

How could you treat in a loveless way?

How could I treat in a loveless way one for whom Christ died in an act of supreme love?

If Christ, the perfect Son of God, loved that weak person, that sinner, loved that sinner enough to die for them, can we not love that sinner who are much like that sinner enough not to devastate them spiritually by an abuse of our liberty?

So, Christ died for that weaker brother.

Paul calls us to build each other up by not causing each other to stumble, not causing each other to grieve, and not causing each other to be devastated and suffer some spiritual loss.