

## **Pt 48 Romans 14:13-23 Sinful Christian Liberty**

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### **Romans 14:13-23**

13 Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

15 But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably.

Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.

16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of:

17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

18 For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

20 For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.

21 It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

22 Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.

23 And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

We pick back up here in Romans chapter 14 by looking at verses 12-23 which will finish out this chapter. Last time we looked at verses 7-12 and saw that every knee shall bow before God one day, whether you are saved or lost. We will all give an account of ourselves before the Almighty God. Those who are lost will be sentenced to everlasting destruction in a place called Hell or the Lake of Fire, and those who are saved will be rewarded for the works we have done in purity for the Lord and enjoy everlasting life in His Kingdom which is Heaven.

13 Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

In our opening text we find the Apostle Paul cautioning against judging our brother. He says, "Let us not therefore judge on another any more."

It is the same thing he said up in verse 3 about judging. We are not to judge one another in respect of observing or not observing the laws of meats, drinks, days, and times. We are not to judge each others moral or spiritual character based upon such things.

In the Church I previously pastored we had a couple who joined and let's just say they had a very narrow view of things. I didn't know it when they joined, but they had bounced from church to church over the past 20-years never being satisfied. One Sunday they announced they felt God had led them to join our church. They were good people and hard workers. The problem was they couldn't take their eyes off everyone else. They sat in judgement of every word said, every song sang, every article of clothing worn, and they became very unhappy. When I put a Christmas tree up in the front foyer of the church it was the last straw for them. I will never forget when they came over to our house to let us know they were leaving the church. After they rebuked us for having a Christmas tree in the church and accused us of worshipping trees, they then told us they were just on a much higher walk with God

than we were. They left the church, and I was trying to keep up with them over the past 5 or 6 years to see where they would end up. Sadly, they had once again bounced around to 3 or 4 churches in the time since they had left our church.

This couple wanted to judge all other church members based upon their own personal preferences and standards. Those who did not meet those preferences and standards were deemed "weak in the faith" or "unspiritual." This is exactly the thing Paul is warning us about.

It is not our place to judge our brother concerning his level of spirituality. Not everyone is going to think, act, or look the same as you. But that doesn't make them less of a Christian.

...but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

Here Paul warns us not to become a "stumblingblock" to our brother. A stumblingblock is something in the way that causes you to stumble. In the Bible, to stumble means **to fall into sin**. We don't want to do anything that may cause a fellow brother or sister in Christ to stumble and fall into sin. One of the ways we might do that is by abusing or flaunting our Christian liberties.

The Bible speaks a lot about the liberty we have in Christ after we are saved. In **Romans 8:21** Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

These liberties that we enjoy are the freedom of the bondage of sin. Freedom from the fear of death, hell, and the grave. Freedom from religious pomp and circumstance. Freedom from the religious laws that bind.

Believe you me, when these liberties were introduced by the New Testament preachers in Paul's day it was very radical stuff. We have no idea what it is like to live under the Jewish religious system with all the restrictions they had upon them but it is a tough life to live. To suddenly be told these Laws were no longer binding would be a hard thing for them to accept. Seeing someone do the things which were once forbidden would be horrifying to many of them. Just like Peter when he was on that rooftop and the Lord gave him the vision of all the different animals being lowered down in a sheet and he told him to eat. Peter refused **Acts 10:14** But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.

While we have liberty in Christ we are also warned not to abuse these liberties. Listen to what Paul wrote to the Church at Galatia: **Galatians 5:13** For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

Even Peter finally came around to understanding his Christian liberties but he too also warned us about abusing them: **1 Peter 2:13-16** Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; 14 Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. 15 For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: 16 As free, and **not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness**, but as the servants of God.

It is very easy to claim Christian liberty and do things we should not do. We will talk more about this further down in the message.

14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

Here Paul is telling us that if someone believes something is sinful, even if it isn't, to them it is. There are some things that I don't believe in that are not sinful things but when I see someone doing them it bothers me greatly. An example: I do not believe in mowing the yard or doing unnecessary work on Sunday. There has been one time in my life that I mowed the yard on Sunday, and it nearly killed me. I swore I would never do it again and I haven't. Both neighbors on either side of our house mow their yard on Sunday. I absolutely hate seeing it, it really bothers me. But, biblically there really isn't anything wrong with it. It's not my place to judge them over it but for me personally I could not do it. It would eat at my conscience and to me would be sinful.

15 But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. 16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of:

Here Paul is warning when we are living out our Christian liberty and causing our brother to stumble and the world looks at the church and sees the strife and discontent going on, then they will speak evil of us. "Those Christians are nothing but a bunch of hypocrites and always fighting among themselves." That is not how the world should view the church. We should be seen very differently.

17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Here the kingdom of God is referring to everything that belongs to God; Christians, the Church, and the behavior of every saved individual. Paul says God's kingdom is not about meat and drink, it's about righteousness, peace, and joy. That is how the world should view the Church.

18 For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

If we observe righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, then we will be living a life that is acceptable to God. Not only will it be acceptable to God but also "approved of men." That means when the world looks upon the Church and sees how it and its members are living in righteousness, peace, and joy, then they will take notice and look on the church with favor.

Jesus said in **John 13:34-35** A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. 35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

When the world looks upon the Church, they should see people that love one another, not fighting and disputes. Jesus says if we love one another as He loved us then "By this shall men know that ye are my disciples."

Sadly, due to Social Media the world has access to Christians and how we treat each other. They see the fussing and fighting in a Twitter feed or a Facebook post. You may notice that I rarely ever make comments or get engaged in controversial posts made by other preachers. Some preachers eat it up when arguments start in the comment sections. In fact, many post provocative things just to get people stirred up. I was browsing through Twitter just yesterday and there was one preacher that actually began his post by saying "This is going to go viral..." Then he started this big post about praise teams and choirs. Of course he got exactly what he wanted, lots of people started coming out of the woodwork to give their two cents worth. I wouldn't give you 1 Cent for any of it. The lost world sees that garbage and they take notice. Why would anyone want to be part of that mess?

Listen to what Paul said to Timothy in **1 Timothy 3:15** But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

We always need to remember that the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth. It is the thing most opposite of the world. There is no truth in the world. Truth only comes from God, and it is manifested in the Church. This is why we must do everything possible to live in peace among our brothers and sisters in Christ and also to not adopt and embrace the world's methods into the Church. Once we start that, we are chipping away at the pillars and no longer standing on the ground of the truth.

19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

Paul reiterates that we must live in peace and do things which "edify" one another. That word edify means to "build up" and "to promote growth."

The spiritual gifts that God gives us is for the purpose of edifying the Church.

**1 Corinthians 14:12** Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

20 For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. 21 It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

Again, Paul is cautioning those who are living in Christian liberty not to flaunt it in front of those who it will bother. We will offend our brother and cause him to stumble and be even weaker.

Paul had much more to say about this to the Church at Corinth.

**1 Corinthians 8:4-13**

4 As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.

5 For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,)

6 But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.

7 Howbeit 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.

8 But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.

9 But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.

10 For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols;

11 And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?

12 But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.

13 Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

According to this, when we cause our brother to stumble and be offended, we are actually sinning against them but even worse, we are sinning against Christ! Which is what he also says in the last two verses of our text here in Romans:

22 Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. 23 And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

While we may not understand the mindset of the Jews, we can certainly understand how we may offend a fellow brother or sister in Christ due to our actions. If you know someone is offended by something, you are doing then you should by all means STOP doing it! To continue doing it in front of them is sinful.

We must be very careful when it comes to Christian liberties. There are usually two mindsets:

1. **The Legalist:** Those who want to condemn everything even if it isn't addressed in the Bible. Television, movies, video games, wearing jewelry, makeup, wearing shorts, smoking, chewing tobacco, drinking caffeine, etc. Example; the Bible does not address having a television in your house; however, there are some that do not believe any Christian should own a television and they condemn anyone who does. Lester Roloff spent a good part of his ministry condemning television.
2. **The Libertines (my made up word):** Those who take Christian liberty too far and say since the Bible doesn't address it then it is perfectly fine to do it. You can take the same list of things the legalist condemns that aren't in the Bible and this other set of Christians will claim we are free to do anything not expressly forbidden in the Bible. Example: the Bible doesn't address smoking marijuana and there are some Christians that claim it is okay to do because of that.

So, the problem with the legalist is it turns into being pharisaical, condemning everybody and everything.

The problem with the libertines is they become too lax and loose in their liberties which causes them to engage in sinful practices.

The bottom line is, if something seems sinful to you then it probably is but it might not be for someone else. If it isn't expressly condemned in the Bible then it becomes a matter of conscience. However, if something you are doing that you feel the liberty to do offends someone else and you know it does, then you should not do it in their presence or promote it in their presence because you will be a stumblingblock to them.