

Series: Romans

Title: Acceptable to God, Approved of Men

Text: Romans 14: 13-15:3

Date: Jan 5, 2019

Place: SGBC, NJ

Proposition: In our text today, Christ commands those strong in faith to limit our liberty motivated by Christ's love for us and our love for our brethren.

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Romans 14: 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:*

Christ has given his saints liberty from the old covenant law. Paul was persuaded of this fact by the Lord Jesus Christ. He walked in liberty *of faith*—of the faith that only Christ can give.

One, the Lord Jesus persuades his people that sin is not in things—*there is nothing unclean of itself*. It was not the fruit itself that plunged Adam, and the whole human race, into sin. It was the fact God forbid Adam to eat that fruit. There is no sin in alcohol or anything else that goes in the mouth. Christ said it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles but that which comes from our depraved hearts.

Matthew 15: 11: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

Concerning things that go into our bodies, it is sin if we break the law, get intoxicated, or it interferes with our responsibilities. "*But there is nothing unclean of itself.*"

Two, Christ has redeemed his elect from the law so that there is nothing which was required in the old covenant law that is unclean of itself—such as circumcision, meat, drink, feast days, sabbath days, and so on. Paul said, "*I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus there is nothing unclean of itself.*"

The Galatian believers were being beguiled into going back to the old covenant law. It was such a problem that the Galatian church had begun to bicker and divide with one another. It was because legalists were trying to force the Galatian believers to live as they lived. Paul told the believers,

Galatians 5: 1: Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Galatians 3:25: The law was a schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

Christ has set his believing people free from the entire yoke of old covenant bondage. The things in the ceremony typified Christ. They were shadows and types. Christ is the express image. He fulfilled the whole law by redeeming us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us. We are under the law of faith, which worketh by love. We worship God in spirit, not the oldness of the letter.

Romans 7:6: But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

Romans 8:2: For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

Still, the fact remains that even though Christ has given some faith to believe this truth, others who are weak in the faith have not this knowledge. Therefore, the Spirit of God uses Paul to give every believer, who is strong in the faith, clear instruction concerning this truth.

SIN IN THE HEART

Romans 14: 14...but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him *it is unclean*...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...23: And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

Though nothing is unclean of itself, to that weak brother who in his heart esteems it unclean, to him it is unclean. It is evil to the weak brother who thinks he is committing an offense to eat certain meats. If he eats, doubting that he is free to do so, his weak conscience will be defiled. His peace will be disturbed. He will think he has sinned. And he has because he eats not of faith: for whatsoever is not done of faith which Christ has given is sin.

It is absolutely true that *“meat does not destroy the work of God.”* Whether we eat or do not eat it adds nothing to Christ’s righteousness nor does it take away from Christ’s righteousness. Christ is eternal. Therefore, his finished work of redemption is eternal. It is a spiritual work never to be undone. What we eat or drink will not undo our justification in Christ. But if a man, in his heart, esteems it sin then to him it is.

“This has to do with the motive of the heart which God looks upon: *“for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”* Whatsoever is not of Christ—not of *faith* which Christ gives by persuading a man in his heart—is sin.

Brethren, this is why we cannot force anyone into liberty. Nor can a weak brother force the strong in faith to observe meats and days. We have to wait on Christ to give faith to the weak. Only Christ persuades his people in the heart. If we forced someone it would not be of faith which only Christ can give. It is sin. So uncleanness is not in things; it is in how we esteem a thing in the heart; it is motive that matters. God looks on the heart.

SIN IN OFFENDING

Romans 14: 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: 18: For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men

It is sin for the strong in faith to exercise liberty and offend a weak brother thereby. It *“destroys”*—it wounds and disturbs the peace of the weak brother, for whom Christ died.

1 Corinthians 8: 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.

Have you ever been emboldened to do something because you saw an older brother do it? Then when you did it your weak conscience was wounded because in your heart you thought you had sinned. Indeed, it was sin if you did it not of faith. But, also, the strong brother sinned because he caused you to do it.

Notice the offenses the strong commit if they walk contrary to this word.

One, I am not walking in love as God commands—*“But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably.”*

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. 14: For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Two, when I sin against my weak brother, I also sin against Christ. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 8: 12, *“But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ”*. Christ is one with those the Father gave to him before the world began. He is one with each believer in whom Christ dwells in Spirit. Therefore, what I do to my brother, I do to Christ himself.

Three, my good will be spoken of as evil. Paul says in our text, *“Let not then your good be evil spoken of: For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”* Why will my good be evil spoken of? Notice the word “for”. It means because. My evil will be spoken of because I claim to know and be persuaded by Christ that meat and drink has nothing to do with my Righteousness before God. But by insisting on exercising my liberty I am saying it does. If I truly know that the kingdom of God has nothing to do with meat and drink then I should want to follow Christ by walking in love toward my weak brother--I should want to abstain from exercising liberty around him. Christ’s Righteousness does not make his people want to disobey his word by using my liberty as a disguise for maliciousness. Nor does Christ make his people want to justify ourselves for walking contrary to his word. Christ makes us want to obey his word.

My good will be evil spoken of because if *Christ is my only Peace with God* then I should want to do that which makes for peace with my brother. Christ makes his people peacemakers. If I know that Christ reconciled his elect when we were yet enemies to God then I will love peace with my brother rather than fighting and separation due to me exercising my liberty.

My good will be evil spoken of because if *Christ is my Joy* then I will want my brethren to have joy in Christ. Therefore, I will not want to turn them to me by exercising my liberty and offending them. I will want them to focus on Christ that they might have the same joy in the Holy Ghost as I have in mine

It is walking in these things toward my brother—*righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost*—that we serve Christ. It is *acceptable to God and approved of men* because then my good will not be evil spoken of. But using my liberty to offend is not acceptable to God or approved of men because then I cause my good to be evil spoken of.

I have heard believers justify themselves for exercising their liberty by saying, “*The kingdom of God is not meat and drink it is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.*” But the context is saying that if I know that this is so then I should want to avoid offending a weak brother by my liberty. Though I claim the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, yet by insisting on my liberty I’m saying it is. But if I know the kingdom of God is not meat and drink—but that Christ is my Righteousness, Peace and Joy—if I know true worship is in spirit in and by the Holy Spirit—then I will not have a problem limiting my liberty for Christ and for my brother.

Let me give you example. When men tried to force Titus to be circumcised, saying it was necessary, Paul refused. Why? Their motive was wrong. But then Paul circumcised Timothy. Why? He was taking Timothy to preach in the Jews temple. Paul knew circumcision is nothing: if you are circumcised you are not better, if not you are not worse. But Paul also knew the Jews would think it something. They would never hear him preach the gospel of Christ if an uncircumcised, half-Gentile was sitting there in their midst. So he had Timothy circumcised. It showed that Paul truly believed that the kingdom of God is not in any temporal thing we do. It showed that Paul knew that we worship God in spirit and in truth and have no confidence in the flesh. And we are still commending Paul’s good unto this day.

LOVE LIMITS LIBERTY

Romans 14: 19: Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another... 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. 15: 1: We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2: Let every one of us please *his* neighbour for *his* good to edification. 3: For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them [God’s elect] that reproached thee fell on me.

Brethren, should making our sinful flesh happy be the test by which we determine what we will or will not do? Let’s say we are meeting friends at a restaurant. I am craving a glass of wine. But there is a brother that will be offended. Should pleasing my flesh be the deciding factor in what I do? No. The deciding factor should be God’s word, the love of Christ for me and my love for my brother. Whether eating or abstaining when I obey God’s word and Christ my Redeemer in faith “*Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.*” Happiness is bearing my weak brother’s infirmities for his good because God’s word tells me to and I know it pleases Christ.

What should we then do? “*We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.*”

Happiness is following my Redeemer’s example—“*For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.*” Christ said to God his Father, “The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.” When it came to saving his people by bearing our sins did Christ do what would have saved him from that awful suffering and shame? No. For all his elect, Christ denied himself, choosing rather that the reproach, wherewith we reproached his Father, fall on him. That is how we are justified. That is how we have this liberty in the first place. Believer, that is our motive to deny ourselves rather than offending a weak brother, that is our constraint for pleasing our weak brother rather than our sinful flesh. Obeying and following Christ, constrained by his love for me, is true happiness.

Amen!