

## “Principles Governing Our Liberty – Part 3”

### Romans 14

(Preached at Trinity, July 10, 2011)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. We've been examining some of the principles that must govern the exercise of our liberty in Christ.
  - A. First, Christian liberty doesn't mean moral autonomy – **Verses 7-8**  
Christian liberty must never be an excuse for sinful behavior. We never have the liberty to disregard the law of God.
  - B. Second, while we have liberty to live according to our conscience, disputes with our brothers and sisters in Christ over non-essential issues are to be avoided  
**Romans 14:1** – “Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but* not for *the purpose of* passing judgment on his opinions.”
    1. There are some non-negotiables—matters of orthodoxy
    2. But when it came to non-essential issues Paul was always willing to give up his liberty
  - C. Third, Progressive Sanctification also includes progressive doctrinal development
    1. Salvation does not result in immediate doctrinal perfection  
We are all on a doctrinal journey – from babes to maturity.
    2. God is continuing to teach us—even the mature are still being shaped
    3. This must lead us to patience with one another as we progress
  - D. Fourth, the value of our brother must not be dismissed
    1. He is precious in God's sight – Christ died for him  
**Romans 14:15** – “Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.”
    2. We should work for his good – his edification  
**Romans 14:19** – “So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.”  
**Romans 14:20** – “Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food.”
    3. Our motive in our behavior before our brother must always be love  
**Romans 14:15** – “For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love.”
  - E. Fifth, each person must walk in accordance with his own conscience
    1. We must not dismiss the voice of our conscience.  
If our conscience condemns an action we must heed.
    2. If we violate our conscience it is sin  
**James 4:17** – “Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.”
2. This morning I want to bring the final message as we continue looking at the principles that govern the exercise of our Christian liberty.

- I. We must always be concerned about our brother's conscience
- Romans 14:14** – "I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean."
- A. Yes, we must be concerned about our own conscience
1. We must never go against its cries
  2. But our place in the body of Christ is not just about us. We must be concerned about our brother.
- Romans 14:21** – "It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or *to do anything* by which your brother stumbles."
- B. As far as our own conscience is concerned, we have many freedoms
- Romans 14:14** – "I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself"
- Titus 1:15** – "To the pure, all things are pure"
1. There are many things we can participate in with clear conscience  
While we may have great liberty we must be mindful of the tender consciences of our brothers.
  2. Paul is declaring that eternity is at stake. We are dealing with eternal souls.
    - a. We believe in perseverance of the faith – eternal security
    - b. Yet, great damage can be done to souls  
Paul uses harsh words - **Romans 14:15** – "Do not destroy with your food"  
**Romans 14:20** – "Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food."
- C. We must always be willing to abandon our liberty for the sake of our brother  
Even though we may have the liberty to be involved in a certain action, if we cause our brother to violate his conscience then we have led him into sin and we have sinned.
- 1 Corinthians 8:12** – "And thus, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ."
- Romans 14:13** – "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this-- not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way."
- Romans 14:21** – "It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or *to do anything* by which your brother stumbles."
- D. This doesn't mean that our weaker brother's position is equally valid
1. This doesn't mean that we must continually conform our church to satisfy the conscience of weaker brothers.
  2. It does mean that if our brother is wrong we must patiently and lovingly teach him  
But we must seek to avoid contention with him and we must not dismiss his position and lead him to ignore his conscience.
- II. We must give great regard to the wellbeing of our own soul
- A. There are many things that are permitted but you must not allow anything to rule you – only Christ is your master

**1 Corinthians 6:12** – “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.”

1. It is lawful for you to surf the internet, but as soon as it begins to master you it becomes sinful. You must be able to say no
2. It is OK for you to eat jelly beans, but if they begin to master you it becomes sinful. You must be able to say no.
3. God allows some of His people to become wealthy. But Jesus said:  
**Matthew 19:24** – “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”
  - a. This is because money tends to rule us. It becomes our master and we begin to worship it.
  - b. **1 Timothy 6:10** – “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”
4. You must know your own weaknesses. You have to know the sins that easily beset you.  
**Hebrews 12:1** – “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,”  
**1 Corinthians 10:12** – “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”
5. As I’ve said in the past, as Christians we have the liberty to partake of an alcoholic beverage. But that doesn’t mean *every* Christian has the liberty to partake.

B. There are many things that are permitted but not everything is beneficial to your soul and not everything strengthens your relationship with Christ

**1 Corinthians 10:23** – “All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.”

1. You may have liberty to use surf the internet or engage in social networking but is this use of your time edifying – will it build you up spiritually?
2. You may have liberty to watch television, or engage in multiple forms of entertainment but all things must be in moderation.  
We must maintain a high interest in those things which edify.  
**Romans 14:22** – “Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.”

C. As Christians our greatest interest, our highest pursuit, our passion is to know Jesus more, to experience His love and enjoy the light of His countenance

1. There are things which are beneficial and things which hinder this pursuit
2. Why should you attend SS, DT, Wed. night, Men’s/Ladies’ studies?
3. Why do you labor hard at mortification?  
Why do you give such attention to your own heart seeking God’s aid continually conform it to His perfect righteousness?

III. Our chief motive for all things must be the glory of God

**Romans 14:6** – “He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.”

- A. The purpose for existence is to glorify God – that is, to declare His glory
1. On one hand God *will* receive glory in all things
    - a. God does all things for His own glory
    - b. God will even be glorified in the judgment of the wicked
    - c. Paul taught this clearly in **Chapter 9** regarding Pharaoh  
**Romans 9:17** For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth."
  2. Where pharaoh glorified God in his judgment and death we are to glorify God with our life
- B. God's glory should be our goal in everything we do  
**1 Corinthians 10:31** – “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”
1. This verse was given in the context of being mindful of our brother's conscience
  2. This must be our goal in every action. It must govern our liberty. Remember, Everything we do is a reflection of our view of God. As Christians our desire must always be to demonstrate to all men the greatness of God in our lives.
  3. Calvin – “There is no part of our life or conduct, however insignificant, which should not be related to the glory of God.”
  4. Our greatest desire must be to honor and please God?
- C. God is concerned about the details of our life – everything has a moral aspect
- a. What we eat and drink  
**1 Corinthians 10:31** – “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”
  - b. What we speak  
**Matthew 12:36** – "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."
  - c. Even what we think is important  
**Philippians 4:8** – “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things.”

Conclusion: How do summarize the principles that govern our liberty?

1. First, everything we do must be measured in the light of Scripture.  
**Romans 14:5** – “Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.”
2. Second, we must be mindful of our weaker brother in the exercise of our liberty.  
It is permissible for you to have a glass of wine with your supper but in our culture it may not be wise to serve it when you have guests in your home.  
Our love for him demands a regard for his conscience.  
**Romans 14:21** – “It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or *to do anything* by which your brother stumbles.”
3. Third, we must have regard for our own edification. We must heed the warning of our conscience and we must seek those things which edify.
4. Fourth, we must do all things to the glory of God. Does it magnify His presence in your life? Can you ask God’s blessings upon your action?
5. Finally, what effect does what we do have upon our ability to win the lost?  
**Rom 14:16** – “Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil;”
  - a. Paul committed his life to reaching the lost with the Gospel of Christ  
**1 Corinthians 10:23-24** – “All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. <sup>24</sup> Let no one seek his own *good*, but that of his neighbor.”  
**1 Corinthians 10:32-33** – “Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; <sup>33</sup> just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of the many, that they may be saved.”
    1. For the sake of the Gospel, Paul was willing to relinquish all rights
    2. For the sake of the Gospel, Paul was willing to endure whatever hardship was necessary  
**2 Timothy 2:10** – “For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus *and with it* eternal glory.”
  - b. We must all be aware of the power of our life before others  
**1 Peter 2:12** – “Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation.”
  - c. What good are your liberties if they cause others to curse God?
    1. A soul is of great value
    2. We must be willing to give up every right that we might reach others.
6. So while the Bible doesn’t specifically address an infinite number of issues it has not left us without guidance. There are principles for us to follow. Example:
  - a. Charles Spurgeon smoked cigars. He had the liberty to do so. This was an activity that gentlemen engaged in. This was before the common use of cigarettes.  
This was before they had a social stigma and before the health risks were known.
  - b. So can you smoke a cigar or cigarettes?  
We know the health risks today. It is a violation of the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment to knowingly put your life at risk.  
Cigars and Cigarettes carry a social sigma today – it would harm your witness.
  - c. It would be difficult to justify that this activity glorifies God today.
  - d. It is also true, however, that a man might still have liberty to smoke an occasional cigar in the privacy of his own home and we would not have the right to pass judgment. He would need to be wise not to offend the conscience of others.