



## **Christian Liberty**

Romans 14:13-23

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I would like to draw your attention this morning to the book of Romans, chapter 14. We're going to be looking at the second half of chapter 14 this morning. That will conclude 14 of the 16 chapters of the book of Romans. Our journey together for more than a year is drawing to a close. This is a very important subject, so I would ask that you would pay particular attention to the reading of God's Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely inerrant, the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient, and the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative. Romans, chapter 14, beginning at verse 13:

*“Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love.*

*By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.*

*Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.”*

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it

Dear Lord, we ask this morning that you would open up your Word to us, that where we need to be pricked, Lord, prick us; that where we need to be comforted, Lord, comfort us. Remind us in all that we who profess the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior have all our hope in him. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

We continue this week on the subject of Christian liberty. We saw last week that this subject was one that caused difficulties in the church in Rome, but it's also something that is a problem in *all* churches at *all* times and in *all* places, including right here in Katy, Texas. It's a problem because Christians grow in Christ at different paces, and that means that some pass judgment on others and some look down on others.

The solution provided by Paul, we saw last week, was to welcome brothers and not to judge each other. Paul picks up this theme here in verse 13 with a further discussion about Christian liberty. As we see in this text, three things Paul wants us to learn. First, *Christian liberty is essential*. It's not something we can jettison. It's not something that as Christians or as a church we can do without. Christian liberty is essential.

Secondly, we see Paul's warning to *take care with Christian liberty*. Christian liberty is not to be handled lightly. We are to exercise or use our Christian liberty with care. Finally, Paul gives us a positive enjoinder to *exercise our Christian liberty*. The exercise of Christian liberty is to be done in a certain way with a certain purpose. Christian liberty is essential, we have to take care with Christian liberty, and Paul explains the exercise of Christian liberty.

## **Christian Liberty Is Essential**

As we begin by looking at the fact that Paul tells us that Christian liberty is essential, it should not be a surprise to you that Paul thinks this subject is very important. For those of you who like statistics, 5 percent (1/20th) of all of the verses in all of the majestic letter of Romans are dedicated to the subject of Christian liberty, far more than, I think, if we were to ask Paul to write the book of Romans according to our orders, we would have. We'd ask him to spend some more time on the Holy Spirit or more time on the sovereignty of God.

Paul believes this is important. What Paul is interested in is not external conformity by everyone in the church. He is rather interested in unity, in love, and for the spread of the gospel. As we've said, this is because Christians grow at different rates, and because Christians grow in the faith differently, this will bring about different practices by different Christians in the same church.

Now, how could we handle this? One way to solve this problem, to have unity, is to force everyone to conform in the way they live. We see this in various places in our society. Take, for example, the military. If you're in the military, you don't get to do your own thing. You wear the clothes they give you, you eat the food they give you, you sleep in the place they give you, and it's all the same for everyone.

You greet your superiors in exactly the prescribed way down to the words you use. You will not see, for example, a soldier walk up and give his sergeant a high five as a greeting. It just doesn't happen. No one is going to say, "Hey, how are you doing?" No. There is a prescribed language and a prescribed mode of action in the military. We see it also in some businesses. The idea is to make the task more important than the people there.

An example that comes to my mind that may be helpful to you is a wonderful place that I call *Chick-fil-A*. If you go into Chick-fil-A, you will notice that all of their employees, whether they're short or tall, very young or older, young men or young women, are trained to respond and work in the same way. In our household, I have a special measure of joy, because I've had Chick-fil-A employees in my household, just walking up and randomly saying, "Thank you" to them, hoping I would get back "My pleasure."

When you go into Chick-fil-A, if you say, "Thank you" to them, they can't say, "You're welcome." They're actually not allowed. That would be wrong in that context. Not because "You're welcome" is rude. It's not. It's actually a sign of being polite, but because at Chick-fil-A they want absolute conformity, they want everyone to be united, they want everything to be the same, you can't even choose your response to "Thank you."

The church is a different kind of place. The church is made up of a variety of people, and God has distinguished between areas of uniformity and diversity, because in the church the people are more important to God than the task, so he doesn't press us into uniformity. There are matters of legitimate diversity of action in the church because God has chosen to leave those matters open. He hasn't spoken upon them.

We saw this in the first portion of chapter 14, and the key statement was in verse 5. "One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind." All of the instructions Paul gives here and all of the instructions he gives in 1 Corinthians and in other places in the Bible would be unnecessary if God wanted compelled conformity.

Paul would have, instead, just given us a long list of instructions...what we could eat, when we could eat it, how much we could eat, what we could drink, what sorts of things we could drink, how we should drink them, what days to observe, how often to observe them...a long litany of lists, and the Bible would probably be three times the size it is now, but we would have a long list to know exactly what we are supposed to do with no deviation.

It's not as if Paul doesn't know God's mind on the subject. He actually highlights this for us in verse 14. He says, "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself..." Paul is very forceful. He doesn't just say, "This is my opinion." He doesn't even say, "I've studied the Bible." He says, "It's because of my relationship with Jesus that I know Jesus' will on this matter."

Paul is also echoing our Lord's words in the Gospels, that it is nothing that goes *into* a man that makes him unclean but it is what comes *out* of a man. Paul is applying that principle here. So, what is the reason? Why does Paul not try to compel us to all conform in our actions? I think first, positively, we can think about it that Paul puts the focus on the individual. It's not just that each has a different practice. Each individual is engaged with this practice to think about if it's proper or not.

Paul emphasizes the individual. His language here in verse 5: "Each one..." One person does one thing, one does another. "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind." Paul makes it clear that the church is not just some sort of corporate blob. It's made up of individual people who are in relationship with God and who are following the Lord and struggling with how to be obedient to his Word.

Paul says that each person is to be fully convinced in his own mind. What God is after here, then, is not just for you to do the right thing but for you to be assured, convinced, convicted that you are following God's will. This verb *fully convinced* is a wonderful verb. It is used most famously earlier in the book of Romans in chapter 4, verse 21, where Paul writes that Abraham was fully convinced that God was able to keep his promise.

What this means is Abraham was completely sure of the promise of God, and he acted his entire life upon that. God doesn't want you to just go along to get along; he wants you to be convinced in your mind that you're following his will. Now, negatively, there are problems that would come from an enforced conformity. There are at least three.

The first is that a forced or a compelled conformity stands in the way of a believer's conscientious obedience to his Lord. What do I mean by that? All we need to do is to look at the text that comes just before this in verses 6-12. I want you to notice how often Paul says, "Lord. God. Lord. God. God. Lord." He's making it very clear that the relationship here is between the believer and God, not between the believer and his elders, not between the believer and church committees, not even between the believer and another believer.

What's important here is the believer's relationship to God, and if we compel conformity, we cut off at the knees the believer's ability to go to his God and to seek God's will and to be obedient to God rather than to a set of lists or to the opinions of others. That's not what godliness is. Godliness is doing what God commands because *he* commands it. It's serving God.

The second problem that would come from a forced conformity is that it puts the believer in the dangerous position of violating his conscience just so he can follow the rule. Now, we have to understand that conscience is not always right. Paul has told us that. Those who are weak are following a conscience that tells them they cannot do certain things or that they *must* do certain things, and they're not biblically informed. They're not following what the Bible has to say on this.

But conscience has great power to it. You can't just ignore your conscience. If you do, it will accuse you. It may not be right, because it's not informed by the Bible, but it will not let you off the hook. Have you ever had the occasion where you have done something and you just have this horrible feeling that you've done something wrong and you can't shake it?

Your spouse or your parents or your children come up to you and say, "Oh, stop worrying about that. It's fine. You haven't done anything wrong," and you say to yourself, "You may say that, but I can't shake it." That's what the conscience does. So if we force conformity, we put the conscience on kind of a procrustean bed, one size fits all, and it's uncomfortable. We're either stretched out where we shouldn't be or we're cut off where we shouldn't be. It's a problem.

The third problem with a compelled conformity is that it creates a checklist-style of obedience in which a person cares more about doing the right thing than why he should be doing something. The example we think of in this is typically the Pharisees. They had decided what godliness looked like, and it was the same for everyone, and you had to follow exactly what they had given. You had to conform to their idea of godliness. Even the smallest of actions were scrutinized.

We actually see that today. That is the religion of Islam. Sharia law authorizes, requires, down to the minute detail, how you should act. Think about that. Not just that you should pray but how many times you *have* to pray; not just how many times you have to pray but which direction you should face when you pray; not just which direction you should face when you pray but how your posture must be so you should pray in a certain way.

This should not surprise us, because Islam is not about a relationship with God; it's about submitting to a prescribed checklist. The word *Islam* actually means submission. So, Paul takes all this time to deal with the issues caused by liberty, because as bad as Christian liberty can make things, compelled conformity would be even worse. Yet the

church is one body. It is the body of Christ, so there must be a unity, so Paul points us to a unity that comes in diversity in the church.

Now, how can we have unity in the church when there is a diversity of practice on so many practical issues? Again, what we must do is focus not on the practice or the action but on the Lord. It is the Lord who brings unity to the church, even in the midst of a diversity of practices. God is the author of unity and peace, not the practices. This is what Paul says in chapter 15, verse 5. "May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another..."

God is the one who has brought about peace and harmony. He is the author. This should make sense to us, because the church is identified by its relationship to the Lord. The end of the church is to be with the Lord. Even the mission of the church...to spread the gospel...is subservient to the relationship of Christians to the Lord. The whole point is for us to be more like Jesus. Paul calls that *being of the same mind as Jesus*. We are called to have patience with others. We are called to endure with others.

Is it surprising to you, as you read the Gospels, that Jesus quite often does not go around correcting people? If you would ever think of anyone who could have spent the entirety of his day correcting people, it would be Jesus, yet, really, the only time he corrects people is when they challenge *him*, when the Pharisees come and accuse *him*, when the Sadducees come and try to trap *him*. He doesn't go around trying to get a uniformity of practice.

The whole foundation of the church being like Jesus is what Paul says in verse 15: to walk in love. Paul says, "For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love." What is underneath that verse is if you are walking in love, you will not grieve your brother and you will not abuse your Christian liberty and there will be diversity of practice.

Paul doesn't say *love* in the sense that we moderns use it. You've seen this before. We've looked at Paul's use of *love* several times in this book. He doesn't mean a mushy, sentimentalized emotion. He doesn't mean we are to have an emotional attachment to someone or something. It's no vague sense of affection. No. Paul says we are to walk in love, and the key here is the preposition. The word *in* here is not the normal Greek word for *in*, the word we would see for "He is *in* the house" or "She is *in* the car," a location.

Paul is not telling you to find love and get in that location and stay there. What he is saying is you are to walk according *to* love. That's the preposition. Even according to the rule or the standard of love. Now what does that look like? We've already seen it in chapter 13, verse 10. "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Do you see how this fits perfectly with Paul's idea of not taking advantage of others in the church, not grieving others? Because love does no wrong.

If I am to walk in love with others in the church, I cannot do them wrong. My liberty must be in that context. Christian liberty is essential. If we force conformity on all matters, we get in the way of our brother's or our sister's relationship with God. But we have to do more than simply stay out of the way. Love demands that I make myself subject to things for *your* benefit, to advance *your* walk with God. It's all about the believer's relationship with God.

## Care with Christian Liberty

Paul has told us that Christian liberty is essential. It cannot be replaced with a forced conformity to rules and regulations. Where God has spoken, we are not to speak, even if *we* think things would be better if people did things *our* way. We are to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, to seek their good before our own preferences. This means that while Christian liberty is essential, we must also be careful with how we *use* our liberty.

This is the subject Paul takes up in earnest in verse 13. He says, "Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother." Paul is showing us here what it looks like to walk in love with our brothers. How do we know if we are not walking in love with our brothers? Paul tells us. It would be that we would be harming them.

First, Paul tells us, "Do not harm your brother," and then secondly, he says, "Do not harm your gospel witness. Do no harm here." Paul actually starts this passage with this. Even before he tells us to walk in love, he gives us instruction that we are not to harm our brother. That's how important this is. Paul gets right to it. He will then tell us that when we *do* harm by failing to follow his instruction, we are not walking in love.

He had told us not to judge one another. That was his main point in the first 12 verses of chapter 14. Now he summarizes that, what we looked at last week, here in verse 13. He says, "Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer..." He does something very interesting in this verse. He uses two verbs. "Do not pass judgment..." Then he says, "...but rather decide..." The interesting thing is they are the exact same word. Paul is using it in two different contexts.

It's as if he's saying, "Do not look around and judge others. Spend all your time judging yourself. Judge yourself as to whether you are being a stumbling block. Judge yourself as to whether you are harming your brother. Don't worry about *them*; worry about *you*. Focus on yourself." So he tells us ways in which we can harm our brother.

The first thing he says is we are not to put a *stumbling block* in front of them. What this means is you are not to do something that would cause them to fall or to stumble, to get hurt, to lose their way, to lose their balance. The best way I can think of to describe this to you is *this*. Have you ever been in a home in which there was a little kind of half step at the doorway?

You walk in, and after you almost kill yourself tripping on the half step, you wonder to yourself, "Do architects *like* it when people fall down? Why would they possibly have done this?" Then, of course, your host comes by, and because they are used to that half step, they walk right over it. They're never going to trip over it. They know unconsciously that it's there, but anyone new who comes in and doesn't know it can stumble.

That's a picture of what's going on here. Those who have a more biblically informed conscience, who have thought about these issues, who have struggled with them, who maybe even have stumbled themselves, realize they're not going to fall by a certain practice or action, but those who have not can stumble and fall and hurt themselves because they're not aware of their liberty in Christ. The point is we are not by our actions to cause someone else to stumble.

Then Paul puts it a second way. He says we are not to put a *hindrance* in the way of a brother. This is also a graphic word picture. It's not just that they would stumble but that they might fall into a trap and sin. They might be led into sin. They might give in to temptation. The picture here is of a trap. Really, the place I've seen this trap is in the cartoons. I don't think regular hunters use this, but you know what this is like as soon as I'll describe it.

You put a big box or a cage up on an angle, and you put a stick in the corner of it to hold the box up so that when the stick is knocked aside the trap springs and the animal is caught. That's the picture Paul wants you to have in your mind. Do not put that stick up in the trap so that when someone stumbles across it they are trapped in their sin. It's not just that they fall; they are caught up in a sin.

The idea is that your brother falls into temptation because of your exercise of liberty. Now, how might that be? Well, he might fall into the sin of judgmentalism that we talked about last week, because you are doing something that you feel the liberty to do because it's not prohibited by God's Word, and they all of a sudden wonder whether you're a Christian. How can you do this? So they sin in judging their brother.

Or there could be another way. Perhaps you do something that is permitted by God's Word. It's at least not prohibited, and they look and say, "Well, I don't think you should do that, but if he can do *that*, well, then I'll do this other thing over here that actually *is* prohibited by God's Word." They may think, "Well, it's a free-for-all, do whatever you want. You want to drink wine? Sure! I'll shoot up cocaine. Same difference. Right?" This is what happens. Your brother is caught in sin.

The third way we harm our brother is we *grieve* him, Paul says in verse 15. We looked at this verse earlier. "For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love." You can grieve your brother. What does that mean? Let me tell you what it *doesn't* mean. It doesn't mean that someone then has the right of veto power to walk up to you and say, "You need to stop doing what you're doing or you're going to grieve me. I'm going to get upset. You don't want me to get upset, so you'd better do what I tell you so that you don't grieve me." That's not what Paul means here.

The word here has a connotation of being spiritually grieved, of it coming into their spirit. This goes right along with the other ideas Paul has been saying of a stumbling block and of a hindrance. What it means is your brother sees you doing something, and he's grieved in his spirit because he thinks you're sinning. You're harming your relationship with God, you're walking away from God, so he's grieved in his spirit. Paul says, "Do not do that. Don't grieve him. Don't make him think you are callous toward God."

The fourth and final way we can harm our brother is by *destroying* him. Paul puts it this way in verse 15: "...do not destroy the one for whom Christ died." Again in verse 20: "Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God." This is important for us to understand here that we interpret Scripture in the light of other Scripture. I'm going to go out on a limb here and say that when Paul wrote Romans 14 he did not forget what he wrote in Romans 8. Same book. Same letter.

Some look at this verse and say that you, by exercising your Christian liberty, can cause someone to lose their salvation. They'll be damned because of what you've done. But Paul tells us in Romans 8:38-39 that *nothing* can

separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus...not height nor depth nor Christian liberty, not meat nor drink nor days. *Nothing* can separate us from the love of Christ.

This is not Paul saying, "Be careful or people are going to lose their salvation," *but* just because that's not what he's saying doesn't mean this isn't a serious thing, because you *can* very seriously harm someone, even if they're not lost. You see, the brother Paul is talking about here is one for whom Christ has died. The reason you are in relationship with him is because Christ died for him. You cannot undo the work of Jesus, but you should not do anything that would affect his progress in Christ. Don't set back the work God is doing in his life just for the sake of enjoying your liberty.

Paul gives us warnings in verses 13 and 15 about the harm we can do to brothers, and he then warns us about the harm we can do to our gospel witness in the world in verses 16 and 17. "So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil." Paul says, "Don't let your liberty be such that it causes others to speak evil of the truth." This is related to the harm you can cause your brother.

Verse 16 begins, "So..." or "Therefore..." You know what *that* means, right? We look back to see what the *therefore* is there for. Paul is talking about the harm we can do to our brother, and one of the results that can happen from that is we can also harm our gospel witness. If you exercise your liberty such that your brother stumbles or is caught up in a sin or is grieved, then one result is that others who see it won't think very highly of Christian liberty.

This makes sense. If an unbeliever or an outsider sees a believer hurt by the actions of a fellow believer, his response is going to be something like, "Why would I ever want to be a part of this church thing? All they do is hurt each other. All they do is cause problems for each other." The good Paul is talking about here is Christian liberty. Christian liberty is good, but if it is misused, then others will say that good is bad, that it shouldn't be exercised, and they'll speak evil of it.

The word that is used here is *blaspheme*. They'll speak evil of God's truth, God's gospel, and of God because of your liberty. Now what does this mean? It means that when you come to a matter of liberty, you have to ask more than this question: "Can I do that?" Instead, you have to ask, "What will the impact of my actions be if I do that? Will it harm my brother? Even more, will it harm or cause damage to God's truth?"

Don't do things, don't exercise your liberty such that it misrepresents the nature of the kingdom of God and God's priorities. This also harms your gospel witness. Paul brings this up in verse 17. "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." What are we talking about here? Let me put it *this* way.

Imagine this scenario: You are living in Rome in the first century, AD, and you are invited to a church potluck. So you go to the market, and there's a good deal on some great steak. The only trouble is the steak is sold by a vendor who had sacrificed to idols, but you know. You've talked to Paul. You know an idol is nothing, and you know that meat is nothing and you can eat and this is not worshiping something that's nothing. You know there's no sin in this. You have your copy of 1 Corinthians 8 in your pocket.

So you bring... You're excited. T-bones, filet mignon...you have the spread. You are ready to go. "I'm going to be the hit of the party, because I'm bringing steak. Barbecue...mm." You come, and there's a problem, though. Your host is offended because your host doesn't believe Christians should eat meat sacrificed to idols. And some of the people who are guests are offended.

But then there's something else. Some of the guests *aren't* offended, and they think the people who are offended are crazy, and they start arguing with them. "Don't deny *me* my filet mignon. I'm eating *this!* By the way, if he brings some ribs, I'm eating the ribs too. I don't care if they're pork." What happens is instead of enjoying fellowship and prayer and joy, a fight breaks out...at a potluck.

So others who are standing by and looking get the impression that "If Christians gather together, it must be that the most important thing to Christians is what you can eat, because look at them go at it. They're going at it hammer and tongs. That has to be what this gospel is all about." So what you've done is harmed the gospel and the message God has given to you. You've given a distorted view of the kingdom.

As one commentator puts it, this is the error of the Pharisees in reverse. The Pharisees ignored the weightier things of the law so they could say precisely what you could *not* do. *This* mentality ignores the weightier things of the law...righteousness, peace, joy, Paul says...to insist on minute things you *can* do, but it's the same error. Now can you see why Paul spends so much time on the subject of liberty? He's concerned about his brothers and sisters, but he's even more concerned about the reputation of the gospel and the kingdom. If we're not careful, we can harm that witness.

### **Exercise of Christian Liberty**

How, then, do you exercise Christian liberty? Is Christian liberty useless? Not at all. The great danger is its misuse. That's why Paul has spent so much time on it. Let's look briefly, then, at how we are to exercise Christian liberty. You exercise it, first, for promoting the peace and the building up of the church. That's what Paul says in verse 19. "So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding."

Again, Paul's language here: "So then..." This is the conclusion of his argument of all of chapter 14. We're not to judge one another. We're not to harm our brothers by the use of our liberty. We have to represent the gospel properly, and when we do that, our service is acceptable to God and is approved by men. Others will see that we are genuine servants of Jesus, that we belong to him. That is your goal, Paul says. That's what you are to pursue.

This is hard for us, as modern Christians, because we think our goal is to be right. Paul says, "That's not your goal." Paul is not telling you to be wrong, but he's saying what you are to pursue is peace and mutual upbuilding. This word *pursue* is a word that describes a hunter tracking someone down, to follow it with all your skill and might.

If I can use a dated reference that has been brought up to speed, this is the detective following the fugitive. This is *Les Misérables* on steroids. You are to pursue peace in this way, never giving up, never going aside, always keeping your mind on it. That's what Paul means. Are you thinking first and foremost of the church with respect to your actions?

Are your first thoughts about whether something is permitted or not or are your first thoughts about whether something will bring glory to God, whether it will bring about peace and unity in the church so that the gospel will go forward and the lost will see their need of Jesus Christ? *That's* what you're called to do, Paul says. Christian liberty is not about getting *my* way because God has not forbidden something I want to do. No. It is about seeking in love the best for my fellow believers so the church of Jesus Christ is built up.

One final word from Paul. We see it in verses 22 and 23. Remember, Paul is not condemning these acts of Christian liberty. He is not saying it is a sin to eat meat or to drink or to do any of the other disputed practices we have talked about last week and this week. He is warning you that your unthinking, even uncaring exercise of your liberty can damage fellow Christians and the church.

He is not telling you to change your view. He's telling you that you don't need to feel compelled to flaunt your view. Keep it between yourself and God, Paul says in verse 22. It's fine in the presence of God. There's no sin involved, but you don't need to trot it out in front of other people, especially if it will cause harm. Paul says it is a blessing to have Christian liberty, to not be bound to things or to views that God has not restricted. That is a blessing. That's what Paul says in verse 22.

You are blessed, but the blessed man is the one who does not *need* to exercise his liberty, because if you *need* to exercise your liberty, you're in bondage. Think about that. If you *have* to have a drink, if you *have* to eat certain meats, if you *have* to celebrate a certain day and you will never be persuaded, then you're in bondage. The Scripture doesn't say you have to, so why are you insisting upon it? If you are insisting upon it, then you're showing you're *not* free in Christ.

What does it say about you if you have to drink alcohol in front of your brother who's offended by it? What does it say about you if you have to go to a certain movie just because you can or to eat certain foods? If the only way you can enjoy liberty is by exercising it, then you're actually in bondage. The free Christian can enjoy his liberty while he is refraining for the sake of others. That's because he's the servant of Christ. Everything he does is for Christ, not himself.

Christian liberty is and always will be a controversial subject, but it *is* important. That's why Paul takes so much time here to instruct us on it. Our liberty in Christ was bought at a cost: the precious blood of Jesus Christ. The blood of Christ should be more valuable to you than any action or any liberty. That means the believer who sits next to you or down the pew from you is more valuable to you than any action, because they have been bought by the blood of Christ. Jesus died for *them* too. They are the work of God. When you think of your liberty, don't think first of what you can do but think, instead, of what Jesus did.