

**Romans: Christian Liberty and Christian Charity (Part 2)**  
Romans 14:13-15:7

Main Point: We should be willing to lay down our liberties for the sake of witness, for the sake of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and for the sake of God's glory.

**#1 - We should prioritize our witness in the world over our liberty. (14:16-19)**

- The background of the text:
  - There were divisions in the church about *non-essential* matters of faith—things like food, drink, and days of rest.
  - The weak felt bound by certain Old Testament laws; the strong felt free because of Christ's perfect life and sacrificial death.
- Love of rights over love of people is confusing to the world—what is the Kingdom all about?

*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*  
(John 13:35)

*Such [selfish] behavior, by causing distress and disunity within the community, brings the gospel into disrepute before outsiders. Unbelievers, seeing in the church disputes about eating and drinking rather than righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, will not view the gospel as a good thing.* (Douglas Moo)

**#2 - We should prioritize our brothers and sisters over our liberty.**  
**(14:13-15, 20-23; 15:1-4)**

- Wrong things are always wrong, but right things are not always right.
  - Paul is not teaching us some sort of moral relativism or indifference to moral norms.
  - Paul knew that things like food and drink and days were right in and of themselves.

*For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.* (1 Timothy 4:4)

- But he also knew that these things were not right for everyone.
- Because the weak considered these things sinful, they were sinful *to them*.
  - It is not only a sin to transgress *a rule* of the Lord...
  - It is also a sin to defy *the rule* of the Lord.

*[The conscience] is not infallible, but it is nevertheless sacrosanct, so that to go against it (to act not from faith) is to sin.* (John Stott)

- And it is the sacredness of the conscience that shapes Paul's instructions to the strong.
  - Paul does not require abstinence from certain things simply because others disagree.

*A grumpy Christian could blackmail a whole church in that case. Some churches have Christians who are very weak and have an enormous number of scruples. They are constantly getting irritated and upset by other church members who are offending their standards of proper Christian behavior. The strong do not have to refrain from everything that upsets anyone else. (John Piper)*

- We are not bound to obey the consciences of others, but we are bound to care for the consciences of others.
  - This is the way of Christ—not insisting on rights but interested in righteousness.
  - Insistence on personal preferences is inherently un-Christlike.

*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (Philippians 2:3-7)*

- Christian, are you bearing with other Christians?
  - Are you going to beyond toleration to edification?
  - Are you overlooking the weaknesses of others?
  - Are you more concerned for unity around Christ than unanimity around your opinions?

*A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject of all, subject to all. (Martin Luther)*

### **#3 - We should prioritize the glory of God over our liberty. (15:5-7)**

- The reason that we should bear with one another, not judge one another, and not exclude one another is not ultimately about one another but about God.
- God has not saved us so that we can follow laws or so that we can enjoy liberties.
- God has saved us so that both us can sing together, eat together, drink together, pray together, serve together, and be together *for the Lord*.

*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:18-21)*