

I. Introduction and review: Liberty is not absolute. v. 13a

A. Review: Stop judging one-another. v. 13a, 1-12

1. Real Christians differ on issues of conscience: i.e. diet, drink, and days.
2. The strong (free) should not despise the weak (strict).
3. The weak should not judge the strong.
4. We should fully accept and welcome one-another as God has accepted us.

B. Be willing to restrain the expression of your liberty for the sake of love. v. 13b-23

II. Don't use your liberty to harm your brother. v. 13b-15a Consciences in collision.

A. The strong brother is right! v. 14a Titus 1:15 Mark 7:15,19b Acts 10:15

1. Material things, such as food and drink are not intrinsically evil. I Ti. 4:4 Ge. 1:31
2. The dietary restrictions of the Old Covenant have been abrogated by Christ.

B. The weak brother sins if he violates his conscience. v. 14b I Co. 8:7

C. The strong sins when he exercises his liberty at the expense of the weak. v. 13b

1. Paul's primary concern here is not merely offending the weak brother, but tempting him to act against his own convictions. v. 14b,21
2. You can do a great deal of damage by the selfish abuse of your liberty. v.13b,15,21 16:17 I Co. 8:9,11 Lev. 19:14

III. Love demands that you not harm your weaker brother. v. 15b-18

A. Christ died for your brother. v. 15b I Co. 8:11 6:20 II Co. 5:14

1. If Christ loved him so much, can you love him enough to curb your liberty?
2. Does this verse support particular redemption? 8:32 Jo. 10:11,14-16,26 Eph. 5:25

B. Don't bring reproach upon that which God says is good. v. 16

1. Who would be speaking evil of what? 2:24 Titus 2:5
 - a. The weaker brother speaking against your liberty?
 - b. Unbelievers mocking the gospel because of divisions among Christians?
2. Either way, your selfish misuse of your liberty causes God's truth to be maligned.

C. Your priorities should be those of God's kingdom. v. 17

1. Eating and drinking aren't the big issues. Mt. 6:31-33 Jo. 18:36
2. Spiritual matters are most important: righteousness, peace, and joy.
 - a. Is Paul speaking of the imputed righteousness of Christ which gives us peace with God and joy in our hearts? 1:16-17 3:21 5:1
 - b. Or is he speaking about living righteously which leads to joyful peace in the church? v. 19 6:13,16,18
 - c. God's peace and joy surpass whatever pleasure you gain from food or drink.

**D. Such loving service is acceptable to God and approved by men. v. 18 12:1-2,17 16:10
II Co. 5:9 6:3 Phil. 2:3-9 He. 13:21 I Ti. 3:7 Lu. 2:52 3:22**

IV. Do whatever it takes to build up God's people. v. 19-23

- A. Pursue peace and edification (not destruction). v. 19-20 15:2 Eph. 2:21 4:12,29
I Co. 14:3,12,26-27 I Th. 5:11 Eph. 4:1-3 Heb. 12:14 I Pe. 5:13b 3:11
Don't use your liberty to destroy God's work. Mt. 18:6f**

- B. Be willing to forego your freedoms for your brother's sake. v. 21 Gal. 5:13
 - 1. Paul expands his list beyond days and diet to include drink (wine) and any other means by which your brother might stumble.
 - 2. Paul set an excellent example of self-sacrifice. I Co. 8:13 9:19f 10:32-33

- C. Keep your convictions on these matters between yourself and God. v. 22
 - 1. He is not saying to keep your faith in Christ as Savior to yourself.
 - 2. Rather he refers to your faith that you have freedom to do what others can't do in good conscience.

- D. The one who acts without a clear conscience sins. v. 23
 - 1. God's standard of righteous behavior is higher than most imagine.
 - a. It is not enough to merely do the right thing.
 - b. You must do the right thing with the right motive (faith). I Co. 10:31
 - 2. What is meant by *faith*? Not saving faith, but a settled conviction based upon Scripture that you are free to act to the glory of God. 14:1-2,22 I Co. 10:31
 - 3. Everything the unbeliever does is sin. 8:6-8 12:1-2 14:18 Pr. 21:4 Ti. 2:15 He. 11:6

V. Romans 14 and your moral choices.

- A. How much can you rely upon conscience? 2:15
 - 1. Conscience is not infallible.
 - a. Your conscience may not allow you to do what is permitted in God's Word.
 - b. Your conscience may allow you to do that which is against Scripture. Pr. 30:20
 - 2. It is always sinful to go against your conscience.

- B. Rules for making moral decisions.
 - 1. Is this clearly forbidden by Scripture? 13:13 *Don't do it.*
 - 2. Would this tempt you to sin? Mt. 5:29-30 *Don't do it.*
 - 3. Are you unsure whether Scripture allows this? 14:23 *Don't do it.*
 - 4. Would your exercise of Christian liberty tempt your weaker brother to follow you against his conscience? *Forego your liberty for the sake of love.* 14:13,21 I Co.
 - 5. Even if you would not tempt the weaker brother to join in, would you offend him?
 - a. You may choose to forego your freedom for the sake of peace and unity. I Co. 9
 - b. Don't, however, allow the weakest brother to become a tyrant.
 - 6. Enjoy your freedom.

- C. Different kinds of people face different challenges.
 - 1. The weak brother...
 - a. Does well when he recognizes the freedom of others to partake of what would be sinful for him (either due to temptation or conscience). Mt. 5:29-30
 - b. Harms the body when he believes what God allows is sinful for everyone and tries to impose his standards on the entire church.
 - 2. The strong brother...
 - a. Does well when he knows his freedoms, but is willing to forego them for the sake of the weak.
 - b. Sins when he takes every opportunity to display them, regardless of how others are affected.
 - c. Also sins when he mistakenly believes he is free to do what Scripture forbids.

VI. Concluding applications: I Pe. 2:16 Phil. 3:15

Discussion questions

- 1. What limitation upon the liberty of the strong is Paul teaching?**
- 2. Are any material things evil?**
- 3. Who is right: The weak or the strong?**
- 4. Why should the weak abstain from what the Bible allows?**
- 5. Why should the strong restrain the exercise of his liberty?**
- 6. What is the bad result Paul fears if the strong flaunts his liberty.**
- 7. What are some issues of liberty on which you restrain yourself for the sake of others?**
- 8. What are some issues of conscience on which others show restraint for your sake?**
- 9. How reliable is the human conscience?**
 What role should conscience have in your life?
- 10. What should you do if a weak brother demands to impose his legalistic standards on you?**