

Christian Liberty

Romans 14:5-12

Introduction

We are in the middle of a section of Romans where Paul is addressing the issue of Christian liberty – matters of conscience

Alexander Strauch: 'a number of young Christian couples from the same church went on a ski retreat. Some of the couples brought wine to have with the evening meal. A few of the couples did not want to drink, but the wine drinkers insisted that there was nothing wrong with drinking wine during a meal. They convinced the nondrinkers to join them and not to be so rigid.'

'Later, however, the nondrinkers felt that they had violated their consciences. They became upset with those who had pressured them to drink, and those who pressured them brushed aside the nondrinkers as being legalistic and ignorant. This caused a rift in their relationships. It led to further dispute within the church about who was right and who was wrong.' [If You Bite and Devour, p. 33]

Such issues are rather common to the church – and have been part of church life from the 1st century

I Cor. 8:8, 9 - 'But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat nor the better if we do eat. But take care lest this liberty become a stumbling block . . .'

I Corinthians 8:13 - 'Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble.'

The idea: if someone's conscience bothers them about something – they don't need our enlightenment – they need us to respect their conscience

The early Christians had to address issues such as eating meat sacrificed to idols / whether one should regard one day above another. Should a Christian celebrate the Jewish holy days - - Passover or Feast of Purim?

Charles Spurgeon and Joseph Parker were two well-known preachers in 19th century London – they had a great fellowship in the ministry – exchanging pulpits / etc. – then the relationship soured – Spurgeon accused Parker of being unspiritual – their falling out was published by the press in the daily newspapers

Why did Spurgeon accuse him of being unspiritual? Parker attended the theatre [dramatic productions – perhaps Shakespeare – or Victor Hugo – or Grease

Spurgeon – who did not go to the theatre did regularly smoke cigars – something many would frown upon today

Who was right? / who was wrong?

The bible doesn't seem to address such issues clearly / - areas of liberty and conscience

Paul would say: 'let each man be convinced in his own mind.'

Romans 14:22-23 - 'Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves . . . whatever is not from faith is sin.'

We need wisdom to discern between the essentials and non-essentials

Augustine: 'In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.'

No one can use these principles on Christian liberty to justify adultery / immorality / pornography / homosexuality / lying / etc.

These issues are where Scripture leaves room for differences of opinion

We encounter these issues all over the place:

I was part of a conservative Bible church in NE that communicated pretty strongly that wives were not to work outside the home – have careers [their job is to be wife and mother] – good values – we lift up motherhood / exalt marriage

Problem with that view is – it's an area of liberty – you cannot legislate [different seasons in the marriage - no kids / kids / no kids again]

As Christians walk by faith – seek to be led of the Spirit - - - they may come to different positions

We moved out to CA – to go to seminary – and we saw wives working as secretaries in the church / teaching in the Christian school / etc.

Christine took a job as a secretary – later as a teacher

One of my friends from Nebraska – his wife was running around telling other women they were in sin for working – the seminary had to call him in and tell him to put a muzzle on her!

What we find in Scripture – on many issues where there is room for disagreement - - - Paul does not take sides

Instead of giving a rule to settle a particular issue – Paul gives principles for living in community while disagreeing with one another

What is important is that you follow your conscience – and you don't judge or condemn your brother in his opinions – you accept those whom Christ has accepted / try not to be a stumbling block to others

I. One Day Above Another - vv. 5-6

We love our brother by not judging him or demanding that he follow us on every issue

Rom. 15:7 - 'Therefore accept one another - just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.'

One man regards one day above another

Our mind automatically thinks of the Christian Sabbath - - but this likely is a much broader reference here

The overriding principle for church worship and attendance – is to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together

Hebrews 10:24-25 - 'and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.'

C.S. Lewis: 'The New Testament does not envisage solitary religion: some kind of regular assembly for worship and instruction is everywhere taken for granted in the Epistles. So we must be regular practicing members of the Church.'

How much / how frequent?

There is room for liberty – but clearly the pattern of one day in seven was reflected in the OT Sabbath day

Arnold Fruchtenbaum: 'The apologetics used for mandatory Sabbath keeping are almost exclusively based on the Hebrew Bible [OT]; there is no NT command for believers in general or Jewish believers in particular, to keep the Sabbath.'

There is no NT instruction given to the church to observe a Sabbath Day

If we observe a Sabbath – it is because we carry forward a principle taught in the OT

The church early on started worshiping on Sundays – in honor of the resurrection

Around the time of Constantine – [321 AD – the emperor declared Sunday a legal day of rest] - - - which is why the 7th Day Adventists argue that the day was illegitimately changed by the RCC – [this was a terrible heresy in their minds]

MLJ [on the 7th Day Adventists]: 'To name a division of the church in terms of this one issue is to contravene the Apostle's instruction at this point. If that is the name you give to your church, if you make it so important that you put it in your heading, as it were, then you are going against the clear teaching the Scriptures.'

*** The command to keep the Sabbath day does not show up in the NT – neither are we told specifically how that would be accomplished [on which day?] - which is very interesting given the number of times the other commandments are repeated – and even developed in the NT

*** We worship on Sundays – we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together

Practices that people have observed on Sundays – abstaining from travel / not mowing the yard / not eating out at restaurants / shopping - vary widely amongst geographical regions and cultures / and times – and have the feel of randomness to them

David Jeremiah shares about a practice early in his ministry: [late 60's]

David Jeremiah: 'My wife, Donna, and I began our ministry together in a Baptist church in New Jersey. We had just come from four years of seminary training in Dallas, and we were both avid Dallas Cowboy football fans. To our dismay, when we arrived at our first assignment, we were told that watching TV on Sunday was forbidden, and reading the Sunday newspaper was frowned upon . . . I remember closing the blinds of our apartment so that no one would see us watching the Cowboys.' [God Loves You, p. 68]

Many believed it was wrong to watch t.v. on Sunday – [not too many believe that today]

We seek to avoid offense – but we also:

Colossians 2:16, 17 - 'Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day - things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.'

Here Paul says that the Sabbath Day was a shadow of things to come – the substance of which belongs to Christ

The Sabbath day was a ceremonial part of the Law – that pointed to and was fulfilled in Christ

i.e. – Sabbath Days – are lumped together with things like the Passover / Day of Atonement / Feast of Booths

A tree casts its shadow – we sit in its shade – but if we try to climb the shadow we aren't going to get very far

The substance is Jesus Christ

We aren't saved, sanctified, or made holy by observing a holy day

We are saved, sanctified, and made holy thru faith in Jesus

While the church doesn't necessarily have a Sabbath Day – we do have the Lord's Day – a day on which the church gathers – on Sunday

We need the Lord's Day – to remind ourselves of biblical truth / for corporate worship / to re-focus upon God / fellowship with His people / for prayer and encouragement / accountability

New life in the Spirit argues that we should desire these things / make arrangements in our schedules so we can regularly worship with God's people

But – we don't legislate and say – 'well – if you don't attend more than 30 or 40 worship services in a year - - - you are a bad Christian and probably not saved!'

We let people work these things out in their own life

If we love God and His people – we love His church

I John 4:7, 8 - 'Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.'

We are called to love one another

But – what if Susie Smoozie goes to your church and you just can't stand to look at her!

That is a problem – a spiritual problem [be reconciled! / forgive]

Don Whitney: 'How can anyone say he has this kind of heaven generated love for the brethren when he doesn't even love them enough to be with them? How can anyone who truly has this love for the family of God have no desire to gather

with his brothers and sisters at the family reunions each Sunday when they meet with their Father?' [Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church, p. 26]

In the church – is a place where we learn to practice all the one another's - - - to forbear and be patient with / to serve / to love / to encourage / to pray for / to forgive one another

C.S. Lewis put it – 'Christianity is forgiving the inexcusable in others because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.' [You might very well be a bigger sinner than Susie Schmoozie!]

II. Unto the Lord - vv. 7-12

Here Paul elaborates on this principle – how we are to love our brothers – ultimately in relation to Jesus

John Stott: 'Because He is our Lord, we must live for Him. Because He is also the Lord of our fellow Christians, we must respect their relationship to Him and mind our own business. for He died and rose to be Lord.'

There are a lot of things that people have to work out for themselves

Sometimes people's views change over time

You would expect that – if something falls into the category of Christian liberty

R.C. Sproul: 'I recall a certain dinner I ate with a group at a restaurant. The waitress came to serve us and asked, 'May I take your drink orders? Would anybody like a cocktail? Our hostess cut her off, saying, 'No, we are Christians.' The smug self-righteousness of our hostess not only embarrassed the waitress, who was simply doing her job, but she gave a wrong message about Christianity. Christianity is not about eating and drinking.'

Romans 14:17 - 'For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.'

That's what we wish to convey – as ambassadors for Christ

Christianity is not about 'not drinking' or not smoking - - - it's about righteousness / peace and joy in the Holy Spirit

Christians have often been guilty of making the faith about peripheral issues or gray areas

J.V. McGee said that his wife grew up in a Southern Baptist church in Texas – where 'mixed bathing' was taboo – [boys and girls swimming together]

They later moved out to CA – the kids were all going to the beaches and nobody thought anything of it - however in their new church climate – smoking was taboo

We live out our lives in the presence of God – Coram Deo – before the face of God

He is our Master – we belong to Him and are accountable to Him – v. 12

This is God's world – He created us – He gives us life – He sets the boundaries

Paul gives an example of people going off the rails in their asceticism [denials]

I Timothy 4:1 - 'But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.'

I Timothy 4:3, 4 - 'men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude.'

This was a key text for Martin Luther – in casting aside clerical or priestly celibacy which is the position of the RCC church yet today

Luther began as a monk in the Catholic church in the early 1500's

If you were a priest and had a child with a prostitute [in the 16th / 17th century]] [or molested an altar boy] – that could be forgiven but under no circumstances should you take a wife and get married! [that's absurd!] / Paul says it's demonic

We still see the fallout from this wicked doctrine today – which Paul attributed to the demons

Paul says – 'that's not Christianity'

We see how Satan gets his hand into the mix and preys upon the ignorant - seeks to lead people astray

II Cor. 11:3 - 'But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.'

That's what we want: devotion to Christ

If we know Christ in this life – He will not forsake us for eternity

He will usher us thru the gates of heaven - - - and clothe us in His righteousness

All will become clear at the judgment – all ambiguities will disappear

I Corinthians 13:12 - 'For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.'

For now – let us walk wisely and prayerfully – in the Spirit

We are to make sure that our religious practices are based on God's Word and not merely on the traditions and practices of men

If God's Word leaves room for differences of opinion – then so should we

Conclusion

One person asked John Piper – what should I do if I feel guilty about doing something – but I'm not sure that it is sin?

Piper responded – 'treat it as sin / repent / ask for forgiveness / don't do it anymore if it harms your conscience'

I Tim. 1:5 - 'The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.'

John 15:11 - 'These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.'