

In All Things, Charity

Romans 14:13-17

Introduction

One guy named Mike refers to an incident that occurred in his childhood: ‘when I was about eleven years old, I was in a toy store with my thirteen-year-old brother. I was admiring this extra special toy matchbox car. I really wanted that car. My brother came up and said, ‘Why don’t you buy it?’ I told him I had no money. My brother said: ‘I’ll get it for you’

I thought, ‘wow – what a nice brother to buy me the car. I just about died when he looked around to see no one was watching, opened the display case on the counter, removed the car and put it in his pocket.’

‘I was shocked beyond belief. I can still feel how terrible my heart felt at that moment. We went outside – he pulled the car from his pocket and gave it to me. I still hurt over being involved with that theft. I never played with the car. I still have it. I regret I never returned it to the store before it went out of business.’ [The Ten Commandments, pp. 244, 245]

The voice of conscience is a powerful thing. To go against one’s conscience often results in guilt feelings, some degree of regret or mental anguish

Unless one receives the grace and forgiveness of God thru Christ – such guilt can remain and linger throughout one’s life

That is one of the great blessings of the gospel - - - forgiveness of sins

R.C. Sproul: ‘God takes no joy in our being immobilized by guilt. He is, like any good human parent, eager to lead us out of a life of fear and guilt so that we are free to do what is right and pleasing to Him.’ [Pleasing God, p. 106]

But the conscience is there for a reason

Everyone has one - - - if we listen to it – it will generally lead us in proper / moral behavior

Martin Luther deferred to the conscience and the Word of God in his classic response to the Roman Catholic authorities who had summoned him to the Diet of Worms - 1521

Martin Luther: “I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me.” [Luther’s Works - vol. 32, pp. 112, 113]

The Catholics were demanding that he go against his conscience – and he said: ‘no’

‘My conscience is captive to the Word of God.’

It is because of the importance of the conscience that Paul gives some of the instruction we find in Romans 14

I. The Importance of Love - vv. 13-15

We have noted in this section – Paul has been dealing with matters of ‘indifference’ / liberty / gray areas – areas in which Christians can have differences of opinion – because the Bible does not expressly forbid something

i.e – it leaves room for personal judgment and the following of the conscience

i.e. – Paul doesn’t say – ‘Just do whatever you want’ - - - He says to follow your conscience

We noted – there are all kinds of issues that fall here – some differ according to different time periods / generations

- Is it ok to drink alcohol in moderation / tobacco
- Certain styles of clothing / jewelry – pierced ear rings / nose rings / tattoos
- Bible translations
- Observance of a Sabbath Day – and how to observe it – should you go shopping? / eat out? / watch t.v. / mow the yard / etc.
- Music instruments in church – can be debated
- Choice of education – public / Christian / Home school
- Use of Birth control

The RCC is officially against all forms of birth control – labels it ‘a sin and a grave matter’

You might call this the ‘no sex without the possibility of a baby’ - view

Google will tell you that almost all Roman Catholics ignore that teaching – [I think google is probably right]

Back in the 70’s – a good Catholic family would generally have a lot of kids

We had one family in our neighborhood: Mark / Jimmy / Peter / Mary / Theresa - - - good Catholic names!

Roman Catholicism – tends to reflect a low view of the Holy Spirit and the conscience

We have to have the pope tell us what is right and wrong – rather than listening to Scripture and acting according to the conscience

When it comes to these issues of conscience - - - where Scripture does not spell things out – there are some principles to follow:

1st - The first thing Paul told us here is to not look down on one another [v. 3] – you’re not their judge – God is [v. 4]

We’ll all stand before God for our actions and give an account – so we should obey the conscience

2nd – we are to live according to the conscience – [v. 5]

Follow the conscience

I Timothy 1:19 - 'Keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.'

3rd – Avoid causing others to stumble – v. 13
Don’t be a stumbling block

In this context – he’s talking about giving up certain behaviors [such as eating meat] because of the conscience of the other person

We need discernment to know how to apply this

R.C. Sproul: 'Though the stronger brother is to bend over backwards not to offend or to hurt the weaker brother, the stronger brother is not to allow the weaker brother to exercise moral tyranny over the church.'

We see this today in our culture

‘I’m offended you won’t use my pronouns’ – [a teacher in Virginia was fired for refusing to use the pronouns of the so-called ‘trans’ kid]

He was a Christian – and thought the whole thing was a sham

The school board later agreed to pay the teacher \$575,000 in a court settlement

But – Paul is talking specifically about the church – and amongst Christians

If someone in the church comes and says they are offended if we don’t use their pronouns – we would tell them to repent and to accept the body God gave them

God created you and gave you your gender – be content

Donald Barnhouse – was a pastor a number of years ago – he once was speaking at a Christian conference with a number of young people present – in the 1920’s. A couple of women approached him and said that there were a lot of young girls there who were not wearing stockings. [part of the Victorian dress code] All girls wore dresses in those days –

then apparently - stockings to cover the legs. These two women wanted him to rebuke the girls on this behavior

Barnhouse said to them, 'do you know that the Virgin Mary never wore stockings?' 'She didn't?' – 'no' – 'stockings were unheard of in that day.'

He then added for good measure, 'Stockings first appeared in 15th century Italy – they were worn by prostitutes'

Was that right of him?

He had apparently dealt with the issue before

If a liberty is to be given up – it should be given up voluntarily – not because someone is trying to exercise moral tyranny over others in the church

4th - Don't use your freedom as a covering for evil

I Peter 2:16 - 'Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.'

We may be free to drink alcohol – but we are not free to be drunkards

We may live in a state where marijuana is legal – but that doesn't mean it's wise or godly behavior

Paul – will bring up the issue of food here in v. 15

For many Jews – this was a huge issue

We might recall how Peter was given a vision to bring Gentiles into the church

The vision involved unclean foods

Acts 10:9-12 - 'Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. And he became hungry, and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; and he beheld the sky opened up, and a certain object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were in it all *kinds of* four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air.'

Acts 10:13-16 - And a voice came to him, "Arise, Peter, kill and eat!" But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." And again a voice *came* to him a second time, "What God has cleansed,

no *longer* consider unholy." And this happened three times; and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.'

'What God has cleansed – no longer consider unholy.'

While Peter was contemplating this strange vision – some men from Cornelius [a Gentile] show up and give him an invitation to come and speak with them the message of salvation

Acts 10:28 - 'And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and *yet* God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.'

This was a big issue – not only the Gentiles / but the foods

Mark tells us in his gospel – Jesus declared all foods clean

Mark 7:19 - 'Thus He declared all foods clean.'

Paul – as a Christian – he knows the old food taboos do not apply to Christians

However – he was willing to adjust his behavior when it came to matters of indifference – if it would avoid offense

In our liberty – we don't want to give unnecessary offense or cause another to stumble

Let's say – I live in Sully - - - and I don't think there is anything wrong with mowing my yard on Sunday afternoon - - - but I know that Bill who attends the First Reformed Church grew up believing that it was sinful to do so

If I mow my yard on Sunday - - - then Bill is going to think: 'What on earth? What kind of Christian is this?' / and my testimony is marred as a result

So – it would be better to refrain from doing something I have liberty to do - - - because of the conscience of others – but it is voluntary

We are called to act in love / in consideration of others

Paul says – there are bigger issues – such as love / consideration of our brother

We do this as parents with young children

Suppose Billy takes Bobby's toy car out of the toy bin to play with

And Bobby is not happy that Billy has his car – so he takes a Jenga block and whacks Billy over the head and takes his car back – and a knock down wrestling event takes place in the living room to see who can keep the car

Mom comes in and says – ‘what is going on?’

And Bobby says – ‘he stole my car’

And Billy says - - - ‘He big baby – I had it first’

What does mom say? [it’s mine now – you can have it back next week when you learn how to share]

i.e. – if one of you can’t give it up – then you both will

The problem wasn’t the car or who had it first - - - the issue was sharing / selfishness / love

Paul addresses the issue of meat and says – ‘the issue isn’t really the issue’ - - - you need to walk in love - bend a little / consider others

Romans 14:15 - ‘For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love . . .’

II. A Good Testimony for the Kingdom - vv. 16-17

Here Paul refers to how a Christian’s testimony can be involved

Charles Spurgeon smoked cigars – and he did so with a clear conscience until one day – he saw an advertisement for a tobacco firm - - - and it said: ‘The brand that Spurgeon smokes’ - - - from that day on – he gave up his habit

If somebody wants to say – “Mtn Dew – the brand Pastor Jerry drinks – I’m happy to endorse!”

Spurgeon felt the ad gave an unfavorable view of Christianity and himself by associating him with their tobacco – that led him to give it up

The real issues of the faith are deeper

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

The Day of Pentecost was originally called the ‘feast of weeks’ – 7 weeks + one day after Passover - - - but in later Jewish tradition it also came to be associated with the giving of the Ten commandments to Moses – a time to recall that event in their history

It took place 50 days after the Passover

In the NT – What did God do in Acts 2 – on the Day of Pentecost?

Instead of giving us the Law – He gave us the Holy Spirit

For the church - - - we have been given the Holy Spirit to dwell within us and to guide us in our behavior

When I was young – a number of boys wanted to have long hair – particularly if you played in a band – the hairball eighties [for many adults – this was something of an eyesore / annoyance]

One kid went to speak with the family pastor – and expressed his frustration that his parents would not let him grow his hair long – it was not right – because of this, this and this

The pastor finally looked at him – ‘right passion – wrong cause’ – it just isn’t that important

You may as well learn now - - - your hair is not that important

If you want something to seek / pursue / be passionate about – seek first His kingdom and His righteousness – Matt. 6:33

Here is a priority for you - major in the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace

The kingdom of God – refers to the rule of God

Usually when we think of God’s kingdom – we think of that which Jesus will establish when He returns – ‘Thy kingdom come’

Matt. 26:29 - 'But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.'

But – there is a sense in which we can manifest traits of the kingdom now – by living lives in submission to the Holy Spirit

We can reflect the joy of heaven now!

How can I rejoice when my grandma just died / or my car won’t run or the coach won’t put me in the game?

Randy Alcorn: 'By rejoicing in Christ, we lay claim to the fact that God is bigger than the Fall and affirm that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will reverse the Curse and reign over a new universe.'

Our lives in this world will always have something that is broken about it

We are not home yet!

But we can begin to rejoice now in the Holy Spirit

We can have peace now

Jesus is our deep place – where we find peace

John 16:33 - 'These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.'

Jesus is our Good Shepherd – who laid down His life for the sheep

Conclusion

David spoke of this shepherd relationship in what we call the 23rd Psalm

Psalms 23:1-3 - 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.'

God leads us beside still waters

If God leads us to rough / rocky rapids – we might fall in and thrash about - - - get swept away

If the water is too deep – we might fall in and drown

But – instead - - He leads us to still waters

But we must follow the lead of our Shepherd

John 8:12 - "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."