

The Believer's Liberty and a Look at Romans 14



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Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage (Galatians 5:1).

According to Galatians 5:1 Christ freed us for the purpose of freedom! He freed us *to be free* – not to be entangled again into bondage. Christ did not die for *theoretical* liberty. He freed us *to experience and live* in freedom.

Listen how some other translations have rendered this glorious verse:

Christ has set us free in freedom; stand fast therefore, and be not held again in a yoke of bondage (Darby).

For freedom did Christ set us free: stand fast therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage (American Standard).

It was for freedom that Christ has set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery (Common Edition).

For freedom Christ frees us! Stand firm, then, and be not again enthralled with the yoke of slavery (Concordant).

For freedom did Christ make us free; stand fast, therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage (Weymouth).

Here are the simple facts:

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself Makes Us Free

If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed (John 8:36).

Christ's Spirit, Resident in Us, Makes Us Free

... Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (II Corinthians 3:17).

Truth Makes Us Free

And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:32).

We are Free from the Bondage of Sin

Being then made free from sin (Romans 6:18, 22; cf. Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14).

We are Free from the Bondage of Condemnation and Guilt

There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God Who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ Who died, or rather, Who is risen again, Who is even at the right hand of God, Who also makes intercession for us (Romans 8:33-34).

We are Free from the Bondage of Religion

Wherefore, if you are dead with Christ from the elements of the world, why, as though living in the world, are you subject to ordinances (touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using), according to the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh (Colossians 2:20-23).

We are Free from the Bondage of Tradition

We are not bound by man's vain religious traditions.

Making the Word of God of no effect through your traditions ... (Mark 7:13).

But in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Matthew 15:9).

We Are Free from the Bondage of Fear

For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, love and a sound mind (II Timothy 1:7).

We are Free from the Bondage of the Opinion of Others

With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment (I Corinthians 4:3).

Freedom is Our Birthright!

For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but you have received the Spirit of adoption, by which we cry, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15).

We have been freed *to be free*. We are free to live, to serve, to love, to be WHO WE ARE *in Christ!*

With these wonderful truths of *freedom and liberty* also comes Paul's solemn warning:

Be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage (Galatians 5:1).

A MIRAGE OF FREEDOM

Religion offers up an appearance of freedom; but it is not freedom at all – for it can't actually be lived and practiced – it is only a “freedom” in theory.

If there is even a hint of “freedom” in the religious system, it really is only a mirage. It is an illusion; and this is exactly what legalism produces – a fantasy of freedom, where no one is actually free at all. There is plenty of talk about freedom, but when it actually comes to living free, the believer has his liberty taken away through the strategic misuse of Scriptures. Legalists enact such twisted standards as “abstain from all appearance of evil”¹ and “be sure not to offend anyone.”

All of this is the classic bait-and-switch. Legalists bait the unsuspecting with language of freedom, and then once they have them under their influence they take away the right to practice the very freedom that they claim to profess – making it merely a delusion of freedom.

THE MODERN LEGALIST

Legalists are insulted by freedom. They refuse liberty and want to make sure that others are not free either. Beware of these freedom-killers – they are everywhere! Christianity is literally filled with them.

They use manipulation and intimidation to reach their goals. These spiritual captors terrorize their victims. They use strong-arm tactics to attack the very root of our freedom in Christ. They do so with their attitudes, language and facial expressions. With judgmental spirits they attempt to bully the believer back into man-made bondage. This “*form of godliness*” is nothing short of the victimization of believers. This vicious oppression has gone on for far too long. It is time for their sinister work to be exposed.

1. See *Abstain from all Appearance of Evil: A Misunderstood Verse – A Freedom Robber!*, Jeff Bowman, *Bible Student's Notebook* #178.

THE PROFESSIONAL WEAKER BROTHER

The legalist will even pawn themselves off as “weaker brothers” to achieve their goals; but this is actually professionals at work – they are not “weak,” nor are they “brothers,” but diehard legalists. Paul calls them “*false brothers secretly brought in*” (Galatians 2:4).

Resist man-made restrictions. Reject legalistic regulations. Refuse to live under the edicts of those who have appointed themselves judges-and-juries of our lives.

Liberty is worth fighting for, not only for ourselves, but for others, so that they, too, may enjoy the freedom for which Christ made them free, and that the truth of the gospel might continue (Galatians 2:5).

Christ has set us free *for* freedom. Be free. Stand firm and strong in this godly freedom. Do not allow yourself to be “*entangled again in the yoke of bondage*.” Reject the attempt of anyone to play “God” in your life. Stop desiring the approval of others. Guide others to freedom. Encourage their freedom. Give them the grace to be free. Live free.

BEWARE OF LEGALISTS

Warning: Professional legalists have had two thousand years of perfecting their misuse of Scripture and abuse of saints in order to bring them into bondage under their control!

Earlier in Paul’s letter to the Galatians, he told of those who even go so far as to spy out the liberty of a believer in an effort to gain lordship over their freedom. Paul gave his own testimony to his diligent opposition to their tyranny.

And that because of false brothers unawares brought in, who came in privately to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you (Galatians 2:4-5).

But that issue was because of those false brothers smuggled in, who sneaked in to spy out our liberty that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us. To whom we yielded in subjection not even for an hour, so that the truth of the good-news might continue with you (A Conservative Version).

Wow, religious spies! We are talking about legalistic espionage, with its snooping, prying and eavesdropping.

This is staggering, but true: there are those who will so despise your freedom and liberty that they will instigate a spying operation against you. They will covertly investigate – under the guise of brotherhood – every little detail of your life that they can, so as to “dig up” something on you in an effort to entangle *you* in the bondage of their legalism.

Yet Paul would not put up with it! He refused to subject himself to their petty inquisitions and pi-

ous lordship. He refused to tolerate them not just for his sake, and that of his own personal liberty, but for the very “*truth of the gospel*” that it “*might continue*” freely in others.

For freedom Christ freed us!

Stand firm!

Sadly, such professional legalists have greatly influenced our understanding of many passages of Scripture. One such passage is Romans chapter 14. This passage is not an attack on freedom, but is in fact a defense of liberty. Because this chapter is a classic passage used to undermine the believer’s freedom, it will be the focus of our attention in this study. We will see the truth of our liberty championed by Paul in the very context of Romans 14.

“WEAK” AND “STRONG”

Receive him who is weak in the faith, but not to doubtful disputations (Romans 14:1).

Paul here makes a distinction between the “*weak*” and the “*strong*” concerning “*the faith*.”

“*The faith*” is a phrase used by Paul to refer to that body of truth which the Lord Jesus Christ revealed to him, and which he recorded in letters to the called-out ones (*ecclesia*), Christ’s Body.

Paul takes sides, identifying himself with the “*strong*” (Romans 15:1).

We then who are strong ...

THE LIBERTY OF EATING MEAT

*For one believes that he may eat all things: another, **who is weak**, eats herbs* (Romans 14:2).

The *weak* have many religious scruples. Their consciences are bound under neglect, ignorance, and misunderstanding of “*the faith*.”

The first issue that Paul specified in relationship to such religious scruples was that of eating meat. The *weak* at Rome were religious vegetarians. The *strong* understood that God had given them the freedom to eat “*all things*” (I Timothy 4:3).

The religious abstinence of certain foods is an expression of one’s personal understanding (*i.e.*, “*faith*”) of the entire teaching of “*the revelation of the mystery*” (Romans 16:25) committed to Paul. In Paul’s letters dietary restrictions are not applied to the believer. In the writings of Paul, which constitute the body of truth for today (Romans 2:16), we have the following admonition:

Let no man therefore judge you in meat (Colossians 2:16-17).

Paul identifies “*commanding to abstain from meats*” as a “*teaching of demons*” (*i.e.*, “*doctrine of devils*,” I Timothy 4:1).

Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils ... commanding to abstain from meats, which God has created to be received with thanksgiving by them who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it is received with thanksgiving (I Timothy 4:1-4).

Faith from God can *hear* the declaration,

For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused.

NO DESPISING, NO JUDGING

Let not him who eats despise him who eats not; and let not him who eats not judge him who eats: for God has received him (Romans 14:3).

Paul here instructs both the *strong* and the *weak* mutually. The *strong* are not to “*despise*” the *weak*. The *weak* are not to “*judge*” the *strong*.

WE STAND BEFORE HIM

Who are you to judge another man's servant? To his own Master he stands or falls. Yes, he shall be held up: for God is able to make him stand (Romans 14:4).

Paul does not shift his focus from the *weak* to the *strong* between verse 3 and 4. He continues his instruction to the *weak* regarding their relationship to the *strong*. Paul here makes it abundantly clear that the *weak* should not rebuke the *strong* for something that it is not declared by God Himself to be a sin against “*the faith*.” For the *weak* to judge the *strong* they would need to presume to be holier than God.

Conduct is a matter between a servant and his Master. Even John Murray (a very law-oriented teacher) highlights this by what he calls “the impropriety of intermeddling in the domestic affairs of other people.”² This is elsewhere called in Scripture being a “*busybody in other men's matters*” (I Peter 4:15).

The *strong* are not to be judged by the *weak*, for the *strong* have their appeal before divine judgment, where they will be approved and upheld. God is able to make them stand strong in their freedom.

Paul here firmly establishes the truth of liberty. The *weak* do not have the right to bind the actions of the *strong* on an issue not condemned by Pauline Scripture. Paul was clear about this in I Corinthians 4:3-5.

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: I judge not my own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but He Who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time until the Lord comes, Who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God (I Corinthians 4:3-5).

2. Murray, John, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), volume 2, p. 176.

THE OBSERVANCE OF DAYS

One man esteems one day above another: another esteems every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind (Romans 14:5).

The second issue that Paul specifies in relationship to scruples is that of the religious observance of days. The *weak* at Rome were persuaded that some days were holy above others and were to be observed with religious devotion.

If it was the revelation of God for believers today to observe “holy days,” then obviously it would be disobedience to not observe a direct command of God. If this were true, such a practice would clearly not be a matter of being *weak* or *strong*. In fact, it would *not* be an issue of liberty at all: it would be an outright sin. Paul never left an issue of divine instruction to one’s individual discretion.

The revelation given to Paul by the risen, ascended, enthroned Lord Jesus Christ included freedom from the observance of holy days.

The religious observance of days is yet another disclosure of one’s understanding (*i.e.*, “*faith*”) concerning the entire teaching of “*the revelation of the mystery*” (Romans 16:25) committed to Paul. During “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” (Ephesians 3:2; Colossians 1:25), the law, as a rule of conduct, is not once applied to the believer.

The Sabbath is mentioned nine times in the book of Acts – a transitional book – in reference to the Twelve Apostles in Israel’s Kingdom Church. The book of Acts does not deal with the “*revelation of the mystery*.” This glorious message was only written about by Paul in his epistles.

During the unique period of the Book of Acts Paul himself took advantage of the Sabbath to share the gospel (I Corinthians 9:20); but when we get to his writings, which constitute the body of truth for today (Romans 2:16), there are only two references to the observance of days. Read these passages carefully:

Let no man therefore judge³ you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ (Colossians 2:16-17).

... Why do you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days, and months, and times, and years (Galatians 4:9-10).

In these two passages we learn that all of Israel’s holy days were simply a “*shadow of things to come*,” and that Paul even refers to them as “*weak and beggarly elements*.”

No day is holy in itself – all days are alike. A day (or anything else) is holy only by divine decree. No such decree appears anywhere in those letters written by Paul. Paul actually feared for those who observed days.

3. As in Romans chapter 14, we see that it is the “*weak*” who judge.

You observe days, and months, and times, and years. I fear for you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain (Galatians 4:10-11).

Even though Paul encouraged the reception of those members of Christ's Body who observed days, he said that they observed them as a result of being "*weak in the faith*," and that they were not to be received "*to doubtful disputations*."

Receive him who is weak in the faith, but not to doubtful disputations (Romans 14:1).

Verse 4 ends with "*Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind*." These are truly amazing words from the Apostle of grace. Moses could never have made such a statement. The Law allowed no liberty of action in such things.

EACH WILL GIVE AN ACCOUNT

He who regards the day, regards it unto the Lord; and he who regards not the day, to the Lord he does not regard it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who eats not, to the Lord he eats not, and gives God thanks. For none of us lives to himself, and no man dies to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living. But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you set at naught your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, "As I live," says the Lord, "every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God (Romans 14:6-12).

Here Paul emphasizes that there is but one legitimate judge – the Lord Jesus Christ. The believer is not to submit to the will of *the many* around him, but to the *one* Lord above him, as He and He alone has been appointed to be the judge of all men. Each person is individually accountable only to God.

As Wayne Jacobson has written,

All the accountability in Scripture is linked to God, not to other brothers and sisters. When we hold one another accountable, we are really usurping God's place. It's why we end up hurting one another so deeply.⁴

A "STUMBLING BLOCK"

Let us not therefore judge each other any more; but judge this rather, that no man puts a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way (Romans 14:13).

Believers are familiar with the principle of a "*stumbling block*." Sadly, its true *nature* is not as generally known or understood.

This is one of the most important and yet misunderstood verses in the whole realm of discussion concerning believers' true liberty.

4. Wayne Jacobson, *So You Don't Want To Go To Church Anymore*, 2006, pp. 44-45.

Paul now begins to address the *strong*. We know that he changes from speaking to the *weak* and now moves to the *strong* for the following reasons:

1. Paul (who is *strong* 15:1) now speaks in the first person (“*Let us not judge ...*” 14:13).
2. In the context, it is the *weak* who are in danger of “*stumbling*” by their very nature of being *weak*. Strength denotes stability, while weakness represents instability.
3. The danger of a “*stumbling block*” here refers to the scruples of abstaining from certain foods (:14, 21, 23). The *strong* do not have such scruples, since Paul’s revelation had no such dietary restrictions.

We must study to understand exactly what Paul meant when he said that the *strong* should not “*put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way*” (:13). This understanding must be solidly based upon a proper knowledge of the Greek words used here:

proskomma – “*stumbling block*”

skandalon – “*an occasion to fall*”

Proskomma

As with so many words of Scripture, Christianity has managed *to* obscure the meaning and concept of a “*stumbling block*.” Many are led to assume that the “*stumbling block*” refers to an issue that the *weak* do not like; that somehow it agitates, perturbs or annoys them. However, *proskomma* has far stronger implications than these words would suggest.

Proskomma is used in Romans 9:32, I Peter 2:8 and I Corinthians 1:23 in identifying the Lord Jesus Christ as Israel’s “*stone of stumbling*” (*i.e.*, Isaiah 8:14). The seriousness of the issue of a “*stumbling block*” is clearly attested in Matthew 8:12; 21:43-44; 23:32-24:2. The result of Israel’s “*stumbling block*” was that they would be broken to pieces and scattered like dust (Luke 20:17-18). Thus, Israel’s *stumbling* and her consequent destruction are inseparably connected – they are the *cause and effect*.

This is why Thayer’s Lexicon defines *proskomma* as,

Stumbling block, *i.e.*, an obstacle in the way which if one strike his foot against he necessarily stumbles or falls ... *i.e.*, ... impelled to sin.⁵

Consequently, then, “to put a stumbling block in one’s way” is “to furnish one an occasion for sinning.”⁶

In Romans chapter 14 (as well as in I Corinthians chapter 8) the issue with Paul is not the simple matters of annoying or irritating others (as in the misused phrase, “I find that offensive”). Instead,

5. Thayer, Joseph Henry, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 547.

6. Stahlin, Gustav, “*Proskomma*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Friedrich, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) volume 6, p. 753.

it is about that which is the “cause of spiritual ruin.”⁷

The *strong* need to be very *careful* here with regard to their liberty. Professional “weaker brothers” will be “offended” at *many* “things” in order to bring the *strong* into bondage.

The religionists have successfully equated the idea of being “offended” with somehow being displeased, disappointed, unhappy, peeved, irked, irritated, annoyed, upset or antagonistic. If the truth of Romans 14 is thus misunderstood, the *strong* will NEVER be able to live in their liberty, because there is hardly *any* faith-action in which they can engage that someone within Christendom is not – by this pharisaical definition – “offended.”

Skandalon

Skandalon is defined by the Arndt-Gingrich Lexicon as,

1. trap. 2. temptation to sin, enticement to apostasy, false belief, etc.⁸

Thayer defines it as:

- a. properly, the moveable stick or [trigger] of a trap, ...⁹ b. metaphorically any person or thing by which one is (“entrapped”) drawn into error or sin.¹⁰

Skandalon is clearly the *cause* of *actual* sin, apostasy and spiritual *ruin*. It is vital that we understand this as the very *nature* of the word. Thus *skandalon*, “in the New Testament interpretation are those who lead into sin and apostasy.”¹¹

When Paul entreats the *strong* concerning the weak, he does not instruct them to avoid agitating, perturbing or annoying the *weak*. The actual words that he used here are *much too strong* for such a *light meaning*.

In fact, the *weak* who *criticize* and pass judgment on the *strong* will NEVER fall over them. If the *weak* are firm enough in their misunderstanding of the truth to actually challenge and condemn the *strong*, they will NEVER be led to follow them in actions against their *weak* consciences, thus causing them to stumble to destruction. Their very actions are but displays of their ardent law-based self-righteousness.

CONDUCT OF LIBERTY

I know, and am convinced by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him who esteems anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean (Romans 14:14).

7. Ibid, Stahlin, “Skandalon,” volume 7, p. 353.

8. Arndt, W.F, and Gingrich, F.W., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 760.

9. “A trip-stick ... which the bait is fastened, which an animal strikes against and so springs the trap.” – E.W. Bullinger, *Critical Lexicon*.

10. Thayer, *Ibid.*, p. 577.

11. Stahlin, *Ibid.*, “Skandalon,” Volume 7, p. 346.

Paul now zeros in on the actual issue of liberty. Paul emphatically sides with the *strong* over the *weak*. Proclaiming, “*I know and am convinced*,” he is speaking with clear, absolute, apostolic conviction – a direct revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ. He was not saying, “It is my personal opinion, that probably ...”

Paul is convinced. He is convinced by revelation. He is convinced by revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ. He derived it directly from the Lord Himself, *not* from social considerations, *not* from popular viewpoints, *not* from religious teaching, *not* from moral or pious standards. Paul allows no debate on this; it’s not some culturally relative ethical standard. He is convinced “*by the Lord Jesus*.”

Paul unapologetically declares that “*there is nothing unclean of itself*.” In the clearest possible words Paul strongly rejects Pharisaical, Platonic and Gnostic concepts of sin. His is a refutation of all religiously based prohibition – “*touch not; taste not; handle not*” (Colossians 2:21).

DESTRUCTION OF THE WEAK

But if your brother is grieved with your meat, now you’re not walking in love. Don’t destroy him with your meat, for whom Christ died (Romans 14:15).

How is it even possible for the strong to “destroy” the weak by eating meat?

What is it against which Paul is actually warning the *strong* here?

Appollumi, the Greek word used to translate “destroy” in :15, is a very strong word that means to “ruin, destroy,”¹² “to put out of the way entirely, abolish, put an end to, ruin ... render useless.”¹³ “Destruction” is not even an issue of being “hurt” – it is one of being “destroyed!”

The issue is one of actually DESTROYING the *weak*. Paul emphasizes the issue again in :20. The injury being dealt with here is not merely some annoyance, displeasure, discomfort or disappointment. No: what is *caused* here is **destruction**. *How* is this destruction caused? It is caused when the *weak* actually have their conscience condemned to the point of destruction. Just *how* does this occur? By the *weak* FOLLOWING (not criticizing, or judging) the *strong* into PERSONAL ACTIONS that are a violation of their OWN *unresolved scruples*.

The “destruction” originates *in the guilty conscience of the weak*, when they PRACTICE activities that appear *to them* to be sinful behavior. The *strong* in such a situation *cause* the *weak* to sin against their own conscience. In such circumstances, the *strong* are NOT walking in love.

In simple words, Paul here is warning the strong concerning the result of *enticing* the *weak* into sinning against their consciences. Clearly, it is a very serious matter that the *strong* seek not to encourage the *weak* to take personal actions that would cause them to sin against their consciences.

¹². Arndt and Gingrich, *Ibid.*, p. 94.

¹³. Thayer, *Ibid.*, p. 64.

RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS OF “OFFENSE”

The modern religious concept of “offense” can be heard in a statement such as “I find that offensive!” The fuller context of such a statement might be, “I found the language in that movie offensive,” or “The open bar at the wedding was offensive.”

In a scriptural sense, neither of these are an “offense” to the one making such statements. They are merely saying that they “object” to these things; that they are “above” them and that they don’t want to have anything to do with them. Neither of these examples are about to lead anyone to “destruction.” This is all merely religion’s redefinition of “offense” to bring the strong into the yoke of bondage.

If the strong allow themselves to be brought under the subjection of the weak’s “standards” of acceptable conduct so as not to “offend anyone,” then the strong will have lost all of their freedom.

DON’T ABUSE LIBERTY

Let not then your good be evil spoken of: for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:16-17).

The “good” refers to the liberty of the *strong*; because it is the *weak* who have scruples. The *weak* see it as wrong to eat or drink certain things, and it is the strong who can encourage them to sin against their *weak* consciences. Paul emphasizes that the *strong* must not abuse their strength by actually leading the *weak* to sin against their consciences by eating that which condemns them. If the *strong* do so, then their liberty will be the subject of ridicule and scorn.

For he who in these things serves Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men (Romans 14:18).

The abuser of liberty does *not* do so merely by practicing his liberty. Liberty’s abuser has a calloused heart that seeks to force his libertarian actions on the *weak*, instead of seeking to lead the *weak* to “*the faith*” in gentleness and meekness, where they will find strength. Such disregard brings shame upon the truth because it entices the *weak* into actions that sin against their own consciences. The careless abuser of liberty receives ridicule; the wise user of liberty is approved.

FOLLOW PEACE AND EDIFICATION

Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another (Romans 14:19).

The bottom line is that the *strong* (“*Let us*”) must actively seek peace and edification in the use of their liberty.

For meat destroys not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eats with offence (Romans 14:20).

The *strong* should be careful not to assault the *weak* with their liberty. If their actions result in the true “destruction” of the *weak* then the *strong* are tearing down the “work of God,” (*i.e.*, the *weak*).

Paul’s statement that “*it is evil for that man who EATS with offence*” is crucially important. It shows that, when the *weak* are finally lured into *actions* against their consciences, there is an “*offence*” (*proskomatta*). It is THEN that the *weak* sin against their own consciences, seeing themselves as being in sin.

It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby your brother stumbles, or is offended, or is made weak (Romans 14:21).

Paul’s admonition here is in a very specific social and religious context. In certain circumstances where it would draw the *weak* into a place of stumbling (*i.e.*, actually committing acts of sin against their own consciences), out of love the *strong* must abstain from the practice of their liberty in their presence.

Paul used the aorist infinitive when he says it is good not “*to eat*.” In Blass and De Brunner’s classic work, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, they comment on the aorist infinitive as it relates to this specific instance.

The aorist is to be taken strictly: “it is good not to eat meat *for once* (in a specific instance) if it might cause offense”; it is not a question of continuous abstention.¹⁴

Richard Lenski writes,

The aorists are to be understood exactly: eating at one time ... in a given case, where offense would be caused; permanent abstinence is not discussed.”¹⁵

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown note:

[Paul’s] directions are to be considered not as prescriptions for one’s entire lifetime, even to promote the good of men on a large scale, but simply as cautions against the too free use of Christian liberty.¹⁶

I Corinthians 8:13 must also be understood in this light.

Wherefore, if meat makes my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world stands, lest I make my brother to offend.

PAUL’S “IF” IN I CORINTHIANS 8:13

Here Paul states that he would “*eat no flesh while the world stands*.” Is Paul telling us that he did **in fact** abstain from meat, and that he would do so for the rest of his life? No, he speaks in a hy-

14. Blass, F. and DeBrunner, A., *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 174.

15. Lenski, R.C.H., *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), p. 849.

16. Jamieson, Robert A., Fausett, R. and Brown, David, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory on the Old and New Testaments*, Volume 2, p. 256.

pothetical sense: “*if*.” Paul tells us, hypothetically, what he would do. He does not tell us that he actually did abstain, neither does he bind others to this hypothetical practice.

There is no imperative exhortation here; but instead a strongly personal reference: “*I will eat no flesh while the world stands*.” Thus, this is clearly Paul’s personal testimony to his own love as to how he would choose to handle such a hypothetical situation.

Of course, Paul conditions this hypothetical situation: he would never eat meat again *IF* in so doing he would cause a brother to “*offend*” (i.e., to sin against his own conscience and be destroyed). We would certainly not assume that everywhere Paul went and at every juncture of his life the weak were all about him on the verge of stumbling over his eating of meat at any moment. Paul simply uses this hypothetical situation to make a point about the extent of love’s nature, as well as the rarity of such genuine circumstances which could *cause* destruction.

In the broader context of Paul’s teaching here, we learn from I Corinthians 9:20-23 that he would actually adopt the position of the weak in order to establish a point of relationship with him. Paul’s goal here was not to confirm religious scruples, but to ultimately rescue them *out of weakness*.

We should make special note here that the *strong* do the *weak* no favors by confirming their *weakness*. With a loving, gentle and patient teaching, the *weak* have the opportunity to become *strong*.

LIBERTY’S PERSONAL NATURE

Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who condemns not himself in that thing which he allows. And he who doubts is damned if he eats, because he eats not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin (Romans 14:22-23).

Paul clearly does not instruct the *strong* to surrender their faith nor their liberty. Paul would *never* do so. Instead he encourages them to avoid *flaunting* their great liberty in an unloving and reckless way so as to lead the weak toward taking actions in violation of their consciences. Grace doesn’t flaunt the privileges of personal freedom. Enjoy them? Yes! Grace leads to the their full enjoyment, in a quiet, respectful, private way – with others who enjoy such freedom. Grace doesn’t rub the nose of others in its freedom.

Liberty is a gift from God, and it pleases Him for the *strong* to enjoy it. The *strong* can happily enjoy his liberty because his conscience does not condemn him.

However, when the *weak* walk contrary to what they THINK is God’s will, then they are condemning themselves – for “*whatsoever is not of faith is sin*.”

**SUMMARY OF
PAUL'S PRINCIPLES OF LIBERTY
IN ROMANS 14**

1. Some are weak in the faith, some are strong (:1-2, 13, 22-23; cf. 15:1).
2. The weak and strong should love and accept each other (:1, 3-4, 10; cf. 15:1).
3. Jesus Christ alone is Lord of the weak and the strong (:3-4, 7-9, 12-13, 22).
4. Each should live according to their own faith (:5, 12, 22-23).
5. We should not be judgmental toward each other (:10, 13, 19).
6. Nothing is intrinsically unclean (:14, 20).
7. Love, grace and peace should distinguish our relationships (:15, 17-19, 22; cf. 15:1).
8. On occasion the strong may need to deny themselves for the good of the weak (:21).

*Where the Spirit of the Lord is, **there is liberty*** (II Corinthians 3:17).

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