

Romans 14:13-23
“Let your brother’s conscience be your guide”

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I. Intro

Paul continues on dealing with Christian ethics and how we behave towards our fellow believers in those “*grey areas*”. He doesn’t want to leave the impression that mature believers are to just leave alone their weaker brothers, leaving them immature in their faith. *Christian love isn’t just noncombative instead it desires to take people along the same path we are on towards maturity.*

Have you noticed that instruction assembly manuals have gotten much simpler over the years? No longer do they give a plain paper novel that resembles “*War and Peace*”. Now they give you a one sheet full color assembly guide located right on top of the newly purchased treasure. This page resembles something that a 4-year-old could follow, (*mostly pictures*). I like that, I can understand that! One of the things I’ve always appreciated about the Word of God is its simplicity! Take this chapter before us, Paul doesn’t just say in verse 13 (NLT) “*So don’t condemn each other anymore.*” He goes on to say, “*Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not put an obstacle in another Christian’s path.*” What follows, in the remainder of this chapter is, “**How To Do This!**” an instruction manual of, “*How-to live-in liberty and freedom, for dummies like me!*”

II. Vs. 13-18 Walking in love

Vs. 13 In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught that we should not judge others in a standard that we would not want to have applied to our self. Here Paul says, “*Don’t judge some other Christian, judge yourself instead.*” **Are you acting in a way that is making someone else feel condemned, or behaving in a way that could destroy a fellow believer because of your liberty?**

If you can answer those questions **YES** then God is judging you! **What something does to a person determines its quality!** But that isn’t the only criteria we need to be concerned with as we need to also ask “**How does my use of this or my practice of that effect my fellow Christian?**”

The truth is we do affect each other; we can cause grief, causing some to fall away from the faith and even destroy folks. When our children were little I adopted a policy that we wouldn’t watch anything of T.V. that wasn’t appropriate for our kids to watch. I can recall that they were over someone’s house when they were in their early teens when the classic movie the Wizard of Oz came on and they had never seen it as we hadn’t allowed it. “*Legalistic*”, some would say but to us we wanted to make sure that we as adults could handle wouldn’t cause them nightmares. **Strong Biblical knowledge isn’t the only quality the mature believer should have they must possess an equally loving character as the battle isn’t one in the head alone but in the heart as well.** When a child is afraid of the dark you cannot argue with them to convince them that they have nothing to be frightened over; instead ***they must be assured by love not just convinced by facts.***

Vs. 14-18 The NLT renders this, “*I know and am perfectly sure on the authority of the Lord Jesus that no food, in and of itself, is wrong to eat. But if someone believes it is wrong, then for that person it is wrong.*” In the 1940 Disney classic Pinocchio’s Jiminy Cricket offered Pinocchio this lesson on “*temptations*” saying; “*The world is full of temptations! They are the wrong things that seem right at the time. But even though the right things seem wrong*

sometimes....*the wrong things are always wrong even at the right time!*” Paul moves on to give us **two reasons why we shouldn’t judge other believers:**

- A. Vs. 14-15 **Do not deliberately do things that offend or make your brothers and sisters in Christ uncomfortable:** Paul had arrived at this opinion not by any other means than the direct teaching of the Word of God. The issue of eating something’s that others didn’t believe was right had nothing to do with a lack of morality. Before conscience is set, knowledge must be persuaded, therefore we may have a conscience on some “nonessential” grey area that can change because we hadn’t the knowledge prior. **The conscience cannot be commanded it must be persuaded by the Spirit of God working through the Word of God.** When this takes place we can move further and further into the freedom we have in Christ. It’s never a “*loving action*” to force people to move at our pace instead it is better for us to adjust our pace to theirs. It is tragic that oft times the Church has demanded from someone what Jesus has already paid for by refusing even the smallest of self-denial on their behalf! We need to ask, “*Does my Christian walk please God and is it approved in the hearts of others?*”
- B. Vs. 16-18 **Give up your rights when it threatens peace or hinders growth in a fellow believer:** Even if “*You let your, conscience be your guide*” Paul says that this is not enough as “*You need to let your brother’s conscience be your guide.*” If you insist on pushing your view on someone so hard then **you are majoring in minors.** In verse 16 the word “*evil*” is the word “*blaspheme*” and in using it Paul suggest that a person that is that opinionated can so offend someone and cause them to curse that which may very well be good. Often we see division over some minor area of Christian practice cause folks to have to pick sides and the world mocks Christians as they see the church just as a

religion of do's and don'ts. It is the eternal not the external that must be the priority in our lives as followers of Jesus. Those eternal are listed for us in verse 17 as righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. As we yield to the Holy Spirit in our liberties we will experience more of these three things, not to mention that there will be more harmony within the Church.

There are **three things Paul says that others should see in us:**

1. **Righteousness**: Already spoken of at length in the first 11 chapters Paul has written about our assurance of “*right standing*” before God solely based upon the work of Jesus. We are loved by God and He delights in calling us his children. As such we know that it is not based upon what we do or don't do. The world ought to see this lived out in our lives on a daily basis not a bunch of folks who look like they have been baptized in lemon juice. They should see us living in self-respect, gentleness with assurance.
2. **Peace**: The world ought to see us living in a calmness that isn't based upon favorable circumstances. We should be people who don't get rattled by minor irritations of the moment. The reason for this is His presence and the reality that He is at work even though we can't always detect it. The world will not see this peace if we are busy screaming at each other.
3. **Joy**: These three always seem to fit together: ***Our understanding that were are God's beloved leads to peace that can't be taken from us by adversity and the outcome of this is that we are full of joy.*** This joy is not to be confused with happiness which is conditional in nature based upon favorable circumstances and situations. The joy I'm

speaking of is because of the above two things which causes me to realize that life is worthwhile even in the midst of problems and trials.

When we are living in these three gifts founded upon our relationship with God it won't be any big deal to give up momentarily our freedom. We get to yield our right of way to someone else instead of insisting upon it and plowing ahead.

III. Vs. 19-23 Not destroying the work of God

Vs. 19-23 Paul gives us **three guidelines to follow in laying down our liberty:**

- a. Vs. 19a "**pursue the things which make for peace**": Or as the N.L.T. renders this "*let us aim for harmony in the church*". Enjoy what the Lord has told you in the "*grey areas*" as long as it doesn't destroy someone else's peace. Paul clarifies this in verse 20 saying, "*Don't tear apart the work of God over what you eat.*" **When you have folks from different backgrounds, cultures you want people to make their focus what they have in common not what they don't have in common.** If we destroy the harmony and peace that is ours in Christ for some minor freedom then we are tearing apart the work of God. ***The quickest path to peace in any situation is the one that leads you away from yourself as it will always lead you to Jesus.***
- b. Vs. 19b "**try to build each other up**": ***The way we do this isn't to insist on our freedom it is to instruct them on our freedom.*** **If we insist instead of instructing we are by passing the learning process that we have come to.** **People are seldom argued into a position they are won to one.** In 1 Peter 2:12 Peter wrote, "*having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.*" **When we try to push someone to our position all we end up doing is**

hardening theirs! Neither is it a good idea to let those with immature positions run the Church as those who are freed up yield to their legalistic whims. If this takes place you will see narrow-minded people with only one aim; “*prevent everyone else from enjoying the blessings God has given us.*” I received a letter in the mail from a man who warned me I was in danger of going to hell and leading you all with me for teaching damnable heresy that Jesus could come back for His people at any moment. The way he wrote it made me even more convinced in my position because if the way he wrote to me is what happens to a person who believes his way then I want nothing to do with it!

- c. Vs. 22-23 “**You may have the faith to believe that there is nothing wrong with what you are doing but keep it between yourself and God.**” We need to allow God’s Word to be the basis for our practice and leave it at that. **If you flaunt or insist on your position then your issue is pride.** In Hebrews 11:6 we read that “*without faith it is impossible to please Him*”. That is what Paul has in mind here. In verse 23 he says, “*If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning.*” There is no airport scanner that went off this morning when you came in here to worship God making sure you believe exactly like me. **You are free to hold to your convictions and I’m free to hold mine, but we are not free to divide and cause division!** Conscience is strengthened by knowledge, but knowledge must be balanced by love; otherwise it will tear down instead of building up!