

**Title: Christian Liberty: More About You Than Me!**

**Text: Romans 14:19–23**

**Introduction**

*Spurgeon on Christian Liberty* - There is growing up in society a Pharisaic system which adds to the commands of God the precepts of men; to that system I will not yield for an hour. The preservation of my liberty may bring upon me the upbraidings of many good men, and the sneers of the self-righteous; but I shall endure both with serenity so long as I feel clear in my conscience before God.

Spurgeon believed Christian Liberty was an essential part of the Christian life.

And so, Paul established in last week's sermon that Christian Liberty is real and it is good, but it is also nuanced. It is not cut and dry for everyone.

And I would say that what Spurgeon says in the quote I just read is true; his attitude needs to be amped down a bit. And that's what Paul will do in this next section of verses.

Biblical Christianity defies a 'one-size-fits-all' approach; it is a dynamic, global, and intergenerational entity. Essentially, Christian Liberty is vital for the Church's survival to prevent it from degenerating into either a rigid, legalistic system reminiscent of Pharisaism or a permissive, 'anything-goes' form of spirituality. Christian Liberty allows for growth in beliefs and grace for others as they grow in their beliefs.

The Bible is a big book and it takes a while to master it (to be honest, a lifetime and more).

I don't believe the things I did when I was newly saved. I have grown. So have you. And, Lord willing, we will continue to grow until we die.

And this is our pursuit as individuals and the corporate church body.

And to achieve this, we must say no to our rights and yes to living for God and others.

**Main Idea: This Church Must Be about Harmony and Growth in Christ**

How are we to accomplish this?

Paul gives three ways we can be harmonious and purpose to grow.

**1. Chase After Peace and Mutual Growth (vs. 19)**

***Romans 14:19 ESV***

*<sup>19</sup> So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.*

The apostle Paul, in this important discussion regarding Christian Liberty, sets a great level. He gives an overarching goal. He delineates a particular mindset that a follower of Christ is to have.

Christians are to chase after God's kind of growth.

**Football season** - athletes are chasing after the elusive championship season. This means they are conditioning, weightlifting, running, and eating in a way that strengthens them. And it is the serious athletes who will have a far greater chance of bringing home the victory than the ones who do not engage in such pursuits.

The same is true in the spiritual realm. In fact, Paul makes the pursuit of spiritual godliness more important than physical health pursuits.

**1 Timothy 4:7–10 ESV**

*<sup>7</sup> Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; <sup>8</sup> for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. <sup>9</sup> The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. <sup>10</sup> For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.*

Our pursuit for spiritual growth in this passage is focused on two areas.

1. That which makes for Peace -
2. That which makes for Mutual Upbringing -

Paul's argument is instead of focusing on what our brother or sister is focused on, instead of creating lists of what people should or should not do to protect themselves from sin

This is what the Pharisees did to protect themselves from breaking God's law - the problem was their rules became as important and more important than God's Law.

Paul will not allow this and instead challenges the Church at Rome to focus on getting along with one another as well as investing in one another's growth in Christ.

**Consider a team** of rowers in a boat. If one person decides to row in a different direction, not only will they not go forward, but they will also expend twice the effort for no gain. However, when they decide to coordinate—listening to each other's needs for rest, stroke speed, or even just morale—they find that the boat not only moves, but glides smoothly across the water.

*This example emphasizes the importance of collective peace and mutual growth. Each rower must make the effort to contribute in a way that benefits the entire team.*

This is just like the New Testament community of believers as described in Acts. Early Christians sold their possessions to distribute to anyone who had need ([Acts 2:45](#)), broke bread together, and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship ([Acts 2:42](#)). They made sacrifices for the peace and mutual edification of their community.

Are you a self-righteous, contentious person who imposes your laws on others? Be careful that you "laws are biblical" and not simply preferential. This calls for you to be a humble student of the Word of God who lives in humble obedience to the Lord.

Secondly, are you investing in others for your mutual growth in the faith?

Consider doing a study with someone - one on one - reading and learning the Bible together.

For the person new to the faith, you will have a tremendous benefit.

For the one who has been around Christianity for a while, you will grow too!

I can't tell you how much doing these kinds of studies has changed my thinking over the years.

Warning, this is difficult because ministry is messy. But it will forever change your life for the better.

**Review** - This Church Must Be about Harmony and Growth in Christ

- Chase After Peace and Mutual Growth

## **2. Choose God's Work Over Your Rights (vs. 20-21)**

### **Romans 14:20-21 ESV**

*<sup>20</sup> Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. <sup>21</sup> It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.*

So Paul wants the work of God to press ahead and he doesn't want anything to stand in its way, not even individual freedom.

What is the "work of God?" It is the work that God does in the hearts of those who turn to Him. It is God taking someone from death to life and causing them to be born again!

Therefore the mature must exercise great care in how they live in front of those not as strong in the faith.

### **The Bible Knowledge Commentary 14:19-21**

*Therefore it is wrong to insist on one's personal freedom in Christ concerning food (all food is clean; cf. Rom. 14:14, "no food is unclean") and drink if it causes someone else to stumble. Meat or drink or anything else should be put aside if it causes a brother to fall. At times one's Christian liberty must be relinquished for the sake of others.*

They are babies in Christ.

*We just had another addition to our family - baby Giana. She is so sweet and delicate. I got to hold her the other day, and I'm pretty certain I heard her say that she loves me and that I'm a very cool Papa!*

But seeing a little one like that, so dependent on her parents and how vulnerable she is reminds me of the tremendous responsibility we have as mature believers in Christ to minister to the new in the faith.

Would Trevor and Sophie leave Giana to fend for herself? No way, they are completely inconvenienced by that little girl. Feeding her multiple times throughout the night. Changing her diaper (why doesn't she just use the bathroom like a normal human?) How inconvenient!

Young Christians are inconvenient as well. They take a lot of work. A LOT of work. That's why so many "mature" Christians do not bother to obey the Great Commission's call to "make disciples."

But, like it or not, as a Christian, you are an influencer. You, by your life alone, help influence those less mature than you. So, proceed with great caution.

Look again at verse 20...

**Romans 14:20 ESV**

*<sup>20</sup> Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats.*

Just because you can do it doesn't mean you should do it!

But Paul makes a stunning point here in this verse. "Everything is indeed clean."

This is what Jesus said in the Gospel of Mark...

**Mark 7:18–19 ESV**

*<sup>18</sup> And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, <sup>19</sup> since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.)*

Peter had an amazing experience that reinforced what Jesus taught.

**Acts 10:9–15 ESV**

*<sup>9</sup> The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. <sup>10</sup> And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance <sup>11</sup> and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. <sup>12</sup> In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. <sup>13</sup> And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." <sup>14</sup> But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." <sup>15</sup> And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common."*

God was preparing Peter for a Gentile revolution. Gentiles would be part of the Kingdom of God. The lifestyle of the Jews as taught in the Old Testament was concluding. The dietary restrictions that would distinguish the Jewish nation were becoming moot. God's Kingdom was expanding to the entire world!

But Paul is careful to instruct the mature Christian to give up their rights to certain food and drink for the protection of the naïve in the faith.

Paul did this for those coming out of Judaism that thought they had to eat and drink a certain way to be pleasing to God.

Paul also did this for those coming out of paganism where food and drink were offered to idols. They could not comprehend that they could be free to eat the very food that was offered to

these pagan God's! Wouldn't the One True God be offended? Paul later makes it clear that these false god's were no god's at all making this issue moot as well.

Remember what Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:1-5

**1 Timothy 4:1-5 ESV**

*<sup>1</sup> Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, <sup>2</sup> through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, <sup>3</sup> who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. <sup>4</sup> For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, <sup>5</sup> for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.*

So, all things are clean! The Jewish Christian can have a ham sandwich with bacon on it and the gentile Christian saved from paganism can eat meat offered to idols.

But the caution in this passage is for the mature Christian to not demand their rights in front of those who still struggle in their immaturity regarding this freedom.

Instead they are to be gracious, kind, and patient as these immature believers grow up in their faith.

We who are mature are to be like godly parents raising their children patiently enduring their immaturity while, at the same time, helping them grow into mature followers of Christ. (This is why the church is so important).

This is why Paul says,

**Romans 14:21 ESV**

*<sup>21</sup> It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.*

In other words, the mature follower of Jesus thinks long and hard about how their actions might affect the walk of less mature believers.

Consider these powerful words of Martin Luther...

*"A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject of all, subject to all."*

— **Martin Luther**, *On Christian Liberty*

In a world where everyone is clamoring for their rights, a Christian should not. A Christian is a servant of all and a Christian willingly puts their rights on hiatus for the benefit of helping others not stumble in their faith, but instead grow into maturity.

Get out a piece of paper and start listing the rights you have as a Christian. Then ask yourself which of those rights are you not willing to give up? You have just identified an idol in your heart.

In all reality, what rights do we really have? NONE! We were slaves to sin and now we are slaves to God.

**Romans 6:20–23 ESV**

*<sup>20</sup> For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. <sup>21</sup> But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. <sup>22</sup> But now that you have been set free from sin and have become **slaves of God**, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. <sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

By the way, being a slave to God has some amazing eternal benefits!

Your efforts here will be certainly rewarded there!

**Review** - This Church Must Be about Harmony and Growth in Christ

- Chase After Peace and Mutual Growth
- Choose God's Work Over Your Rights

**3. Cling to Your Convictions (vs. 22-23)**

**Romans 14:22 ESV**

*<sup>22</sup> The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.*

*“The faith that you have...”* meaning the personal convictions that you have about the Christian life - keep them between you and God. In other words, God must be at the heart of your convictions. You must do business with Him and His Word regarding your convictions. And everything you allow in your life must be an act of worship and thanksgiving!

**1 Corinthians 10:31 ESV**

*<sup>31</sup> So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

And so, the Christian who has a clear conscience about what he or she eats or drinks, according to this verse, is blessed. To have a clear conscience before God is a wonderful blessing of the Lord!

**The Bible Knowledge Commentary 14:22–23**

*Concerning personal convictions in areas where different views exist, Paul concluded, So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. A Christian must not insist on influencing a believer with tighter scruples to change his ways. It should be something “in his own mind” (v. 5), for he lives “to the Lord” (v. 8). Paul considered a Christian like himself who had a clear conscience on such matters blessed.*

Keep your freedoms to yourself, don't flaunt them lest you discourage those who do not hold the same convictions as you.

However, look at verse 23...

**Romans 14:23 ESV**

*23 But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*

So, you are a pagan that has been gloriously saved from a life where meat was offered to idols. You have been taught that idols are no gods at all, and yet you still doubt your position about eating meat offered to idols. Paul's simple yet helpful response is not eat the meat if you have doubts.

Here is a good principle!

When in doubt, don't!

*"Certainly we try to steer clear of actions forbidden by Scripture, but on some issues Scripture is silent. At those times, we should follow our consciences. "If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning" means that to go against a conviction you have would leave you with a guilty or uneasy conscience. When God shows us that something is wrong for us, we should avoid it. But we should not judge or criticize other Christians who exercise their freedom in those areas." ASB*

Tony Evans offers a helpful illustration regarding this issue...

*"So when in doubt about something, don't do it. Your conscience is like a metal detector: it beeps when you approach something God hasn't freed you to do. You may watch a dozen people walk through that metaphysical gate without the beep going off. Don't bother about them. If your conscience beeps, don't follow." - Dr. Tony Evans*

What should you do?

Stand in your convictions.

Study the bible and ensure that your convictions are rooted in the scriptures.

Use your conscience to help you discern.

Whatever it is, if you have doubts about it and you engage in it, it is sin.

**Review** - This Church Must Be about Harmony and Growth in Christ

- Chase After Peace and Mutual Growth
- Choose God's Work Over Your Rights
- Cling to Your Convictions

**Conclusion**

What should our focus be as a body of believers in Christ?

We must pursue unity!

We must encourage growth!

And we must do it all to the Glory of God...

*No Christian should do anything in which he cannot glorify God; and this may be done, according to Scripture, in eating and drinking and the common actions of life. - Spurgeon*

### Connection Group Reflection Questions

1. In Romans 14:19, Paul urges us to pursue what makes for peace and mutual edification. How can this principle be applied in our day-to-day lives?
2. How do you distinguish between essential beliefs that shouldn't be compromised and non-essential issues where flexibility is acceptable?
3. What are some practical steps you can take to promote peace and mutual growth in your own circle of influence, such as family, friends, or workplace?
4. Verse 22 mentions "The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God." How can private convictions coexist with public responsibility within a faith community?
5. Romans 14:23 ends with "For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." How can we ensure that our actions, even when they involve liberties, are rooted in faith?
6. Can you recall a time when you felt your personal freedom was a stumbling block to another believer? How did you handle that situation?
7. How can this teaching on peace and mutual edification influence the way we interact with people who hold different views within our church community?
8. *Who are you praying for daily?*
9. *Who are you engaging with weekly?*
10. *Who are you sharing the gospel with monthly?*