

Title: Christian Liberty: A Journey of Selflessness

Text: Romans 14:13–19

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the renowned 19th-century Baptist preacher, was known to have smoked cigars. He is often cited as a controversial example of Christian liberty in action.

Spurgeon's smoking was a matter of public knowledge, and he was even criticized for it during his lifetime. He reportedly responded to such criticism with humor and conviction, believing that his smoking was a matter of personal freedom rather than a moral or spiritual issue.

The Bible has a lot to say about a lot. But is also unclear in some areas as well. This is why there are so many opinions about the Christian faith within the Christian faith. Frankly, this is why there are many denominations.

And I think God was wise to set it up this way.

I like lists. Tell me what to do and not to do. That's easy. I can follow lists.

God gave some lists in His bible. The 10 Commandments, for example. Pretty good list, if you ask me.

However, the Bible is a lot bigger than this list. It is a book of 66 books, mostly narrative, that forces us to use our brain and our spirit (coupled with the Holy Spirit) to GROW in our understanding of who God is and How He desires for us to live.

And if we are not careful, we can lose sight of the overarching message of the Bible and get lost in the minutia. (Promote reading large and small).

And when you read large and small you will find some things in the bible that we cannot bend on.

The Trinity, The Deity of Christ, The Virgin Birth, The Atonement, The Resurrection, The Authority of Scripture, Salvation by Grace, The Second Coming, The Final Judgment, The Great Commission, The Unity of the Church.

But there are a whole lot more things that the Bible talks about that have varying interpretations. (e.g., mode of Baptism, communion, eschatology, etc.)

There are primary issues, secondary and tertiary issues.

And this is where **Christian liberty** comes into play. There are activities and ideas that Christians have and participate in that cause disagreement.

How do Christians protect themselves from falling into the pit of dissension and anger?

If it is not a clear issue of sin - **omission** or **commission**, if God has not made it clear in His word what the right answer is, it falls into the area of **Christian liberty**.

A clear understanding of the Gospel of grace and the purpose of faith in Christ.

By the way, lists don't promote spiritual growth. Understanding and walking out the gospel of Grace does.

Just think how much Grace God has with you each and every minute of every day!!

So Paul is dealing with this subject in [Romans 14](#) and it is so good for us to study through this because it humbles us and reorients our focus from self-exultation in what I choose or do not choose to participate in as a follower of Christ.

The overarching governor on our choices isn't my freedom in Christ. It is love for my brother or sister in Christ.

In this passage, Paul reveals three actions to ensure that Christian liberty is celebrated and not used to destroy the unity in the church.

Main Idea: Promote Peace, Prioritize People, Pursue Purpose

1. Promote Peace: Stop Judging and Start Supporting (vs. 13-14)

Romans 14:13-14 ESV

¹³ Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. ¹⁴ I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.

We live in a world of judgment. The WOKE movement is proof of this reality. If a famous person or a person of notoriety says something that goes against the doctrine of the woke community, cancelation is the inevitable and irrevocable result.

Some have bucked this system, but for the most part, this juggernaut of judgment has been surprisingly effective.

"Hollywood actor Jennifer Aniston shared her opinion on cancel culture during a recent press interaction. The actor said, "I'm so over cancel culture. I probably just got cancelled by saying that. I just don't understand what it means ... **Is there no redemption?"**"

<https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/movies/jennifer-aniston-talks-about-cancel-culture-asks-if-theres-no-redemption/article67226604.ece#>

I do not know Miss Aniston's relationship status with Jesus, but she poses a compelling question that critiques the biggest challenge with the Woke movement. ***"Is there no redemption?"***

And the answer is NO! Once you screw things up and say the wrong thing, you are done, canceled, thrown to the curb. There is no grace, no mercy, no redemption in the woke mob's ideology.

Now, contrast this with Biblical Christianity - At the heart of biblical Christianity is redemption.

Unlike the woke mob (whoever they are), God has every right to judge everyone because they have fallen short of holy perfection.

James 2:10 ESV

¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.

And all, I mean all, have failed to keep God's law perfectly.

Romans 3:23 ESV

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

So, the ones who have no basis on which to judge do so freely with no opportunity of redemption, but the One (God) who has every right to judge offers redemption and hope.

Prime example? The Apostle Paul.

Paul was a murderer

Acts 8:1–3 ESV

¹ And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. ³ But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Acts 9:1–2 ESV

¹ But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

So, can we all agree that Saul was the worst? Later Saul/Paul even refers to himself as the chief of sinners!

But do you know what God did?

God Redeemed Paul!

Acts 9:3–9 ESV

³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Yet Believers struggled to not judge but support Paul

Acts 9:10–19 ESV

¹⁰ Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹ And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, ¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." ¹³ But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." ¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; ¹⁹ and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.

So, Paul has a terrible past. God gloriously saves him. Ananias judges Saul. God rebukes Ananias and then commissions and empowers the Apostle Paul to not only write a significant portion of the New Testament but also be involved in planting (either directly or indirectly) some 180 churches over his 30-year ministry.

Do you think Ananias had any idea what God was going to do with this murderer, Saul? I think his mind would have been blown to learn what God would do through this guy!

Later, Barnabas vouched for the character of Paul when the Apostles were suspicious about Paul infiltrating their ranks. Barnabas stuck his neck out for Paul...

Now, I've said all of this to help us look at verse 13...

Romans 14:13 ESV

¹³ Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

Paul is admonishing the church at Rome to resist the profound urge to look down on each other because of choices they make in Christian Liberty.

And as you can imagine, Paul had little tolerance for sin but much grace in matters that are not clear-cut in the Word of God.

His only admonishment for the church at Rome was, don't allow your freedom in Christ, your choices to cause another believer to stumble or fall in their faith.

Look back at verse 14 for clarity...

Romans 14:14 ESV

¹⁴ I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.

So, what is Paul saying here? Remember, the church in Rome has both believing Jews and Gentiles living and serving in the church community together.

The Jews, accustomed to the Law of Moses, would struggle with holdovers from the Mosaic Law. They would struggle with holding onto traditions that no longer played any role in the Christian life. And they would be tempted to look in disdain at those who did not view the Christian life through their lens. They were the weaker brother.

Yet, the gospel brings freedom from the Law. And the Gentiles had no background with the law, so they would really enjoy their freedom in Christ.

The mature follower understood that Christians are to give thanks for all things. All things are to be received with joy and thankful hearts. And they rightfully reject adding to or taking away from the Scriptures.

1 Timothy 4:1-5 ESV

¹ 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, ² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

This is Paul's point in verse 14. Nothing is unclean. Everything is to be used for the glory of God.

The Jew could enjoy a ham sandwich without worrying if he was breaking the Law or not, because the Law was fulfilled in Christ, and now both Jew and Gentile are free in Christ.

But care must be given not to be an "in your face" Christian flaunting your liberties in front of the weaker brother or sister.

Running around with a ham sandwich saying nana nana boo boo! I can eat a ham sandwich in front of you hoo!

This attitude ought not to be!

Instead of Living for your liberties, live to love your fellow Christians and encourage your fellow Christians to grow in their understanding of the Word of God and do so with grace and kindness.

Maybe it comes down to agreeing to disagree on certain issues, but yet again, this can and must be done with grace and kindness.

Remember Paul's words in...

Romans 12:18 ESV

¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Review - Promote Peace, Prioritize People, Pursue Purpose

2. Prioritize People: Love People Don't Destroy Them (vs. 15-16)

Romans 14:15–16 ESV

¹⁵ For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil.

Talking with Elliot while he is playing on his tablet. *“People are more important than tablets.”*

Do you get what the Christian life is summed up as? It's summed up as love!

Matthew 22:37–39 ESV

³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Why?

Matthew 22:40 ESV

⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

God's heart in the OT and the NT is that we die to ourselves and love others.

In other words, we put others before ourselves. By the way, that is the only way you will ever feel fulfilled. Constantly taking from others will never bring you satisfaction.

Serving and loving others will, because that is how God has designed you and me.

Even unbelievers get this. They serve in soup kitchens or do nice things for those less fortunate. Why? Because it makes them feel good about themselves. Wrong motive, but still proves my point.

Biblical love is all about sacrificial action for others.

So, if your freedom grieves a fellow believer, love them more than your freedom.

The MacArthur Study Bible Chapter 14

***grieved.** The Gr. word refers to causing pain or distress. A weak believer may be hurt when he sees a brother do something he believes is sinful. But still worse, the strong believer may cause his weaker brother to violate his own conscience (cf. 1 Cor. 8:8–13). **love.** **Love will ensure that the strong Christian is sensitive and understanding of his brother's weaknesses** (1 Cor. 8:8–13).*

1 Corinthians 8:8–13 ESV

*⁸ Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹ But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? ¹¹ And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. ¹² **Thus, sinning against your***

brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³ *Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.*

The point is people are more important than food or other Christian liberties you might enjoy. The way you enjoy your liberties as a Christian is good.

But the challenge is not to be odious in your use of them lest they be perceived as evil.

Spoken of as evil...

The ESV Study Bible Chapter 14

The strong should not cause sorrow to the weak by what they eat but rather should refrain for the sake of the weak. They must beware lest they destroy the faith of a brother or sister. If the strong do not act in love, the goodness of the gospel may be wrongly identified as evil, for their lack of love for the weak contradicts Christ's love.

We are not to be focused on our "rights" and we are not to be touting what we are free to do or not do. Why? Because it causes us to be self-righteous and superior to those around us.

"Well I have never _____ - and this makes me more spiritual than the one who does."

"Well I have the freedom in Christ to _____ - and this makes me more spiritual than those who do not."

Both groups, according to Paul, need to get over themselves.

Both groups need to be humbled by the gospel.

Both groups need to walk in humility.

True Humility Is Not Thinking Less of Yourself, It's Thinking of Yourself Less. -C.S. Lewis

If you want to do something because you are free in Christ, then do it (as long as it is not sin). And when you do whatever that thing is, remember to take into consideration those that are weaker around you lest you cause them to stumble. Don't be "in your face" about your freedoms if you know it will harm the spiritual walk of your brother or sister in Christ. Because, this is sin!

If you want to give up something that you believe will keep you from growing in Christ. Then give it up! The problem is when you start to impose that same thing on other people and make it a test of fellowship. This too, is sin!

Christian liberty is a big subject. Here are some examples we may run into...

Dietary Choices: In the early church, there were disputes over whether Christians could eat certain foods, particularly those offered to idols. Paul addresses this in [Romans 14](#) and [1 Corinthians 8](#), teaching that believers are free to eat anything, but they should also be mindful of how their choices might affect others' consciences.

Observance of Special Days: Some Christians might observe particular days as holy or special (such as the Sabbath), while others might treat all days alike. [Romans 14:5-6](#) encourages believers to be fully convinced in their own minds and to act in accordance with their faith.

Styles of Worship:

Dress and Appearance:

Social Activities: Participation in various social activities (such as dancing or playing cards) might be seen differently among Christians. While some might see no issue with these activities, others may choose to abstain. Christian liberty allows for these personal convictions without passing judgment.

Educational Choices: Choices around education, such as homeschooling vs. public or private schooling, can be areas where Christian liberty applies. Different families may feel convicted to choose different educational paths for their children.

Political Involvement:

Tattoos and Piercings:

Celebrating Holidays: The way in which a Christian family chooses to celebrate or not celebrate certain holidays (such as Christmas or Easter) can differ widely. Christian liberty allows for various practices and beliefs about these celebrations.

Marriage Traditions:

Use of Technology:

Drinking Alcohol: While drunkenness is clearly condemned in the Bible, the drinking of wine or other alcoholic beverages is not inherently sinful. However, some believers may abstain from alcohol entirely as a personal conviction. Christian liberty allows for different personal practices in this area, but it also calls for sensitivity towards others who might be struggling with this issue.

Christian liberty encourages believers to follow their convictions in these and other non-essential matters while maintaining a spirit of love and unity with others who may hold different convictions. It acknowledges that believers are guided by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, and that there can be legitimate differences of opinion in areas not directly addressed by Scripture. It's a call for grace, understanding, and a focus on what unites believers rather than what divides them.

How do we do this? Put people first!

Jayson's situation

Just like I told Elliot, *"People are more important than tablets"*, so People are more important than my Christian liberties."

I'd like to give you one simple application of this point.

Pursue relationships with all people not just people you agree with and apply these verses from Jesus' brother, James.

James 1:19–20 ESV

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Do you want to know why so many young people are walking away from Christianity? Because we older people don't do these verses very well.

Maybe we should repent about that?

Review - Promote Peace, Prioritize People, Pursue Purpose

3. Pursue Purpose: Living in the Kingdom's Values (vs. 17-19)

Romans 14:17–19 ESV

¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

Do you know what God's purpose is for you as a follower of Christ?

1 Corinthians 10:31 ESV

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

We are to live in light of the Kingdom of God, which ultimately brings glory to God.

Every action you take, every thought you think is to glorify God!

And Paul says, *"The kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking!"*

Do you understand God's mind here? The Israelites missed the weightier implications of God's Law and became focused on the minutia.

This is what Jesus challenged the Pharisees with in...

Matthew 23:23 ESV

²³ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.

You are so focused on the insignificant to the exclusion of the significant.

God's Kingdom isn't about a focus on what you eat or what you drink, it is on more substantial things. Things like...

Righteousness - What is right and pleasing to God.

Peace - A state of tranquility or wholeness; shalom. And a cessation of war.

Joy in the Holy Spirit - Closely related to gladness and happiness, although joy is more a state of being than an emotion. And this state of being is a direct result of the indwelling ministry of God the Holy Spirit.

THIS IS A CHRISTIANS Focus! And this is why Paul says...

Romans 14:13 ESV

¹³ Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer,

It is interesting to look at the implication of verse 18...

Romans 14:18 NLT

¹⁸ If you serve Christ with this attitude, you will please God, and others will approve of you, too.

If you don't serve Christ with this attitude but instead have an attitude that is focused on eating and drinking - things you should eat and drink or things you shouldn't eat or drink, if these things are your focus, then you are not pleasing to God.

We, if we are going to be honest about ourselves, we like to focus on the things we are good at mastering.

The visible things that we do or not do.

I do this activity because I am free in Christ! In your face!

I don't do this activity because I am a holy servant of the Lord! I'm better than you!

Both focus on "look at me and what I do or don't do."

Both are and egocentric self-focus that is not pleasing to God.

Instead, what is our purpose?

Romans 14:18–19 ESV

¹⁸ Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

We must be determined to seek peaceable relationships with one another.

And

We must purpose to build one another up.

This kind of building up is not a shallow and hollow mutual admiration society.

No, this is **biblical discipleship**.

We have a biblical mandate to build into the lives of others. It is our purpose.

Matthew 28:19–20 ESV

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

When we do this we will all mature in the faith.

What should every believer do with their lives?

Begin with the end in mind...

What is your purpose in this life? Are you pursuing it with righteousness, peace, and with joy through the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life? This is what it means to live with Kingdom values.

Review - Promote Peace, Prioritize People, Pursue Purpose

Conclusion:

I started this morning off talking about my preaching hero, C.H. Spurgeon smoking cigars.

However, it is also said that Spurgeon later reevaluated his stance on smoking. Some accounts suggest that he gave it up when he became convinced that it could be a stumbling block to others, recognizing the principle found in [Romans 14](#) about not causing a brother to stumble.

Like Spurgeon, there are some of us here this morning that need to think long and hard about what liberties we participate in and make sure we don't make it about us and our rights as a Christian.

When we began our walk with Christ, we gave up our rights and became followers of Jesus.

Ephesians 5:1-2 (ESV) *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

Is your Christian life about your rights or loving others?

Connection Group Reflection Questions

- 1. Who are you praying for daily?**
- 2. Who are you engaging with weekly?**

3. Who are you sharing the gospel with monthly?