

“Principles Governing Our Liberty – Part 1”
Romans 14
(Preached at Trinity, June 26, 2011)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As I stated as I introduced **Chapter 14** this chapter deals with the issue of Christian liberty. The Roman church was being weakened over the use and misuse of liberty. The context of this passage is in **Verses 2& 5**
 - One man believed he could eat anything while the other believed he must maintain a strict dietary restriction of eating vegetables alone.
 - In addition there were some who believed every day was others held to the strict observance of the Jewish holy days.
2. Paul's charge to both groups is found in **Verses 3&5**
 - The negative instruction is in **Verse 3**
Romans 14:3 – “Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him.”
 - The positive instruction is in **Verse 5**
Romans 14:5 – “Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.”
Let each be fully convinced that he is living in such a way as is pleasing to Christ.
3. The Church of Rome was largely a Gentile church. They had never been under the Jewish ceremonial law. As they embraced Christ they felt full liberty to live outside of those former ordinances of the Old Covenant.
4. But apparently, there was also a large segment of converted Jewish Christians in the Roman church. They were coming out of Judaism. As Jews the ceremonial laws were still important to them.
This was the root source of the conflict. How were these two factions to get along in love and harmony?
5. **Chapter 14** addresses an important aspect of our Christian life—the issue of Christian liberty. In Christ we have great freedom, but the use of our liberty demands great wisdom.
 - a. First, we are never at liberty to disregard the rule of Scripture. We must direct our lives according to God's Word. This means we must not allow what God forbids. It also means we must not make a law out of something God does not command. There is always a danger of creating our own rules and condemning our brothers if they do not obey.
 - b. Just because the Word of God does not forbid an action doesn't mean we should allow it. We must maintain great love for our fellow believers as well as a high regard for the souls of the lost. Sometimes this means we must be willing to give up our liberty.
 - c. And when our brother is convinced of behavior that we know God doesn't command we must deal with him with love and patience.

6. As I stated last time, as we examine **Chapter 14** I want us to take a broad look at the chapter to search out the basic principles that govern the exercise of our liberty and then we'll go back and look at some specific verses.
Let's begin looking at the basic principles that must govern the exercise of our liberty.
- I. Christian liberty doesn't mean moral autonomy – **Verses 7-8**
- A. As Christians we have great liberty. In fact of all human beings we are the most free.
John 8:36 – “If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.”
1. We have to understand the ultimate source of our liberty – Jesus has purchased our liberty – He bought our freedom.
Paul spent the first half of Romans explaining this.
 2. Jesus has freed us from the guilt of sin and the liability of judgment. Our guilt was imputed to Christ upon the cross
Romans 5:1 – “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,”
Romans 8:1 – “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”
 3. Jesus has freed us from our bondage to sin – in Christ we are no longer servants to sin. Sin no longer has dominion over us
Romans 6:6 – “knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin;”
Romans 6:17-18 – “But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”
 4. We've been freed from the burden of the law
 - a. The ceremonial law – shadows and types of Christ and fulfilled in Christ
 - b. We've been freed from the curse and rigor of the Law. The Law can no longer condemn us. The law cannot touch our eternal condition.
- B. But we have not been freed from the rule of Christ in our lives
1. Notice how the subject of Christ runs throughout this passage. He is preeminent. He is the motive for all things.
 2. Our great desire is to obey Christ – but obedience to Christ is not left up to our subjective opinions.
The standard of obedience to Christ remains His moral Law
 3. He has written it on our hearts whereby obedience to it is no longer a burden
 4. We now have liberty to obey Christ from a heart turned towards Him.
Romans 14:8 – “whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.”
Romans 14:11-12 – “For it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall give praise to God.” ¹² So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God.”

5. Christian liberty must never be an excuse for sinful behavior. We never have the liberty to disregard the law of God.
 - a. Some boast of their liberty as they go to bars and give themselves to behavior unbecoming of a Christian
 - b. Others boast of their liberty as they go to movies that are inappropriate.
 - c. Still others go to ballgames on the Lord's Day or watch the Super Bowl while boasting of their liberty.
 - d. Often when you confront such behavior they accuse you of being legalistic
 6. Sometimes churches refuse to practice church discipline because they don't want to infringe upon the liberty of their members. They don't want to appear legalistic.
- C. There is a terrible misuse of the term "legalism"
1. Today if you hold to any standard of behavior you are labeled a legalist. In our day people despise rules and disregard standards. Rules are equated with legalism.
 2. The definition of legalism is simple: It is seeking to gain God's approval through our outward actions.
 3. It is NOT legalism for a church to hold to Biblical standards.

II. A second principle: Disputes on non-essential issues are to be avoided

- A. The issue in the Church of Rome was opinions on non-essential issues
Romans 14:1 – "Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.*"
1. These "opinions" had to do with things involving the ceremonial law. There were some in the church who believed the practice of these laws were still necessary for the Christian.
 2. These were non-essential issues
 The weak were making the observance of the ceremonial law absolute
 The strong, however, were willing to disregard their weaker brothers – they were not heretical, just immature.
 3. We must be able to discern non-essential from essential matters of theology
- B. There are some non-negotiables
1. There are doctrines of orthodoxy, doctrines you have to believe in order to be a Christian
 2. What are some of these?
 The Trinity
 The deity of Christ
 Justification by faith alone
 The Resurrection
 The virgin birth
 The authority and infallibility of Scripture
 3. Paul was dogmatic when it came to the essentials of the Gospel
Galatians 1:8 – "But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed."

4. But when it came to non-essential issues Paul was always willing to give up his liberty
1 Corinthians 9:19-22 – “For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; ²¹ to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. ²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.”

- C. The issue was the Christians in the church of Rome seemed to have difficulty with making the distinction between essentials and non-essentials
1. The text implies they were rejecting one another outright
Verse 1 – “Now accept the one”
Verse 3 – “is not to regard with contempt” – (it means to reject)
Verse 3 – “Is not to judge . . . God has accepted”
 2. They were making judgments about their salvation
- D. This means we need to be very careful about our opinions – this is true of both the weak and the strong
1. We may feel very strongly about some of our opinions, but we do not have the right to force our opinions upon others.
Luther: “Every man naturally has a pope in him.”
 2. We may even feel they are supported Biblically
 - a. These weaker brothers were not inventing practices that were completely unknown to the Bible
 - b. These Old Covenant practices were commanded by God. But they were no longer binding upon the Christian.
 3. Your beliefs may be sound but are they worthy of dividing fellowship with your brother?
Romans 14:1 – “Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but* not for *the purpose of* passing judgment on his opinions.”

III. Progressive Sanctification also includes progressive doctrinal development

- A. Salvation does not result in immediate doctrinal perfection
1. We are all on a doctrinal journey – from babes to maturity.
 2. God is continuing to teach us—even the mature are still being shaped
- B. This truth should have a great effect upon us
1. It must lead us to patience with one another as we progress
 2. It must lead us to know that none of us have all of the answers yet. None of us are infallible. This should humble us.
 3. This doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t be precise in our theology and it doesn’t mean we shouldn’t be dogmatic in what we believe.
 - a. It does mean, however, that we need to be humble in what we believe and always willing to be taught.

- b. It does mean we need to continually study, searching the Scriptures.
1 Timothy 3:16-17 – “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”
 - c. It does mean we must recognize that Christianity is a community of faith. There are historic doctrines. There is orthodoxy. We must make sure our positions are consistent with the historic faith.
4. While we must be dogmatic, we must realize we are not infallible, we must never cease to be teachable, and we must be patient towards those who do not yet properly understand.

Conclusion:

1. We have great liberty in Christ. But we do not have the liberty to disregard Christ. He is Master and Lord. Paul makes this clear in **Chapter 14 Romans 14:4** – “Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”
Romans 14:6 – “He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.”
2. We have great liberty in Christ, but we do not have the liberty to disregard our brother. It doesn't matter how mature you are, how much knowledge you have; if you don't have love you are nothing. If you boast in your liberty while causing your brother to sin you have sinned against Christ.
1 Corinthians 8:12-13 – “And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.”
3. May God grant us the joy and grace to enjoy the freedoms we have in Christ, but may He grant us the wisdom to use our freedom in such a manner that will glorify Him.