

## Christian Liberty

Romans 14:13-23

We return to the food fights of the first century in chapter 14.

These are religious battles over holy days and holy food and drinks.

The church has since moved on to a holy bishop and holy liturgies, holy robes and holy hands of ordination by a special priest.

Where are we today? Worship styles? Music? Instruments?

We saw a stretch where indoor worship, masks, and social distancing, and then vaccinations became an issue in church.

Paul here gives us a grid – three principles – to help the church to not eat one another over food fights.

Here they are – are you ready?

1. There is usually **a right view of the matter** debated. We are not talking about what is clearly sin or clearly a duty. Not eating oysters or bacon was commanded in the OT ceremonial law. How could it be morally wrong? How can we change then? Well, it was changed. Jesus made all food clean.
  - a. The word for unclean is *koinos*, common. The OT dietary laws forbid the use of certain foods. This was meant to elevate Israel from the common or unclean of the world to that of unique, uncommon, clean, and set apart.
  - b. The Lord in Mark 7 made all meats clean – no more are external markers necessary for the NT church.
  - c. The pivotal passage is Acts 10. Peter and the roof-top picnic as Gentiles are knocking at the door below.
  - d. Gentiles and their culture are accepted. Not their sins but their culture and their foods. Peter would later stumble at this and Paul rebuked him.
  - e. We are to have this faith says Paul. But not everybody does.
  
2. The second point – there are **those who struggle** to get this. This is seen in the second half of 14.
  - a. To them it is unclean. They think it is so, and if they think it is so, it is so to them. If they are pushed to eat, they are going against their thoughts, their hearts, especially their conscience.
  - b. Even though it is not wrong in itself – it is wrong to them if they partake! “It is always wrong to do what we believe to be wrong.” Our conscience is that important!
  - c. A similar setting of meat offered to idols is found in 1 Corinthians. Idols are nothing – but if a believer thinks that it is false worship to eat that meat offered.
  - d. So important is the conscience, following what you know is right, that the Lord permits the weaker brother to live and thrive and grow up with such a lower viewpoint. Why? Because it is crucial all believers follow right thinking, right feeling, right wills, right consciences.
  - e. As we have seen – this weaker brother in 1-13 – is made to stand to the Lord. His or her union with Christ is as solid as any other’s. Jesus died for them, rose for them, is supreme to them!
  
3. This leads us to the third and major point: **the strong need to be extra careful and patient with them:**
  - a. Careful! Do them no harm! Because you can!
    - i. Look at the words Paul uses to speak of the dangers: 13 – an obstacle or stumbling block to make them trip; 15 – hurt your brother and destroy them with your food; 20 – tearing down the work of God in them; 21 – stumbles again; 23 – brings the brother into condemnation.
    - ii. The destruction of the brother and/or his piety in this instance is not total apostasy. Faith in 22 is not justifying faith, but his sanctifying faith.
  - b. Patient – walking with them not just to criticize them – but as 15 says, to walk in love toward them.

- i. How you carry yourself brings harm not only to them but to the cause of Christ and yourself!
- ii. 15 – no walking in love = walking in a cold way to them, even hating them. But Jesus loved and died for them! 16 – your good is viewed as evil; 17 – missing the point of the Kingdom of God; 18 – do not have this approval of the wiser stronger brother; 19 – fail the peace test in building up the body; 20 – cause your brother to sin; 21 – better for you to abstain; 22 – Paul is not saying become a weaker brother – but beware how you use it.

### Being Kingdom People

Verse 17 rises like a mountain: not unlike verse 9 and 11. Sets it out: Food or Kingdom?

We can come at it in this way: Food does nothing for or against the k of G. But that isn't quite right, is it? Food can be against the K of C by gluttony; and abstaining from food when we fast and pray can be for the K of H.

Let us see it this way – food and drink are part of God's kingdom. Eat and drink to the glory of God! There is no question our mundane things like eating and drinking can be dishonoring to God.

But we make dining on grace, on God's generosity, on God's goodness the main course. The Spirit is grieved instead of communicating joy when we don't. No peace coming from the gospel of the Son for such a divided church. The Father's righteous Kingdom, the righteous shining before the King, shining as the Sun!

Here is 3-point sermon – what serves the increase of righteousness in the Father's Kingdom? What makes for our peace in the cross of His Son Jesus to both Jew and Greek? What nurtures the joy of the Spirit but making us keep in step in the Spirit of love, joy, peace?

Paul says there are three participants: – the kingdom rule of F, S, and HS. There is your own well-being, stronger brother. And there is the well-being of your weaker brother: don't put a stumbling block before them by your strength.

Our aim is always to be the honor and glory of the triune God.

It is by the church being built up by the Lord, in the Lord, for the Lord, in righteousness, peace and joy – that goes hand in hand with glorifying God.

We are not only to have an eye to ourselves, but 1000 eyes to the well-being of others, said Chrysostom. Selfishness and self-centeredness in the body of Christ still hold first place for bringing strife in the church. And how can this ever be when we serve a blue-ribbon Savior! Who is to have first place always!

### Be Kingdom People.

#### Then Be a Prudent People:

The church is to be a people of convictions about the truth: to be a people of the Word.

We must ask good questions of the Bible regarding debated matters.

Is this a matter of command or of liberty? What does Jesus say about it? The commands of God are not up for grabs, are they? Do we debate with God? Am I developing my convictions from the Scripture? Are you studying the Bible faithfully, consistently? Where do our convictions come from? From my emotions? From culture? From traditionalism?

Paul says I have been and continue to know and be convinced of these matters. How about you? Are you stagnant in your growth in knowledge, appreciation and conviction of the truth?

This getting along with brethren who differ is not about tossing the truth overboard just to get along.

But Paul goes even further as the **manner** in which we hold the truth as well as the matter is important.

Not just right or truth, but *humility, sweetness*; and truth with *grace, kindness* – what is the **motive**?

The right use of our strength – our liberty – our rights comes before us.

As Paul says in 1 Cor. 10:23 “All things lawful” is not equal to all things then being helpful, edifying, appropriate.

FF Bruce's comments:

“Paul enjoyed his Christian liberty to the full. Never was there a Christian more thoroughly emancipated from unchristian inhibitions and taboos. So completely emancipated was he from spiritual bondage that he was not even in bondage to his emancipation! He conformed to the Jewish way of life when he was in Jewish society as cheerfully as he accommodated himself to Gentile ways when he was living with Gentiles.” Romans, 243  
 The word **PRUDENCE** comes to mind here – wisdom, timing, patience, carefulness. This is the order of the day. I cringe at the thoughtless, cruel, vile words professed believers against their fellow-believers have used; it would make you shudder were I to repeat them!

**So Beware Extremes:**

To the right of the stronger brother is the Pharisee; and to the left of the weaker brother is the professional weaker brother!

Regarding the Pharisaic brother; the one is convinced and humble, the other convinced and proud. One is taught and open to correction, the other taught and the matter forever settled in the heavens for him. The stronger brother accepts others who differ, but not the Pharisee who judges. The strong are willing to discuss the matter openly, where the Pharisee seeks discussion only to conform to his view. The strong one does not cause another to stumble into sin, where the pride of the second will do so. The one uses his freedom to protect the weaker brother, where the Pharisee is upset with those who do not catch up.

On the other side, the weaker brother is the one who holds the stronger brother in contempt and is unwilling to change. He is the professional weaker brother and is as stubborn as the Pharisee to bring all down to his own views.

For the weaker brother – live up to the light God gives you. Live carefully as you already do for the Lord. How great that you have faith in Him when the rest of the world passes on in darkness and unbelief. God gives you purity and peace of conscience. What a work he has begun in you – continue as you have begun; the path of the just shines more and more to the perfect day.  
 That is it. Love your neighbor as you love the Lord. Amen?