

The Law of Love

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Date: 07 October 2012

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[0:00] Take your Bibles tonight and open them to the book of Romans.

Romans, I know some of you were thinking we're never going to get back to it. And we're going to be looking at chapter 14, verses 13 through 23 tonight.

But since it has been a number of weeks, really I think more than a month, at least four Sundays I think, since my last message from this letter, I really would like to read the entire chapter, chapter 14.

I know that might be a little unusual, kind of a lengthy passage, but we need to get this all back into perspective. I'm going to try to help us do that with a little review, a very quick review.

But let me read the entire chapter. So you follow along in your copy of God's Word and listen as I read. Paul says, Receive one who is weak in the faith, immature in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

[1:19] For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. By the way, I got to thinking, I'm not one who believes you can eat all things.

There are some things I won't eat. But really, it would be better said, one thinks he can eat anything. Eat anything. I don't think I can do that either. Anyway, I am getting off track here.

Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat. And let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has received him.

Who are you to judge another servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day above another. Another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day observes it to the Lord. And he who does not observe the day to the Lord, he does not observe it.

[2:29] He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks. And he who does not eat to the Lord, he does not eat and gives God thanks. For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.

For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that he might be Lord of both the dead and of the living.

But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, as I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

So then, each of us shall give account of himself to God. Now, we're going to move into new territory. Therefore, let us not judge one another any more, but rather...

And that points to a shift in emphasis. We'll get to that in a minute. But rather, resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

[3:41] I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself. But to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

Yet, if your brother is grieved because of your food, the things you eat, you're no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.

Therefore, do not let your good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. Therefore, let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which

your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.

[4:48] Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats because he does not eat from faith for whatever is not from faith is sin.

Now that's a lot, isn't it? A lot there to consider. Now half of that we've already talked about. And we don't necessarily need to go back over all that.

And I'm not going to. But I do need to set this up again. Our subject. And someone, some have said, and I think it's correct.

In fact, it may even appear in some copies of the Bible, though it's not part of Scripture, may appear as a heading over chapter 14. Some have called this that I've read, verses 1 through 12, the law of liberty.

Now we covered this ground several weeks ago, but I think that's probably a good designation. The law of liberty. This is the law of liberty. We are free in Christ. We've been liberated in Christ and so forth.

[6:04] But now, woven in those verses is this clear emphasis in the text. And this is where we're kind of reviewing. Woven in this text is the clear emphasis that it's all too common for more mature believers in Christ to judge other believers who are not as mature in the faith.

To, as it were, to set up a kind of criteria for acceptance. Some of it may be clearly based upon the Word of God. That is, based upon their understanding of God's Word and their maturity of faith in the clear teaching of God's Word.

Some of it based upon extra kind of sensibilities that have been developed, convictions. And so there is this common problem within the body to accept or reject newcomers or those younger in the faith based upon a kind of set of criteria.

And this is wrong. And so this is the point here that Paul is making in these first 12 verses. In this part that we would call the law of liberty.

Paul says, receive them. Or accept them. Or we could use the word even, the word welcome.

Welcome the more immature, the younger in the faith.

[7:34] Welcome the one who is weak, Paul says, in the faith. But not to disputes over doubtful things. Now that's really awkward language.

Let me give the NIV again. We need to make sure we're clear on this. The NIV I think has it pretty good. Accept him or her whose faith is weak, immature, without, at the same time, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

There's arguable points of theology or doctrine or practice. All right? That's very clear. And here's what we said last time. Receive them, number one, because God has received them.

Very clear from what Paul said in verse 3. For God has received them. Could not be more clear.

Receive them also because Christ is their Lord and you're not. You are not.

Verse 4. Who are you to judge another servant? And receive them, thirdly, because they are your brothers and sisters in Christ.

[8:39] No matter how young they are in the faith, how immature they may be in the faith. Maybe they're baby, baby, baby Christians. Maybe you're thinking they ought not still to be babies.

Whatever level of maturity we're to receive them, because that person is my brother in Christ and sister in Christ.

We're all a part of the same family. Verse 10. Why do you judge your brother? And then, fourthly, receive them because we will all one day stand before God's judgment seat and He'll work all that out.

He'll sift through all of that. And maybe those things you were dead set on, convicted about, God's going to say, that wasn't from me. And so God's going to work all that out.

And we're all going to stand before Him at the judgment seat of Christ. That's what He says in verse 10. We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Each of us shall give account of himself to God.

Alright? But now when we get to verse 13 and following, Paul's argument changes just a bit. Maybe more than just a bit. It's kind of a shift in focus.

[9:48] He's still addressing the strong in the body. But his emphasis, his instructions to the more mature in the body of Christ is a little bit different.

Now the subject is still the law of liberty. Really the overall subject is the law of liberty. Our liberty in Christ. But the focus has changed. In verses 1 through 12, the focus is, We are free, but not free to judge.

But now the focus in verses 13 through 23, the focus is this. We are free, but not free to be unloving.

Unloving. And so we might say, I think, could say accurately, That the subject in these verses from 13 on to the end of the chapter is the law of love.

The law of love. The law of liberty and the law of love. We have these things side by side in chapter 14. And here's what I think we should understand. He addresses the law of liberty first.

[10:58] And then the law of love. And here's how they come together. The law of love always trumps the law of liberty. Now let me say that again.

Hopefully by the time we're done you'll understand what I mean by it. The law of love always overrides, always trumps the law of liberty that we have as the grace of God.

The law of love trumps the law of liberty. And I think about that and we'll explain it as we go. And really the principle, that principle is taught in a number of places in Scripture. Not just here in Romans 14.

For example, Galatians 5:13. And let me read it to you. For you, brethren, Paul says, have been called to liberty. All right, there's the law of liberty.

You've been called to liberty. You're free in Christ. But then he adds this qualification. Only do not use liberty. The liberty you have. It's yours. But do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh.

[12:02] But through love, serve one another. So we don't use the law of liberty to feed our own flesh. To do what we want to do.

To allow it to work itself out in some self-centered, self-serving way. Not an occasion for the flesh. But rather what? Through love.

Through love, serve one another. There it is. For the law. He says, for all the law is fulfilled in one word. And what do you suppose that word is? Love.

Even this, he says, and he expands, he says, love, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There it is. There's the principle. The law of love always trumps, always overrides, always takes precedence, always rules over the law of liberty.

Doesn't negate the law of liberty. But when the choice is there, am I free or am I to love? Then if the need is to love, then we deny our liberty for purposes of love.

[13:12] I think we find it also in 1 Corinthians 6, 12. Even though the word love is not mentioned there. And then again, he repeats almost the same thing in chapter 10 and verse 23. But here's what he says.

All things are lawful for me. That is, I'm free. All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

And then in chapter 10, verse 23, it says, all things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. That is, build up.

And I believe the implication is not just his own personal edification, but the edification of the church. The build up of the church.

All right. So the law of love always trumps the law of liberty. So let's look at this passage and I'm going to divide it into three parts. And really, that's the wrong way to put it because we're going to kind of skip around in the verses.

[14:16] But I'm going to give you three words. First, the word interpretation. The interpretation of liberty.

How are we to interpret that, this law of liberty? The second word is illustration. The illustration of liberty. And then finally, the investigation of liberty.

And let's look at each of these three tonight. Again, we're going to kind of skip around the verses. It's not going to be, you know, the first three verses is this and the next several verses this and so forth.

We're going to kind of skip around because we find this really repeated a number of times. Each one of these concepts. The interpretation, the illustration, the investigation. First of all, the interpretation of liberty.

Verse 14, Paul wrote, I know. He was certain about something. Convinced he'd come to this conclusion. I know and I'm convinced by the Lord, he said, the Lord Jesus.

[15:21] By the way, he's not convinced according to somebody else's conclusion or somebody else's point of study or somebody else's book they wrote on a certain subject, biblical subject. He's convinced.

He knows he's convinced by the Lord Jesus. And what's he convinced about? That there is nothing unclean in itself. There is nothing unclean in itself.

Now, folks, in first place, this is a huge admission on the part of the Apostle Paul, this Jew. The Apostle Paul, before he was saved, epitomized Jewish orthodoxy.

On every jot and tittle, he didn't miss a thing. Even boasted of it. Of course, he called all that rubbish compared to knowing Christ now.

But prior to his conversion, Paul was a Jew of all Jews. A Pharisee of all Pharisees, he said. And when it comes to food, and that's the example he's using here, though the principle is much broader.

[16:31] When it comes to that, for most of Paul's life, he would only eat foods that were strictly kosher. Kosher. No pork? Well, that would be terrible, wouldn't it?

You get an amen from some of the most unusual. All right. But I say amen. But he didn't eat pork, no fish, without scales.

All right. So he couldn't go down to the all-you-can-eat catfish restaurant buffet, you know. What's that? All right.

So he was just strict on this. Only, he would only eat meat from animals with split hooves. And would true the cud. What would that include?

Cows. Nothing wrong with beef. I like beef. Lamb, of course, would be included there and such. And so what Paul said is radical. This is radical.

[17:31] Not to us, but certainly to his Jewish audience. Jewish readers. Radical. Nothing unclean in itself. But Paul is issuing a principle here that we need to interpret.

And you understand the interpretation of this principle, this principle of liberty. This is more than just a little discussion on food laws. So, in the first place, let's understand this interpretation of liberty. First place, there are some things that are neutral. Some things that are neutral. Paul said nothing, there is nothing unclean in itself.

There are some things that are neutral. Now, again, in the immediate sense, Paul was addressing the controversy over food. This was a big one in the New Testament church, the early church. Certainly was a big one for those Jewish believers and Gentile believers there at Rome, in the church at Rome. So, he's addressing food.

[18:44] And specifically, he's addressing this question. Is it right for a child of God to eat meat that has been offered to idols? And some, there would be one group of believers in Rome who said, No, absolutely not.

You couldn't be a Christian and do that. And then there was another group of believers who said, Yes, they ate the meat that had been sacrificed to idols. You say, Well, how would they eat meat sacrificed to idols?

Well, simple. You know, the idol worshipers, the priests, the idol priests, the pagan priests. We'll get it right here in a minute.

Their worshipers, their devotees would bring the food to be sacrificed, the animals to be sacrificed to their idols, their gods, this god, that god.

And, of course, you know, it would be cooked and waste not, want not. And some of it would go to the priests to provide for them. And the rest of it would be sold in the market so that the pagan temples could raise money and so forth.

[19:53] It was just kind of a system. And so here is a believer out there getting, you know, a nice big hunk of lamb for Sunday's supper because, you know, all the family is going to be over for dinner.

We're going to have hash brown casserole. And, well, that's what we had for lunch today, hash brown casserole. It was delicious. And ham.

We had ham. All right. And so here he is. He's buying the food. And so there are believers in the church. They're buying some of this food. It's cheap. I mean, you can get it real cheap.

And you're money conscious. And you only have so much money to spend. So you're going to get the best deals out there. And maybe Walmart there in Jerusalem had a section, you know, of meat that they got from the pagan temple.

And, you know, whatever. Just use your imagination. And so this caused an uproar in the church. I mean, how could a believer partake of meat that had been sacrificed to an idol?
[20 : 52] And so this was a big issue. And so Paul is addressing this principle. And he's saying that meat is neutral.

It's neutral. One chunk of meat, regardless of where it came from, as long as it's not spoiled or whatever, it's clean.

It's clean, spiritually speaking. It's just as clean as any other chunk of meat. And this is what Paul is saying. Now, that doesn't really cross over for us.

But let me give an illustration. Maybe something that might be more applicable to our lives, our day. A good illustration, I think, would be money.

Money is a neutral thing. It's not clean or unclean. I mean, spiritually speaking. All right. My mom told me never put money in my mouth.

[21 : 54] You know, I know it's not clean in that sense. But spiritually speaking, it's a neutral thing. And the Bible says, you know, in 1 Timothy 6.10, the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.

But that does not mean that money itself is evil. It's neutral. Absolutely neutral. All right. So, if that is the case.

And what if one believer in the church sees nothing wrong with going down to the casino and say on that particular day, wins.

Doesn't always happen, but sometimes it does. Maybe wins a lot of money. And the very next Sunday gives 50% of it to the church.

How would you feel about that? If you knew it. Now, right now, as soon as I mention that, some of you are feeling uncomfortable. Some of you are thinking, well, I don't see anything wrong with that.

[22 : 58] In fact, some of you might be thinking, well, I don't see anything wrong with going down to the casino. And there would be various opinions about the casino. But the issue I want us to focus on is the money won there.

Or let's just say it was the lottery. Glory. And, you know, one of our members won \$200 million in the lottery and comes and gives half of it to the church.

Glory. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. How would you feel about that? There was a church not too many years ago. I read in the Baptist paper quite a few years ago.

I'm not sure what state it was in. But someone had either won a lot of the casino or lottery and was giving this huge sum of money to the church.

And the church voted to reject it based upon the fact it was won at the casino. And I remember thinking a certain way about it then. I'm not going to tell you how I thought about it then or how I think about it now.

[23 : 59] That's not the point. I'll give you a little window into my conclusion today. I think a person ought to give 100% of it to the church and thereby sanctify that money.

Huh? You say, well, Pastor, when you put it that way, that seems reasonable. And maybe it depends on just how much it is.

You know, whatever. You see the point. The point is that the money, money is neutral. Food, whether it was offered to an idol or not, is a neutral thing.

And this is Paul's broader point. Nothing material is evil in and of itself. Rather, it is obviously what we do with material things.

What we do with it that has the potential for evil or the potential to make it evil. Jesus said in Mark chapter 7, 15, There is nothing from without man that entering into him can defile him, can make him evil or dirty.

[25 : 17] But the things which come out of him, these or those are they that defile the man. Alright? Very clear. And this is something, this really leads us maybe kind of a sideline to this that we need to address at this point.

Something we need to understand about this issue of liberty and the neutrality of things. Let me say this though, very quickly. That Christian liberty is not to be used to justify clearly defined sin.

There are many things in God's Word that are clear, they're clearly taught, that are sin, and those things are not neutral.

Alright? So we don't have liberty when it comes to God's clearly revealed Word. But there are a number of things, a host of things, that we wish were detailed in God's Word, but they're not.

You could think of some. And this is what we're talking about. There are things that are neutral. But Christian liberty is not an excuse to sin.

[26 : 26] That is, commit those sins that are clearly defined in God's Word. 1 Peter 2.16, 1 Peter 2.16, Do not use your freedom as a covering for evil.

And there are believers who do that. I'm free to smoke pot. Because there's nothing about smoking pot in the Bible.

Yes, but there is a lot about controlling substances that we bring into our body. Let me give you a second thing that you need to understand.

Christian liberty is not to be used for self-destructive behavior. Self-destructive habits that you might involve yourself in.

1 Corinthians 6.12, All things are lawful to me. I read this a moment ago. All things are lawful to me, but not all things are helpful to me. All things are lawful for me, but I will not, this is his, Paul's very resolute, I will not be enslaved by anything.

[27 : 33] And you could add then, you could bring in a whole host of things that we could involve ourselves in and with. Certain substances and certain activities that may not be in and of themselves wicked or evil, but those things, when we involve ourselves with those things and bring them into our bodies, they're self-destructive.

I don't know how many arguments I've had with people about, not really arguments, but discussions about smoking, about smoking cigarettes.

And how many people have asked me, where is that in the Bible, preacher? And usually I ask them this, will those cigarettes kill you?

I mean, just honestly. Will they destroy your life? And the answer is yes. So listen, Christian liberty is not to be used for self-destructive behavior and habits.

And we could go on and on with the specifics, but we're not going to do that. Let me give you a third thing. And this one comes from John MacArthur, and I add this because it's worded in his typically profound way.

[28 : 52] Christian liberty is not meant to bring spiritual retardation. What do you think he means by that? Well, you know, when we involve ourselves so much of our time, involve and devote so much of our time to things that are fun, things that maybe, you know, we would put them under the category of entertainment, you know, be it Hollywood entertainment or recreation of some kind or video and computer games and things like that.

Internet, Facebook, could go on with the list. And you're thinking that I'm condemning all of these things. Now, some of these I could condemn. That's not the point.

The point is that when we devote so much of our time to these things, that maybe they're neutral things, but we devote so much of our time to them that it brings about spiritual retardation.

We're not spending any time with the Lord, not any time in His Word. All right. All right, so there's some things that are neutral.

I need to get on with this. Nothing unclean in itself. Secondly, there are things that are spiritual. There are things that are spiritual.

[30 : 28] Things that are neutral, things that are spiritual. Verse 17, for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking. That is just involving yourself in material things. It's not that.

It's righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. You do know that Christianity by definition and even practically speaking, Christianity is not simply a list of do's and don'ts.

Do this. Don't do this. Christianity is not just simply moralism. Did you know that if you compare your, say, your list of don'ts with that of, say, a Muslim or a Mormon, we're about to go to the polls and decide upon, you know, one of two candidates, one of them is a Mormon.

If you compare your list of don'ts with that of Mitt Romney or maybe a Jehovah's Witness, we could include that in there, or even some atheists, you compare your don'ts, your list of don'ts with those of these, these other faiths or even those who have no faith whatsoever, you might find out that they're living more spiritual, more, more moral life, a more moral life than many of God's people. Christianity is not moralism. That ought to be the fruit of it, but that is not it. Christianity is something else.

[32 : 20] Someone has said that Christianity is not about what you're doing. Excuse me.

Christianity is not about what you are doing or what you are not doing.

Christianity is about living. It's about a living, vital relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what it's about. And Paul said, he described it as righteousness and peace and joy. And really, using those three words, he is causing us to look in all the directions of our life. Righteousness is upward. Our life is all about our upward focus and devotion. Our desire to be right with him. And we are ever living to discover all the things that are right by him so that we can live those things. Some of them are clearly listed in his word and others we have to dig for and others we have to ask godly wisdom for so that we can have discernment to know what is right and wrong by him. So that's what Christianity is. Righteousness and its peace. And I really think he is having us look outward. It's peace with one another in the body of Christ. [33 : 40] And it's joy and that really goes inward. Upward, outward, inward in the Holy Spirit. Christianity is not about rules. It is about an inner relationship with Jesus Christ that manifests itself outwardly in righteousness and peace and joy of the Lord.

Now certainly there are some don'ts. You wanted me to say that didn't you? There are some don'ts. There are some things that are off limits for Christians. They're clearly spelled out in God's Word. But these things are not for anything else but our protection. Our protection and to foster our spiritual growth so that we can bear fruit as a believer for the glory of God.

I like what one preacher said. He said, when you spend your time doing the do's of the Bible, you won't have time nor the desire to do the don'ts of the Bible.

That's a homespun way of putting it, but that's exactly it. And so we're talking about the interpretation of liberty. And there are some things that are neutral. There are some things that are spiritual. And then finally there are some things that are individual.

[35 : 00] Individual. Verse 14, but to him who considers anything to be unclean. To him it is unclean. Verse 22, and let me give it to you in the New American Standard because I think it's more understandable in that version.

The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. It's not somebody else's faith, it's your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

things. It is the things you say, well, this is okay for me to do. And yet you condemn yourself because of that which you have approved. This is individual.

And the idea is that outside of those things that are sufficiently communicated in God's Word, clearly communicated in God's Word, outside those things, we are to settle all matters of right and wrong with the Lord.

We are to settle them with Him. Philippians 2.12 And by the way, this comes through prayer and Bible study. And it takes place or it happens in us through discernment that He gives us.

[36 : 21] We ask for that and He gives it to us. We need wisdom and we ask for wisdom. Wisdom concerning those things are just not sufficiently clear. But our desire is to get that wisdom from God and our desire, our settled conviction is that whatever He tells us, whatever He says in our hearts, that's what we're going to do.

And so if it's unclean to us, it is unclean. Whether it's unclean to anybody else or not. In fact, you might be the only one you know that has come to this certain conviction about an issue in life and you're fully convicted about it.

And you don't judge others if they don't come to the same conviction. You don't alienate yourself and separate yourself or reject others because they've not come to the same conviction. But when it comes to you and your part, this is the way I'm going to live.

This is what God has said to me. It's individual. And so that is the interpretation of liberty. Second, and we're going to have to move on here real quick.

There's the illustration of liberty. And what I mean by that is, what does our liberty in Christ look like? What does that look like?

[37 : 36] I mean, how would you describe that? If you saw it, would you know it? Our liberty in Christ. Or maybe I should put it this way. How is it played out in the church between our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ?

Christ. Three ways. Always has to be three. Did you know it's that? Three ways. First, our liberty is showing loving compassion for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Our liberty in Christ leads us to always show loving compassion for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Verse 13. Therefore, let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this. Not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way. We're resolved to do that. Verse 15.

Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food. That means if your brother is grieved or his faith is challenged or even damaged because of your liberty.

[38:57] In this case, it's food, but in the broader sense, any point of liberty. If your brother is grieved because of that, your liberty, then you are no longer walking in love.

Boy, that is just as straightforward a statement as you could ever want. What does that mean? It means if you have come to discover your liberty, I'm free to involve myself in this or that or do this or go there or allow this to be a part of my life, to enjoy this thing or that thing or whatever it may be. And I'm not going to give you a list of them, but if you come to the conclusion where I'm free to do this now, but that activity grieves a brother or sister, causes the foundation of the faith to shake, maybe even cause them to stumble, then if you go ahead with your freedom, then you're not walking in love.

Love always trumps, is his point. It always trumps your liberty. He says, do not, he goes on to say, do not destroy with your food.

This is verse 15. Do not destroy with your food or your liberty, whatever it is. Do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. Now, how could, how could we do that?

[40:26] To a brother or sister, someone for whom Christ died. That we would involve ourselves in some activity or hold on to some kind of thing that we love doing, but is a stumbling block to a brother or sister.

We're not walking in love, but how could we do that to someone for whom Christ died? That's his point. And that's why I have said the law of love always trumps.

If you don't get anything else that I said, you ought to remember that one line. The law of love always trumps the law of liberty. Always. Put that in the negative, we could say it this way.

Placing, placing the law of liberty over the law of love is self-centered and that's sin. That's sin. So before we do anything, we need to ask ourselves, will this hurt my brother or my sister in Christ?

Second, as we move along, liberty is showing a loving compassion. Second, liberty is making a loving contribution to my brother and sister in Christ.

[41:37] Verse 19, therefore, let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things which are by which one may edify another.

I think I've slipped up on my typing here. You know, I could just look at the Bible. Verse 19, therefore, let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another or build up another.

So here's the point. Don't let your liberty that you have discovered, your liberty in Christ, don't let that hinder the church in general, bring reproach upon the church or suspicion upon the church, but also within the body, hinder those within the body of Christ.

Don't let your liberty hinder the church in general or any individual member in particular is his point. And this, by the way, is why I think you've noticed I'm very careful not to give a list of specifics here. I mean, everything in me as I was studying this passage preparing to preach, everything in me wanted to say, well, why don't we just, why don't you just prepare a list of things that we're free to do?

[43:02] Just a list of those things. And because I know that when you stand there, the people out there are going to want, now, Brother Don, you know, listen, I know what the Bible says about things, but what about this or this or that?

You know, what do you think about that? Would you just give us kind of a list of those things that fall under the category of liberty? And I'm not going to do it.

Why? I don't want to damage anyone's faith. And I have no right to go outside the bounds of the clear teaching of God's word.

And, you know, a preacher has the unique opportunity, unique power to either build up the members of his church, to build up their faith or to tear it down.

And so I'm not going to give you a list. I'm sorry. You'll just have to come up with your own from the Lord. And that's Paul's whole whole point here. But now for this. So here's the point for the strong believer, the stronger believer, the more mature believer.

[44:05] The onus is on us in this deal. That's why Paul's addressing the mature believer. He's been addressing the mature believer all along. The onus, the responsibility is on us.

And so we should ask ourselves, is my choice, say, of hairstyle? Well, let's just take some neutral thing like that. Is my choice of hairstyle?

Guys, the length of my is my choice of the length of my hair, the way I cut it or the way I make it spiked and look like I just got out of the bed. Is that going to offend anyone?

Might offend the pastor. I don't know. No. Or clothing. You know, I noticed that no one out here is wearing a suit coat. And I'm just offended by that.

No, I'm not. But clothing. Clothing. You know, what do the clothes I wear say about me?

[45:04] We want to analyze these things. And how will others, other believers in Christ, how will that affect them? I don't know. There's a limit to how far you can go with this because you know, obviously.

But within reason, inappropriately, we ought to ask ourselves. And we can say the same thing about music, about places we eat out, the kinds of restaurants where we eat, what you watch on TV, movies that you go to and such.

And so you listen, you're free in Jesus. You're free if you're born again believer. But you are not free to damage the faith of your brother or sister in Christ.

Is the whole point. Making a loving contribution. And then third, liberty is walking, always walking in consideration of other believers. Verse 21.

It is good neither to eat meat or drink wine or do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. We ought to walk, we ought to live in consideration of other believers.

[46:13] Charles Spurgeon, you know, great preacher of yesteryear, preached the thousands upon thousands, countless of thousands at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, England, back in the 19th century.

Great preacher, Charles Spurgeon. And through his printed sermons, by the way, I mean, not just now, but then had a printed, his printed sermons, sermons impacted two continents for the Lord. Tremendous preacher. But some of you probably know that for most of his life and most of his ministry, Spurgeon smoked cigars. And a pipe once in a while.

I've seen pictures. Haven't you? Haven't you? Pictures with Spurgeon with a big stogie between his fingers. Now what about that?

Well, one day, and this is a story that comes from Spurgeon himself. I just read this the other day. I was gratified by it. One day, Spurgeon, as the story goes, and he's telling the story, he was walking through London.

[47:22] And when he passed a tobacco store that was advertising a certain brand of tobacco, the advertisement said, quote, the brand that Spurgeon smokes.

And he was appalled. He saw that and he was so, he says, so convicted and became so aware for the very first time in his life that his liberty might prove a hindrance to someone else that from that day forward, he never smoked again.

Isn't that interesting? I can tell you right now that there are preachers walking this earth now who are great fans of Spurgeon who smoked cigars because he smoked.

Every believer in this room, especially every minister, pastor.

But not just pastors, every elder, every deacon, every Sunday school teacher, every leader in any capacity, but really every believer in this room, we all need to see ourselves in a position of influence towards someone.

[48:40] And we have a God-ordained responsibility to be very careful about how we live our lives in Christian liberty. People are watching.

Family members are watching. Your children are watching. Your youth down here are watching. We need to be very careful.

And the law of love always trumps, must always trump the law of liberty. And then let me give you one more thing very quickly. The investigation. The investigation of liberty.

The one leads to the other. That is, someone is always watching. Someone is always investigating your liberty. Always. In fact, two people are.

Two persons, personages are looking, watching. In the first place, we are every day investigated daily by the eyes of men.

[49:41] Verse 16. Look at it quickly. Therefore, do not let your good be spoken of as evil.

The subject is liberty. Let not your behavior, the good things you think you're doing, because you're free to do them, let not that be spoken of as evil. Because people are watching. And they're evaluating.

The good of your life based upon the things you're doing. So, we're investigated daily by the eyes of men. Verse 18 is another point of reference to this.

For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. And you're approved by men because they are watching. Making conclusions.

Negatively or positively. Negatively about your life. And so, they judge then the gospel. They judge the Bible. They judge Jesus himself.

[50 : 41] By what they see in us. If your co-workers and friends were asked to come next Sunday morning and stand before our congregation and tell us about you, how would that go?

Let me tell you a second thing and we're about done. We're not only investigated daily by the eyes of men, but we are investigated divinely by the eyes of God. The eyes of God.

Verse 18, I've already said, For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God. God's watching. And that matters. What he thinks.

Verse 22. Do you have faith? Or the faith you have? Whatever you believe about these things.

Have it to yourself before God.

Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats. Or if he takes this point of liberty. Because he does not eat from faith.

[51 : 59] For whatever is not from faith is sin. You see, God is watching. 1 Corinthians 10, 31.

Therefore, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God. Now apply that to the law of liberty and here is the conclusion. The Christian life is not about seeing who can get the closest to the edge without falling into sin.

The Christian life is about living every moment for the glory of God. And for the good of God's people. The law of love always trumps the law of liberty.

The Christian life is about living every moment for the glory of God.