

## PERSONAL LIBERTIES

Text: Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8

INTRO: In this study we will examine 2 Bible chapters that deal at length with the subject of personal liberty. This subject will always be a problem to some extent because within every congregation there are Christians who have come from various backgrounds and have reached different levels of spiritual growth & maturity. Some have scruples about matters that others feel are matters of opinion. Some see no error at all in some things that others believe to be wrong.

Some abuse their personal liberty to run rough-shod over the convictions of others. Some feel all others should give in to their every whim. Such problems involve all Christians in questions of fellowship, tolerance, patience, etc.

I am fully aware that I cannot settle all such problems – in fact, sometimes I may inadvertently cause a problem -- but in this study we will attempt to come to a better understanding of the principles that must be applied if such matters are ever settled at all.

Two things need to be remembered as we enter into this study:

1. Rom. 14 deals with matters of personal application.
2. It deals with things not wrong within themselves.

I. WE MUST RECOGNIZE THAT THERE ARE SOME MATTERS OF PERSONAL LIBERTY. Not everything is black/white, cut/dry.

- A. Circumcision. Gal. 5:6.
- B. Eating meat. But food does not commend us to God, for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. (1 Cor 8:8).
- C. Washing of hands. MT 15:20.
- D. Matters today that MAY involve personal liberties.  
Head covering, long hair, donate to F.C., Xmas trees, cards, use of tobacco, playing cards, billiards, women's slacks, L.S. supper Sunday night, instrumental music with hymns at home, weddings & funerals in bldg., war question, voting, oaths/vows, etc.

NOTE: It's sometimes suggested that we should follow "the safe course." Who is going to define that safe

course? Must all godly women shun all make up, refuse to ever cut or even trim their hair, avoid wearing slacks under any/all circumstances, wear an artificial head covering when praying or studying Scripture, avoid all jewelry, refrain from teaching a Bible class even when only women or children are present?

Must all men register as conscientious objectors, cut their hair in the style of the Caesars, & refuse to be put under oath in court because of someone else's convictions? Must we give up our meeting houses, Bible class arrangements, individual drinking vessels in the Lord's supper, located preachers, & all printed literature because some hold opinions opposing these & other matters?

We should not practice any of these things if they violate our consciences, or even if we suspect them to be wrong, but we are not obligated to give up all these & other practices simply because someone else does not believe in them

NOTE: Technically, we are at liberty to do anything that is right, and we are never at liberty to do anything that is wrong. But since we do not know everything we must sometimes allow in others what we cannot conscientiously participate in ourselves, & allow them to answer only to God.

II. IT MUST BE REMEMBERED THAT EVEN THO A MAN'S CONSCIENCE IS NOT INFALLIBLY RIGHT, IT IS ALWAYS WRONG TO VIOLATE & IGNORE YOUR CONSCIENCE. READ ROMANS 14:14, 22-23.

However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; & their conscience being weak, is defiled. (1 Cor 8:7).

III. IT MIGHT HELP US TO GRASP THIS LESSON IF WE WILL LEARN THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SOME KEY WORDS & PHRASES IN OUR TEXTS.

A. Romans 14.

1. Weak--to lack strength (Vine).
  - a. in knowledge, understanding. Being unenlightened on some particular subject.
  - b. in courage; prone to give in to temptation.  
READ ROMANS 14:1-12
2. Stumbling block--an obstacle against which one may dash his foot. Translated offense in vs 20. It is used of the spiritual hindrance to another by a selfish use of liberty, vs. 13, 20.
3. Cause (Occasion) to fall--the name of the part of a trap where the bait is attached, hence anything that becomes a hindrance to others or causes them to fall by the wayside, vs. 13.
4. Grieved--to be made sorrowful (Vine). To affect with sadness... to cause a scruple (Thayer), v 15  
  
READ ROMANS 14:14-19
5. Offense--same as stumbling block in vs. 13  
READ ROMANS 14:20-23.

NOTE: To eat with offense is to eat when one believes it is wrong to do so. This offense has nothing to do with hurting someone's feelings. It has to do with a person violating his own conscience or enticing another to violate his conscience.

6. Offended, vs. 21 comes from the same root as "cause to fall," vs. 13.

B. 1 Corinthians 8.

1. Weak--same as in Rom. 14:1-2, 21.  
READ I COR. 8:1-7

NOTE: In this passage the emphasis seems to be a little more directed toward fortitude, whereas in Rom 14, the emphasis seems to lean toward lack of understanding, but both thots are probably in both passages to some extent.

2. Stumbling block--same as Rom. 14:13, 20.  
READ I COR 8:8-12
3. Offend--same as in Rom 14:21, trigger.  
READ I COR 8:13

CONCLUSION: The Bible recognizes that Christians will be at different levels of understanding & spiritual growth & this fact will sometimes present problems. In the light of these texts, let us seek to use--without abuse--our personal liberties.

1. Do not attempt to force your personal scruples on others.  
If his doing something you cannot conscientiously do can be done without your being involved, do not stand in his way unless you have clear-cut book, chapter & verse to convict him of wrong. If you sincerely believe he is wrong, try to teach him, but do not seek to pressure him into line. Allow him sufficient time to grow spiritually.
2. Do not use your personal liberty in such a way as to knowingly entice others to violate their convictions. This does not mean you must always give up your liberty for the sake of another's opinion. It does mean that if your doing something is likely to involve someone who cannot be involved in good conscience, you should abstain from exercising that liberty under those circumstances.
3. It could scarcely be over-emphasized that there should be an openness & cooperation, so far as is conscientiously possible between brethren who have not yet reached the same level of understanding on matters of personal

application. None of these passages, nor any others, are meant to take away our liberty in Christ, but they are meant to protect the brother who is weak, either in his understanding or in his courage, from being led into sin by another.

La Porte, TX, December 17, 1987

Dayton, TX, May 4, 1979 (lectureship)

Dickinson, TX, March 28, 1984 (meeting)

Exton, PA, October 28, 1984

Exton, PA, December 9, 1990

Shiloh, Mexia, TX, February 21, 1993

Susquehanna, Marietta, PA, November 1, 1998