

**Building Up One Another Without Offending, Part 1**

Romans 14:13-15

45-110

Let's open our Bibles tonight for the study of God's Word to the 14th chapter of Paul's great epistle to the Romans. I was talking to Chris Mueller for a moment and sharing with him before the service began that I suffer from a sort of frustration in the process of preaching the Word of God. And it comes out today, I suppose, in a double-barreled way in the fact that I can see in the text a unitive thought, but can't seem to preach it as a unitive thought. What the apostle could easily deliver in about eight verses takes me about two weeks or more sometimes. And I don't want you to get the idea that because we divide the message, the thought of the text is divided because it isn't. It just seems as though sometimes when you have a rather lengthy unit of thought, it lends itself to more than one message in order to grasp all that's in that thought. And I really do resist being bound by some precast style of preaching that says I have to start at the beginning and end at the end and get it all into one shot and do it all in thirty minutes. And so I trust that you've graciously learned to bear with me if sometimes what starts out to be a unit of thought winds up extending beyond the one message. And I think that is very likely what will occur again as we come to the second major unit of thought in Romans chapter 14.

Tonight our study begins in verse 13 and takes us down through verse 23. Eleven verses, but really one basic idea is conveyed here. Now all of this passage beginning in chapter 14 verse 1 down through chapter 13...pardon me, down through chapter 15 verse 13, from 14:1 to 15:13 is really one subject. And the subject that is on the heart of the apostle is the unity of strong and weak believers. We've already begun to examine that in our last couple of messages, so I know you're up to speed to some degree. But let me just initiate our study with some thoughts that may help you to kind of get your bearings as we approach verse 13.

It's obvious that Christ has granted us in the new covenant great liberty and great freedom. We are free from any encumbrances of Old Testament ceremonial law. We are free from any dietary restrictions, any external things. Coming to Christ we are free from any former religious taboos. We are free to enjoy all of the good gifts that God has created for us. There are really no limits to what we might enjoy of God's good gifts.

Now that, of course, does not include the freedom to sin, but the freedom to enjoy all the good things that God has provided for us. I suppose we could say that the basic idea of Christian liberty or Christian freedom is that in Christ, as recipients of the blessings of the New Covenant, we are free to enjoy all that God has provided without any restrictions in terms of non-moral things.

Now there are some people who would tell us that we're not free to eat certain kinds of food. Seventh Day Adventist people would tell us we're not free to eat pork. Some of them would even say we're not free to eat meat of any kind. They would be vegetarian. Some people would tell us that our drink is limited because of some scriptural scruples. Others would tell us that we're limited as to our

recreation. Some would tell us that we cannot watch television. Some would tell us that celluloid in little squares cut in a strip with holes on the side that runs through a projector is sinful and we should not watch films. Some would tell us that certain activities on Sunday are in themselves evil. Some would tell us that weeds chopped up, stuffed in paper, put between our lips and lit is evil in and of itself. Some would tell us that little thin cards with funny pictures on them that you throw at each other and then hold in your hand are intrinsically evil. Some would tell us that hair over your ears is basically evil, or down your back, if you happen to be a man. Some would tell us that beards are unspiritual. Some others would tell us that not having beards is unspiritual.

Now there are a lot of these things that have nothing to do with morality, have nothing to do with that which is clearly delineated in Scripture as related to sin. These kinds of things, these neutral things are the elements of which Christian liberty is made. And in order to understand how we react to all of this environment of available things that in themselves are not evil, we must have instruction from the Word of God. And the reason is because in the church of Jesus Christ there will be people, strong believers who fully understand their freedom and can enjoy all the good gifts that God has given them as long as they don't abuse them in a sinful way, and on the other hand there are some believers who because of their background, tradition and experience are bringing into their Christian experience a whole lot of taboos and scruples that cause them to believe that these things are not permissible and therefore we potentiate a great conflict in the church. Between those who want to exercise their freedom to the fullest and those who want to confine themselves to very limited perspective in terms of freedom.

Now Paul's great concern is that this kind of conflict in the church can disrupt the unity of the church. And so he takes this lengthy passage to treat the matter of church unity and the expression of love as it regards these non-moral things, these personal preferences, so that they may be handled in an attitude of love that conciliates and strengthens the church rather than alienating and dividing it.

Now in this section, Paul divides the large section into four general categories of teaching regarding strong and weak Christians. And basically he sort of gives four general exhortations. Number one is that we are to receive one another. We are to receive one another. That's verses 1 to 12. He begins by saying the one that is weak in the faith receive. We are to receive one another.

He gives us four reasons. Do you remember? We studied them last time: First, because God receives us, because the Lord sustains us, because the Lord is sovereign to each of us, and the Lord alone can judge us. And we went into all the detail in those particular points.

The second major point after we are to love each other, we are to share with each other, we are to receive each other, the second point begins in verse 13 and runs to verse 23 and that is the idea that we are to build up one another. Not only are we to receive each other in the sense that we tolerate our differences, but we are to do that which constructively edifies each other, strengthening and building up each other. Then as he comes to chapter 15 in the first seven verses, he says that we are to please each other. We are to please each other. We are to be concerned not for pleasing ourselves, verse 2 says, but pleasing our neighbor for his good to edification. And then finally, from verse 8 to 13, his point is that we are to rejoice with one another in the marvelous plan of God that has brought us all together. So, we receive one another with understanding. We build up one another without offending. We please one another with Christ as our example. And we rejoice with one another because of the wonder of God's plan.

Now I want to ask a couple of questions and stretch our introduction a little bit tonight because I think it's important for us to get a grip on what Paul is wanting us to understand. So let me just develop the introduction for a few moments.

Let me ask you a question. Now we are saying in this passage, we've heard Paul say it already, that a weak person is not to condemn a strong person, nor is a strong person to despise a weak person, but rather we are to be very gracious and receiving of one another. That was his first point. Now he's going to tell us that we are to be concerned with building up one another. Now an underlying thought that comes to my mind is this, and I'll ask you the question: Is it necessary to eat or drink or do whatever your liberty tells you you can do to prove you are strong? Is it necessary? Is it necessary for you to do what you believe you're free to do in order to prove yourself to be strong?

The answer is no. The answer is no. It is not necessary for a believer who is strong and understands his liberty in Christ to exercise that liberty to prove his strength. In fact, he will demonstrate a greater amount of spiritual strength for the most part if he does not exercise that liberty. For the sake of whom? The weaker ones. Now listen, the issue is not whether we exercise our liberty; the issue is whether we possess that liberty. So we could say this. When one abstains from the liberty that he has, it may be reflective of a weak believer who abstains because he doesn't understand his freedom. Or it may be a strong believer who abstains because he does not want to offend a weak believer. So we do not want to conclude that in order to prove we are strong we have to somehow flaunt our freedoms. That's not the case at all. No one needs to prove their strength in that regard and certainly no one needs to be pressed into exercising freedom, not the weaker brother who abstains out of unbelief and not the stronger brother who abstains out of love.

You know what this is saying? This is saying in a church there will be a kind of conformity that will develop in that church because the weaker brothers, based upon their prior experience and where they've come from, will set limitations in their own conscience because they cannot believe they are free to do those things. And the stronger brothers out of love for the weaker brothers will wind up setting the same limitations. And so there will come then a kind of conformity and I trust a kind of developing conformity so that as the strong in love confine themselves to that which will be tolerated by the weak, they build relationships with the weak that eventually will strengthen them and widen that scope of liberty. Now I hope you followed that.

It must be understood that our freedom is before God, our liberty is before God. Whether we exercise it or not is another matter. I may in my own heart feel I'm free to do many things that I would never do because I don't need to do those things to prove I'm strong. I rather need not to do those things in order to demonstrate my love for those who are weak. You see, my liberty is vertical. The liberty that I enjoy in my heart is before the Lord and in my heart before the Lord I know I have freedom. But the exercise of that liberty is horizontal. It is between a person and another person, and that is limited by my love.

So, Paul's concern, as we come to verse 13 and all the way through the section, is not to make sure the strong really use their liberty to the limit. His point is not to have the strong flaunting their liberty, defining and demanding their rights, but it is to teach the strong to restrain their liberty for love's sake.

John Brown, commenting on the epistle of Peter wrote this, "There's a great difference between Christian liberty and the use of Christian liberty. Christian liberty is an internal thing. It belongs to the

mind and the conscience and has a direct reference to God. The issue of Christian liberty is an external thing when it belongs to conduct and has reference to man." Then he says, "No consideration should prevail on us for a moment to give up our liberty. Since our liberty grows out of the teaching of the Word of God and the God who alone is Lord of the conscience, we should be willing to die for the maintenance of our liberty, but many a consideration should induce us to forego the practical assertion or the display of our liberty," end quote.

We have liberty in Christ. But that liberty is controlled and it is not necessary for me to flaunt that liberty, to demand that liberty, to even exercise that liberty to prove my strength, but rather it is incumbent upon me to discern the spirit of those in my assembly who are weak and restrain my liberty in line with their weakness so that I, in gaining their love, may move them toward a greater understanding of liberty.

Now, the Bible places a lot of restraint on our liberty. Paul only deals with really a couple of the restraints in verses 13 to 23. There are others dealt with in other places. For example, the exercise of liberty in the first place is certainly, and let me give you just a few, is certainly number one, not for the purpose of self-deception. Now what do I mean by that? Look at 1 Peter 2:16, 1 Peter 2:16, the exercise of our liberty is certainly not for the purpose of self-deception. In 1 Peter 2:16, Peter talks about using your liberty for a cloak of wickedness. Now what does he mean by that? He means to say that you can use your liberty simply to cover over your evil. You can be self-deceived. You can sort of...of have this wickedness in your life and you cover over your wickedness with the cloak of Christian liberty.

For example, you may have a drinking problem. And you may be drunken from time to time. And that is sin, plain and simple, in the Word of God. But in order to cloak your drinking problem, you flaunt the fact that you are free in Christ to do whatever you want to do because drink in and of itself, the juice from the grape, is not inherently wicked.

Or you may be a television addict. And you may sit looking at that one-eyed monster till you're nothing but a zombie. And whatever garbage parades across there, parades half-way across through your brain and then finishes out on the screen so that you compute all of it. And if anybody calls that to your attention, your response is "But I am free, it's only electric impulses." But the truth of the matter is you are using your so-called Christian liberty to cloak over what is basically a sinful preoccupation with something that is sucking the life out of your spiritual development. You can use liberty as a cloak to cover your evil.

I mean, it could even be playing golf on Sunday morning. "I'm free. I worship God in the creation." I've heard that one a few times. Yes, there's nothing inherently evil about a little white ball until you get to the sixteenth hole and you're twenty strokes over par. Then there's something very evil about that little ball. You say to yourself, "Well, I'm free to do this," and all that is is a cloak to cover the wickedness of a heart that says I'm not really interested in worshiping God. So, liberty is not to ever be for the sake of self-deception or the sake of deceiving others.

Secondly, Scripture also elsewhere — this time 1 Corinthians chapter 6 would be a point we could touch — tells us that the exercise of liberty is not for self-destruction. There are some people who given certain freedom can use that freedom until it becomes self-destructive. Now personally you'll have to agree with me that there's nothing inherently evil in a tobacco plant. It just sits there. I've seen them on the racks in the farms in the mid-south. Tobacco leaves just hanging over those racks

in those places where they dry. And there was nothing particularly evil about that. There's nothing inherently immoral about cutting it up. There's nothing inherently moral or immoral about stuffing it in paper, sticking it in your mouth and blowing smoke. There's nothing inherently evil about that. But when that little thing hanging out of your mouth is sucking out your very life and sucking out your energy and creating the shakes and totally dominating your life, then you have allowed that little thing that is not immoral in itself to become the source of self-destruction. I mean, there are some people who would...and I know myself of a man who was in our church who literally was so committed to drinking beer that he left the church rather than set that liberty aside and always was saying, "That's my freedom, that's my freedom." The truth of it was it was self-destructive.

Now look at 1 Corinthians 6:12. He says all things are lawful. Now he doesn't mean unlawful things are lawful, he means all things that aren't unlawful are lawful. You understand that. He certainly wouldn't say sin is lawful. So, all that is lawful is lawful. "But all things, though they would be permissible, are not expedient." Simply put, all things are lawful but it isn't smart to do all things. I mean, you don't have to be Phi Beta Kappa to know that if you suck that stuff in long enough it's going to hurt you. Now in and of itself it isn't immoral but it isn't smart either. You could say the same thing about a movie or about a television or about anything like that, when it becomes something that literally destroys a person it becomes unlawful.

I can think of an evangelist, well known about 20 years ago, I know his name well, who was preaching in crusades all across the United States, decided to play golf all the time. Eventually was playing golf for \$4,000 a game and it destroyed him, totally destroyed him. He lost everything including his ministry. And again I'm back to the fact that there's nothing inherently evil in a little ball, there's nothing inherently evil in a nice green place to play golf, there's nothing inherently evil in a club in your hand, but when it is for self-destruction it is an abuse of that freedom.

Again in chapter 10 of 1 Corinthians and verse 23, he repeats that same idea. "All things are lawful for me but all things are not expedient." It doesn't make sense to engage in all things if by engaging I cannot control those things. It's amazing how things can literally destroy people.

Now let's go to a third thing. Christian liberty is not for self-bondage. Christian liberty is not for self-bondage. The purpose of Christian liberty is not to bring you under the control of something so that you become its slave. And yet that can happen. That literally can happen. Do you know something? Do you know some people are literally controlled by chocolate? Chocolate is their master. And you're laughing because you identify with that, you understand. I mean, they have real trauma if they don't have their chocolate. Some people are totally controlled by a soap opera. And if they can't get home to see the next serial, they're miserable. You don't want to be near them. It's really incredible. They're slaves. They've been brought into bondage. And that's back to 1 Corinthians 6 again and the second half of the verse. He says, "All things are lawful," that is all lawful things are lawful that aren't forbidden by the law of God, "but I will not allow myself to be brought under the power of any," literally to be entangled by any.

I don't want to let myself be under the control. Listen, man was created to be the king of the earth. Man was created to be the sovereign. Man was created and given dominion. And isn't it interesting how things, because of the fall of man, have now had their dominion over him? And people are controlled by things. They're controlled by cigarettes and candy and some people are controlled by food. They literally live to eat. And in our society it isn't even a question of eating, it's a question of eating in an environment that is spectacular. I mean, now restaurants are like a side show. You don't

just go there and eat, you go there and it's a happening at which you happen to eat. They can't give you food. They can't give you food on a plate, they have to give it to you in a bucket or in a shoe or on a piece of wood, or something else. Or they've got to have all kinds of decor which triples the price of the food and makes you think what is very normal is abnormal or super-normal. People are controlled by things like that. It's absolutely ludicrous to imagine that any of God's good gifts to us would become our master, isn't it?

And then I would add a fourth thought. Our Christian liberty is not for the sake of self-retardation, self-retardation. God didn't give us our freedoms, and back to 1 Corinthians 10 again and that 23rd verse. He says, "All things are lawful for me but all things do not build up." So he says our freedom, in a sense, is not to do the things that tear us down, that don't build us up. And so I guess what we have to say is because I love my relationship to the Lord I'm not going to get controlled by some things. I want to avoid what tears me down. And there may be things in your life, there may be recreation in your life that tears you down spiritually because it keeps you away from the people of God. Television may keep you away from the Word of God. Movies may keep you away from the Bible study. And in effect, these things that in and of themselves, if indeed they are not immoral — and I would venture to say that 99.9 percent of movies are immoral to one extent or another, either in what is depicted or what is sort of implicit — but these kinds of things that tear us down, retard our development even though in and of themselves they are not moral, we have to recognize that we do not have freedom so that we may engage in that.

Now those are all personal. But I wanted to give you those 'cause I think you need a full picture. I have liberty in Christ. But my liberty is not for the sake of self-deception, not to cloak my vice. And my liberty is not for self-destruction, not to get me under habits that ultimately destroy my effectiveness for God. And my liberty is not for self-bondage so that I can be controlled by some thing. And my liberty is not for self-retardation so that whatever it is that I engage in literally pulls me down spiritually. That's all personal for me.

But I want to turn the corner now and take you to Romans chapter 14 and show you that Paul talks about Christian liberty here, not in the sense of how it affects me, but in the sense of how it affects my brother and sister. And this is a very important dimension of understanding Christian liberty because it affects the church. So, Paul's concern from verse 13 to 23 is for other Christians, how we are to build up other Christians without offending. And that calls for limiting our exercise of liberty. Don't let anybody take your liberty. Don't let anybody threaten your liberty. Don't let anybody bind your conscience to things that are not in themselves evil. But at the same time, you don't have to flaunt that liberty to prove you're strong, right? You don't want to do that because it may turn out to be bondage for your own sake and it may turn out to be unloving and divisive for the fellowship of believers.

Now how do we avoid offending each other? How do we look at our liberty in terms of each other? There are six kind of little hooks that we'll work through as we go through this passage tonight and next Lord's Day. First of all, let me show you the key in verse 15. It's the key to everything. There's a little phrase in verse 15: "Now walkest thou not in love." The point there is really the point of the whole passage. What you want to do is be sure that your conduct in the exercise of your liberty is not unloving, is not insensitive to other believers. If we can just make a positive out of that statement, we would say that the objective of Christian living in the church, the goal of a strong believer is to conduct himself in love toward a weaker brother. That's the essence so that there's no offense.

Then he works through six ways in which we avoid offending and build up each other. First of all is in verse 13 and the first one is, don't cause your brother to stumble, don't cause your brother to stumble. "Let us not therefore judge one another anymore, but judge this." There's a little play on words. "Let's not judge one another, but let's judge this." Let's determine this, "rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."

Now notice the "therefore." Since the Lord receives each Christian, weak or strong, as he's shown in the first twelve verses, since the Lord is able to hold up the strong and hold up the weak so we don't have to worry about each other, since the Lord is sovereign to each and each does what he does to please the Lord, and since only the Lord will be the final judge, therefore don't you judge, don't you judge. You just be responsible, not for judging or condemning, but for being sure you don't cause that brother to stumble. That's what you're to be involved in doing.

It's not our task to sit on the throne or the bench and judicicate...judiciate...adjudicate, I mean to say — got to get that right — to sit on the bench, as it were, and adjudicate in the case of everybody. It's not for us to render the verdicts of condemnation to those that we feel are deserving of such. So he says let's not judge, *krinō*, let's not condemn. After all, verses 10 to 12 says, the Lord's the one that's going to judge. That's not for us. The weak are not to judge the strong, and that's what the tendency was we saw in the first 12 verses, the weak were condemning the strong because they saw that as an abuse of freedom. And nor are the strong to condemn the weak for their lack of faith and their small-mindedness. That's not for you to do.

Instead of that, you make a decision. It's an aorist imperative. It calls for action. You make a decision. And your decision should be this, I'm not going to judge people but I'll tell you, I'm not going to put stumbling blocks in people's way either, that's what I'm going to do. That's going to be the preoccupation of my life. The picture here is of a brother who...or a sister walking along the path of the Christian life and somebody putting something in their path to cause them to fall. We don't want to be the source of trapping a Christian, stopping them in their onward progress, causing them to trip up and fall. And the idea is to cause them to fall into sin on the path of their spiritual walk. The injunction is not to injure someone in the use of our liberty by causing them to fall into sin.

Look at 1 Corinthians for a moment, chapter 8 and there's a comparative passage there that's worthy of our attention. First Corinthians chapter 8 verse 9, "Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak." And here Paul is dealing with some of the Gentiles in Corinth who had a lot of trouble eating meat offered to idols and drink offered to idols, and some of the more liberated brethren were not so concerned about that, thinking they could eat everything, and really they could because an idol was nothing anyway. So when you offered something to an idol, you offered something to nothing. And something offered to nothing is nothing. So it was inconsequential, but some of these pagans who had come out of these idol feasts had a hard time eating that stuff because they were so long identified with the idolatry connected. And so there was this potential conflict and he says, "Just be sure," in verse 9, "that you don't take your liberty as a means to cause a believer to fall into sin."

Now how does that happen? He goes on in verse 10, "For if somebody sees you, who has a mature knowledge, and you sit down at the table in the idol's temple, you're eating the meat that's sold at the idol's butcher shop, shall not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat the things that are offered to idols?" He's going to say, "Well, my strong brother does that, so I think I can do that." So he's going to go out and he's going to eat that and as a result, verse 11 says, through your

knowledge the weak brother is going to be devastated for whom Christ died. I don't think the perishing here is the perishing of apostasy, or damnation, I think it refers to spiritual devastation, spiritual loss. And we'll see that term again later in the context of Romans 14 and define it a little more closely. But what he's saying here is this, you make a brother stumble when you do this, when you go out and exercise your freedom and you do what you want to do and your brother seeing you free to do that says I must be free to do that, does that and his conscience is tremendously guilty because in his heart he believes it's wrong. And so you have created a guilty conscience and you have caused him to stumble and fall. You may even have caused him to be thrown back into a pattern of sin. It is possible that somebody seeing a liberated brother eat something offered to an idol could go back into an idol feast and get caught up in the whole orgy and the whole debauchery and get into a very disastrous situation because someone flaunting liberty gave him freedom to do what his conscience said he shouldn't do and what his spiritual weakness wouldn't allow him to do without pushing him into sin.

People always ask me the question, if I drink alcoholic beverages. I don't know why that's a concern for people. The answer to that is I don't and there are so many reasons I don't want to go into all of them, but one of those reasons is that the last thing on the earth that I ever want to do is give someone else the idea that that's what liberated Christians are free to do, that's what mature Christians are free to do, that's what ministers and servants of God are free to do, therefore I must be free to do that and then you've got someone who had a background of alcoholism before they came to Christ. They do that emboldened by what they see someone else do and down they go into the pit of their own drunkenness. So we must realize that the way we live is with a view to not causing someone else to stumble.

I've had people ask me, I don't know why it's become an issue recently, if I dance. I want to tell you about my dancing. Now I want you to know something basic, if I wanted to dance with my wife at home that would not be sinful. I mean, putting my arms around Patricia and dancing around would not be sinful. The kids would laugh, it would be ridiculous, but it wouldn't be sinful in and of itself, obviously. But there is an environment, of course, that confines that, and that is the environment...that is the environment of the believers for whom we set an example.

I mean, I go way back on this. I remember in junior high, my parents basically raised me that we don't dance. In fact, very few Christians used to dance. In fact, they used to have kind of a saying, you know, you don't want to dance because people go to dances and then go out and neck. Christians don't dance; they just go right out and neck. No, we don't want to talk about that. But, we avoid the middle man, right? Yeah. But anyway, that was just something basically that we were raised that you didn't do. You just didn't do that.

And dancing, when I was raised, was a far cry from whatever kind of stuff is going on nowadays. But anyway, when I was in the ninth grade I had an algebra class and one day we had a class dance. And they did that in public school. And so a girl came over to me and said, "I want you to dance with me." And I said no, you don't want me to dance with you, I don't dance and I don't even know how to dance. And so she got kind of upset at me because I think, you know, she kind of liked me. You know how ninth grade is, and so all I remember was she always wanted to wear my jacket. And I just felt embarrassed, you know, to let her wear my jacket, so I didn't. And now she wanted me to dance, you know. So I said no.

So the teacher... She went and told the teacher, and the teacher came over and said if you're not on

that dance floor in five minutes with that girl, you'll flunk algebra. Now if you see a transcript from North Downey Junior High for one John MacArthur in the ninth grade, it will have an "F" for algebra. I didn't dance and he gave me an "F" for that class. I think I had a "D" at the time so...so it wasn't the grade that was the major issue, you understand. Mathematics was never my strong suit. But anyway, there are people who are concerned about that matter. And I suppose... I suppose that the limitation on something like that is the same limitation because of so many things associated with that, it seems to me that most of all of that with the exception perhaps of some of those things that might be a part of the folk culture of some society, and have some inherent beauty and dignity, most of that would certainly be a far cry from an environment where a weaker brother who came out of that environment would be stimulated to godliness.

You as a strong Christian might be able to go out with your wife and go to a saloon and dance around and quote Bible verses to each other, I don't know. But there are a whole lot of people taking your example who wouldn't be able to do that at all, for whom it would be a tremendous stumbling block.

Well, I think you understand the point. So when you trip up a believer and cause that believer to be a fallen believer on the road of spiritual progress, you have acted in less than love. So we say then that in order to build up our brother without offending him, we must be sure that we don't do anything that emboldens him to do something that will cause him to fall or stumble.

Secondly, Paul says not only are we not to cause our brother to stumble, but secondly, we are not to grieve our brother. We are not to grieve our brother. In verses 14 and 15 he sort of discusses this, and I confess that my outline is a little bit contrived in the sense that there's a tremendous amount of overlap here, but it just helps us to keep a bit of the flow. Here he strongly emphasizes again that what he's talking about are non-moral things that of themselves are not unclean and of themselves are not evil. And he says that in verse 14, "I know and I am persuaded by the Lord Jesus." I love that statement, "I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus." It's like saying I didn't get this by hearsay, I got this directly from the source. "In my own personal intimate communion with the Lord Jesus Christ, He revealed this to me." That is a unique privilege for a Scripture writer. "So I know and I'm persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself." And you can stop there.

So, he says I'm not asking you to give up your liberty. I want you to enjoy your liberty and understand your liberty. I want you to know that this is not my opinion; I know this because I've been convinced by the Lord Jesus Himself. Even as he said in Galatians that his gospel did not come to him through human instrumentation but rather the Lord Himself had given it to him. He says, in effect, this is right from the Lord. You strong are right. Did you get that? The strong are right. That's right, they're right, they're right. Sin does not reside in things like food, I don't care what kind of food it is. It does not reside in what's in a glass. It does not reside in film, or electronics or games or recreation or activities. It doesn't reside in plants. It doesn't reside in anything.

First Timothy 4:4 says that all things are to be received with thanksgiving, right? And don't let anyone bring any of those devilish doctrines that tell you that we are to abstain from foods. Titus 1:15 says to the pure all things are what? Are pure. To the people who are defiled, everything is defiled because they're conscience is defiled. Jesus Himself, back in Mark 7, I believe it's verse 15, "There is nothing from outside of a man that enters into him that can defile him." Isn't that interesting? There is nothing outside of a man that entering into him can defile him. It's the things that come out of him that defile him.

In Acts chapter 10, the Lord showed Peter the big sheet, remember. And said, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat," which is to say all the dietary laws of the Old Covenant are now set aside. So he says there's nothing here, in verse 14, there's nothing that in and of itself is inherently unclean. Now that's a very important point. The word "unclean" means common. Basically it's the word for common but it came to mean impure or evil. So the strong are right, the strong are right. But is it not true that not everybody can handle that? Sure it is. And that's back to 1 Corinthians 8 again, verse 4. He says an idol is nothing. And he goes on to talk about that. But he says in verse 7, how everybody...however, there is not in every man that knowledge for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol and their conscience being weak is defiled. Not everybody can handle it. You strong are right but not everybody's ready to handle that. I mean, a truly godly person who understands his liberty should not be dissuaded against that. He's right. But the people who are in ignorance don't need to be shown a pattern of behavior that will cause them to stumble. Rather they need not to be encouraged to violate what their conscience tells them, but they need to see an example of love that meets them on their own ground. And that's why he says in the middle of verse 14, "However" or but "to him that thinks anything is unclean, to him" it is what? "it's unclean." It's unclean."

Now I don't believe he's teaching us that sin is a subjective thing, that sin is only what you think it is. That isn't true. Sin as such is very explicitly defined in the Scripture, is it not? We're not talking about those things that are basically sinful, inherently sinful. We're talking about those things that are basically inherently not sinful. But listen, you show me a person who believes it is a sin to do a certain thing, and if that person does it even though inherently in and of itself it isn't a sin, they will have a guilty conscience. I know that in my own life. If I have any weakness, it may show up in the sense that I have a certain weakness about how I spend my time. And I'm a bit un-liberated in that area. And there are days when I decide I'll take a couple of hours and do nothing and I can hardly get through those couple of hours because I have such a guilty conscience. And people around me say, "Why do you feel like that? I mean, everybody's entitled to a few hours of breathing without be encumbered with some task to do." But that points up to me something of what the conscience is like in a weaker brother.

I remember hearing a conversation one time where someone was saying, "You know, I never miss a morning with my family, without having my personal devotions in the Word of God. I get up every morning and I read the Bible and I have my devotions." To which this reply came, "You're a legalist. You need to stop doing that so you can prove you're not a legalist. You need to skip a few days. That's legalism." And if I remember the situation rightly, the person took that advice, did it and suffered tremendously from a guilty conscience.

Now is it a sin not to have your morning devotions? Surely isn't said to be in the Bible. But I'll tell you one thing, if in your conscience it would be wrong and you don't do it, then you're going to suffer with a guilty conscience. And so what he's saying here is, look, why in the world, verse 15, would you want to cause your brother to grieve? Right? To be upset? Because in his own heart, his own mind, in his own conscience, he believes he's done something that's wrong. You see, whatever tends... David Brown said this, "Whatever tends to make anyone violate his conscience tends to the destruction of his soul. And he who helps, whether wittingly or no to bring about the one is guilty of aiding to accomplish the other."

The Lord wants a clear conscience, clean conscience. And you never want to train anybody to

violate conscience. Didn't we see that last week. You don't want to learn to violate your conscience. You don't want your conscience seared like 1 Timothy 4:2. You don't want to train yourself to ignore your conscience. You don't want to train yourself to overrule your conscience or you're training yourself to ignore that instrument through which the Spirit of God subjectively leads you. So, you want to have what it says in Acts 26, a conscience void of offense toward God. When a stronger brother comes along and somehow tempts by his liberty a weaker brother to violate his conscience, when that weaker brother violates that conscience, that weaker brother will have a painful, bitter sorrow in his own heart. He'll feel guilty and instead of helping him grow in his spiritual life, it will push him back, because then he'll be even more afraid of liberty, right? More afraid of it. It will be a greater threat to him.

Now a weak Christian is grieved in verse 15. He says if your brother is grieved with your food, you're not walking in love. Now how would a weak brother be grieved? Well, a weak brother would be grieved by just simply seeing a strong Christian do what he felt was wrong. Is that so? Sure. If you are strongly convinced that something is wrong, and I'm not talking about something sinful, but something that they do and you see these people do it, it's going to grieve you. You're going to be grieved over their liberty which you see as an offense.

But I think it's even stronger than that in this context. I think what he's saying again is back to the idea that this brother is not just grieved because you do it, he's grieved because you've led him to do it, too, and it's violated his conscience. By following your instruction or your example, he does what he believes is wrong and then has to live with the remorse and the guilt of his conscience. And he forfeits the peace and joy of his Christian walk. What is the point of that? What is the point of that?

So, you set your life in a path so as not to grieve people and cause them sorrow because they have followed you into something their conscience didn't allow them to do. Now you know what this is telling us, folks. This says we've got to get close enough to each other to know where we are, right? We've got to know the hearts of the people around us so that we can be sure that we walk in love toward those people, in selfless self-denying *agape*. We never want to lead a believer to fall into sin. We never want to grieve a believer by having him violate his own conscience.

And the third of the six — and we'll take the last three next time — in verse 15, "Destroy not him with thy food for whom Christ died." Don't make him stumble, don't grieve him, and certainly don't destroy him. Now all I can tell you about the word "destroy," *apollumi*, means to ruin, is that it's a very strong word, very serious word. When you cause a believer to stumble or to be grieved, to violate his conscience, it can bring about a certain effect that is here discussed with a very strong word. Let me tell you a little about this word, this word *apollumi*. It is translated very frequently in the Scripture with the word "perish." It can mean eternal damnation, unquestionably it can mean that. It means that in many New Testament passages. Matthew 10:28, Luke 13:3, John 3:16, right? "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish." Romans 2, I think it's verse 12, 2 Corinthians 4:3, 2 Thessalonians 2:10, 2 Peter 3:9, "God is not willing that any should perish."

So the word can have the meaning of eternal destruction when used in reference to non-Christians, to unbelievers. The word *apollumi* also can be a general term used for death or the elimination of something. And in that sense it's a much more general term. For example, in 1 Corinthians 1:19, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent," talking about sort of wiping out the folly of those who suppose themselves to be wise with their worldly

philosophies. There it's used in a rather general sense.

It is used similar to that also in talking about death when it says in 1 Corinthians 10:9 that people were destroyed by the serpents, not talking about eternal damnation but just they died. And it says in the next verse you better not murmur also as they murmured who were destroyed, again the same word, by the destroyer.

So it can be used in the general sense of the death of a system of thought or the death of a person from a snake bite, as in 1 Corinthians. And you can compare other places, Hebrews 1:11, James 1:11, 1 Peter 1:7, where it has a general use. Or it can be used in reference to non-Christians of eternal destruction in hell. But I want to quickly add that it also is used in the Scripture to speak of believers. And when so used, we understand that it therefore has some latitude. For example, in Matthew chapter 18 and verse 14, a familiar chapter on the childlikeness of the believer, we're discussing a Christian here, one who believes in the Lord, one of the sheep that belongs to the Lord. And it says in verse 14, "Even so, it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." Now this is a marvelous passage, because this passage is all about not offending Christians. It's a great parallel to Romans 14. The whole passage is about Christians, not about babies. It's about the childlikeness of believers. That's why it says in verse 6, "Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones." What little ones? These little ones who what? "Believe in Me," believers who are like children. He said that in verse 3. "Unless you be converted and become as a little child, or as little children, you don't enter the kingdom." So He says in verse 6 you better not offend one believer, you'd be better off drowned than to offend a believer, strong. You would be better off drowned than to offend a believer.

Then over in verse 10 He says, you take heed that you do not think down, *kataphroneō*, look down, despise one of these little ones. What little ones? The believers. "Because the angels and the Father are so greatly concerned about them." How concerned are they? Here's an illustration. If a man has 100 sheep and a sheep wanders away, the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine, goes and gets the one and brings it back and rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine which went not astray. Now God is the shepherd and the sheep is His own. And then the next verse 14, "So it is not the will of God who's in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

Now can you offend a believer? Can you look down on a believer and despise a believer and lead a believer into some kind of sin to the degree that they will perish forever in hell? No. It's talking about some kind of spiritual loss, some kind of spiritual disaster in their life. It could be the leaving of the church. It could be the loss of their joy, the loss of their effectiveness in ministry. The same term is in 1 Corinthians 8 and I mentioned it to you earlier and told you we'd make reference to it. In 1 Corinthians 8 it's used in the same way. Verse 11, "Through thy knowledge shall the weaker brother perish for whom Christ died?" And we know we're talking about a believer, he's called a brother and it is said he is one for whom Christ died, to identify him as one especially beloved and belonging to the Savior. Are you going to cause this one to perish? In that sense again, the word *apollumi* cannot mean eternal destruction. It must mean to suffer loss.

Now this is strengthened in 2 John verse 8. It says, "Look to yourselves that we lose not those things that we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward." And the same word is used there. In there it means the loss of reward. It doesn't mean eternal punishment, or eternal perishing, or eternal hell, it is the loss of a reward. So we assume then that the word *apollumi*, back now to Romans 14, in this context as in other contexts when used with believers indicates the loss of some spiritual

blessedness. When you cause your brother to stumble, when you cause your brother to be grieved, or when you cause your brother to lose some spiritual blessedness, you have not acted in love. And how can you do that with your food, which is emblematic of your liberty, like a Jew who flaunts...a liberated Jew who flaunts a pork chop in the face of a newly converted Jew, or a liberated Gentile who eats meat offered to idols in front of a newly converted pagan who came out of that very idol system. How can you use your food to cause such spiritual loss for some weaker brother or sister? "Don't plunge them into spiritual devastation for whom Christ died," almost a repeat, isn't it, of 1 Corinthians chapter 8.

And that's the strength of the point. How could you treat in a loveless way, how could I treat in a loveless way one for whom Christ died in an act of supreme love? What a contrast. If Christ, the perfect Son of God, loved that weak person, that sinner, loved that sinner enough to die for them, can we not love that sinner who are much like that sinner enough not to devastate them spiritually by an abuse of our liberty?

So, Christ died for that weaker brother. So Paul calls us to build each other up by not causing each other to stumble, not causing each other to grieve, and not causing each other to be devastated and suffer some spiritual loss. And then he broadens his appeal in a most marvelous portion from verse 16 on which we'll discuss next week. And it has to do with evangelism and how the world sees us in terms of treating each other. Let's have a word of prayer.

I want you to come before the Lord yourself, if you will, for a moment tonight. I'm concerned that this not just be a message, a tape, but that it be a word from the Lord to all of our hearts. And I'm concerned that you come before the Lord in your own spirit and I want you to pray this prayer: Lord, God, if there is anything in my life that causes another brother or sister to stumble, to grieve, or to suffer any spiritual loss, show it to me and remove it out of my life, that I may walk in love toward the one for whom my Savior died.

Can you pray that prayer with an honest heart for the sake of the Savior, for the sake of the unity of His redeemed church?

That is our prayer tonight, o Father, that our lives would be without offense, without offense toward Thee, without accusation toward ourselves and without offense toward our brothers and sisters for whom Thou didst die, and to whom Thou didst call us to walk in love, for Christ's sake. Amen.

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