

Building Up One Another Without Offending, Part 2

Romans 14:16-23

45-111

It is the highlight of our times together on the Lord's Day to open the Word of God, and I want you to do that right now, opening your Bible to the 14th chapter of Romans, Romans chapter 14. We're continuing in our wonderful study of this great epistle. And in the section that we're involved with in chapters 14 and 15, we're looking at the subject of the unity of strong and weak Christians.

Just by way of introduction, for those of you who haven't been with us, the apostle Paul in this great Roman epistle is concerned to deal with the matter of salvation by grace through faith. He's talking about redemption. He's talking about justification, being made right with God through the work of Christ. Having laid out all of the beautiful and marvelous and wondrous elements of salvation in the first eleven chapters, beginning in chapter 12 he starts to talk about some of the practical ramifications of that doctrine, some of the things that are true in life, some of the things that are to be part of our commitment as those who have received the gospel of saving grace.

One of the things that flows out of the doctrine of salvation is the life that exists within the fellowship of redeemed saints. Now we all know that sin can be a blight on that fellowship and he has treated that in chapter 12 and 13. But there's another potential problem within the assembly of redeemed saints and that's the conflict that can come between strong and weak Christians. Strong Christians are those who understand their liberty. They understand that they are free in Christ from any ceremonies, taboos, traditions. They're free from any religious rituals. They no longer have to observe the elements of the externalism of the Old Covenant. And they understand that. They're free to enjoy all the good things that God has provided for them.

But there also are weak brothers and sisters who can't quite understand that freedom, they can't enter into that freedom, they can't enjoy that freedom. They're still restricted by some non-moral taboos, some traditions, some habits, some things from their past life that hold onto them and make it very difficult for them to enjoy their freedom. They may be hung up on certain meats, certain foods that they don't feel they should eat, certain things they feel they can't drink. They may be sort of hung up on certain holy days and festivals and feasts and Sabbaths. They may be, in our own contemporary time, coming out of a rather legalistic background. They may think it's wrong to eat meat. They may feel it's wrong to do anything that remotely relates to exercise on a Sunday. Some people might feel it's wrong to wear makeup, to go to a movie, to watch television, to listen to a certain kind of music.

Now it is wrong to do wrong. And we've pointed this out. And sin is sin and we're not saying that sin is subjective and for the discretion of the one who sins. But there are many things in our world and in our life as Christians which we are free to enjoy, provided we do not use them or abuse them to excess. Some of us understand that. Some of us do not. And so there is a potential conflict in the church over these things. Paul sets out to help us have the information we need to resolve that

conflict in chapter 14 verse 1 through the 13th verse of chapter 15. It is essential that we understand what it is that he is saying to us here.

Now remember, the basic idea, the basic truth of freedom in Christ, or Christian liberty, as it's called, is that we are free from the outward requirements of the Old Testament ceremony and we are free to enjoy all of God's good gifts no matter what taboos we have lived under in a former time. We are never free to sin. We are free to enjoy all those things which, and in and of themselves, are not sinful. Food in and of itself is not sinful. Drink in and of itself is not sinful. Recreation is not sinful. Entertainment is not sinful. Exercising on Sunday in and of itself is not sinful, and a myriad of other things.

But not all of us can accept that. And so while the liberated brethren, the strong, might feel they need to exercise their liberty, they would in so doing greatly offend the weak and create conflict in the church, which would disrupt the church's unity and harm the church's testimony. So in order for us to understand how to get along, Paul has given us this tremendous insight in chapters 14 and 15.

Now these two chapters, the sections at least to which we look, are divided into four sections of exhortation. He says to us basically there are four things you have to have in mind. Number one, you must receive one another with understanding, that is, without condemnation. And that is the subject of chapter 14 verses 1 to 12. You must receive one another with understanding.

Secondly, from verse 13 to 23, you must build up one another without offending. You must be concerned to build up one another without offending.

Thirdly, chapter 15 verses 1 to 7, you must please one another, with Christ as your example. And fourthly, from verse 8 to 13, you must rejoice with one another in God's plan.

Now if we learn how to receive one another, build up one another, please one another, rejoice with one another, we will eliminate the potential conflict between the weak and the strong, which is always a possibility in the church. Now we're looking, by the way, at the second section, verses 13 to 23, on building up one another without offending.

Now in order to do this effectively, in order to receive one another and in order to build up one another, we discussed last time that we must be willing to limit our liberty for the sake of a weaker brother. That's the primary message here. We set aside the prerogatives of our liberty for the sake of not offending a weaker brother. Now I want to just lead you through the passage. We've already covered half of it; we'll cover the second half. But just to remind you, there are six ways in which Paul points out that we are not to offend, six ways, six things to keep in mind.

The first one we saw last time, don't cause your brother to what? To stumble, verse 13, "Let us not therefore." The "therefore" is there because of what he has just said, since the Lord receives each Christian weak or strong, since the Lord is able to hold them up whether they are weak or strong, since each of them serves the sovereign Lord with his whole heart thinking he's right, and since only the Lord will judge, therefore let us not judge one another anymore. That's for the Lord to do. So let us not sit in condemnation on each other, but if we're going to make a judgment, let's not judge others, let's judge this rather, that we never put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in a brother's way. We never want to do anything to cause a brother to stumble.

Now how do you cause a brother to stumble? By exercising your liberty in the face of a weaker brother, you know that weaker brother doesn't enter into that liberty, is not free to do that without having a guilty conscience, but in the exercise of your liberty or in your teaching to that weaker brother, you push him into the situation where he does what he's seen you do and as a result of it, of doing that, it causes him to fall into sin. There are some people, for example, who cannot touch anything that even remotely relates to alcoholic beverage without falling into drunkenness. And the reason they don't is because they know that. If I were to exercise the freedom that I have and to drink something and they would see that and I would say to them, "This is your freedom," and they would do that, it could cause them to fall away from the steadfastness of their faith. I never want to do anything in my life that will offend.

In the day of the apostle Paul that meant that you didn't want to eat anything in front of a new Jewish convert which that Jewish convert would think violated the law of God because he was just coming out of Judaism with all of its dietary restrictions. If you were to eat that and he were to enter into it, it might cause him great anxiety. It might cause him to fall away thinking he had offended God, thinking he had violated God. He would feel guilty about his sin and it would plunge him into some kind of despair.

It could be that if you were to take a Gentile and say, "Hey, meat offered to an idol isn't anything anyway, don't worry about eating meat that was once offered to an idol," so you invite him to engage in that kind of meat, you invite him maybe to buy at the cheap meat market where the idol meat is sold, the part of the meat that wasn't consumed in the idol temple. But once he gets into that cycle, he's back into that old cycle again and maybe he decides that, "Oh, I ought to go back to the idol feast and see some of my old friends," and before you know it, he's in an orgy again and you've caused him to fall.

You might not think that there's anything wrong with playing cards and a little penny-ante gambling. Somebody comes along following your lead, does that, plunges into an old habit of gambling and loses a great amount of money and there is a fall in their Christian growth. The idea, don't make your brother stumble is fairly obvious.

The second thing that we need to understand is: Don't grieve your brother. In verse 14 Paul says, "I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus" this isn't human opinion "that there is nothing unclean of itself." And I remind you that there is nothing unclean that isn't unclean...I mean, that is unclean. It doesn't mean there's nothing unclean period, paragraph. It means there's nothing unclean that's unclean. Those neutral things, those preferential things, those non-moral things in and of themselves are not unclean. So what he's saying is the strong are right, the strong brothers are right. Moral evil does not exist in non- moral things. There's nothing inherently evil about those things.

But, if you're not careful, even though that thing itself is not unclean, if a person esteems it to be unclean, to him it is unclean and if forced into doing it, verse 15 says, your brother will be what? Will be grieved. You want to preserve a clear conscience. And if a person thinks something is wrong, they shouldn't do it. Why? Because they're training themselves to violate their conscience, and the conscience is a tool, a self- judging faculty that God uses to keep you aligned with truth and righteousness. If you train yourself to violate your conscience, you train yourself not to listen to what God says through your conscience, you will have what 1 Timothy 4:2 calls a cauterized conscience, a conscience covered with scar tissue that no longer can be sensitized to the call and the voice of

God.

So, learn to listen to your conscience. We do not want to grieve, that means to severely upset some brother by what we do and then he follows along and he does it and it violates his conscience and he becomes in great grief over that.

We had a lovely, young couple at our radio Bible conference last week who are coming out of a very, very legalistic background. They came to the radio Bible conference because they've been listening to our ministry on the radio and their greatest fear was that their pastor would find out they came, because their pastor would condemn them for stepping outside the boundaries of their own legalistic environment. They were so fearful while they were here that they were anxious the whole time and worried. We arranged a meeting for them with a pastor who some years ago had come out of the same sort of fundamental evangelical legalism and they drove maybe 100 miles to meet for a whole afternoon with this pastor to try to get some help in the de-programming process of the bondage in which they had been so long held.

And they said to me, "You know, we're hoping, we would pray to the Lord that our daughter might come to your college, but we never would want to send her because, you see, she is suicidal over her inability to keep the rules and we wouldn't want her to kill herself at your school." The interesting thing about this is these people have been hearing the Word of God for a long time but they've been so bound in the system they were in that they're not free to enjoy any of the liberty that God has given them, even the liberty to listen to another person teach the Word of God without a terrible bondage.

The fact of the matter is, until they can be released and weaned away from that gracefully, there's little point in them coming to a Bible conference like ours because all it does is pile upon them guilty feelings which make them feel like they're disobeying God. So we want to be very careful and very cautious not to cause grief to a brother who cannot do what we can do without violating conscience. To force a brother into that kind of grief, verse 15 says, is not to walk in love. And love is the pervasive thing. Didn't we see that in 1 Timothy, that the goal of the commandment is love out of a pure heart? Isn't that right? God's desire for us is a fellowship of love. And it is not loving to push someone into doing something that causes them to stumble and fall into sin or causes them to be grieved because they've violated their conscience even though their conscience may be reacting to wrong ideas in their mind.

And then there was a third thought that I feel is so important here. Not only are we not to cause our brother to stumble and not to grieve our brother, but not to devastate our brother. And in verse 15 he uses a very strong word, "Do not destroy him with your food for whom Christ died." "Do not destroy him with your food for whom Christ died." The word "destroy" means to experience spiritual loss, literally a devastating spiritual setback, a plunge backwards in your spiritual life.

In 1 Corinthians, if you'll turn there for just a moment, one book to the right, chapter 8 and verse 10, we have a very similar passage. Paul writing to the Corinthians, verse 8 says, "Food commends us not to God, neither if we eat are we the better, neither if we eat not are we the worse." The whole issue here is meat offered to idols. As I mentioned earlier, a person would come to worship a pagan idol, put the meat on the altar. The priest would eat some of the meat, take the meat he didn't need to eat, go back out the door of the temple and sell it on the marketplace. Some person comes along, buys it because it's cheaper than anywhere else, serves it for dinner to a new Gentile convert who's

just come out of that pagan religion. He sits down, he says, "Hey, this is great meat, where did you buy it?" "Well, I bought it at the butcher shop of the temple of Diana." And he is plunged into devastation, almost gags on the meat because all that does is remind him of all the vile orgiastic worship that went on in that pagan system, and he sees that meat as having been offered to an idol, tainted with the demonic reality that once was a portion of his life. He is greatly offended.

Now the real issue of meat is no issue at all. Meat is not the issue. It doesn't matter to God if we eat it. It doesn't matter to God if we don't eat it. We're no better if we do; we're no better if we don't. It's a non-issue; but not to that person. So he says in verse 9, "Take heed, lest by any means this liberty of yours" you're free to eat it "will become a stumbling block to them that are weak, for if any man see thee who hast knowledge "you're a strong believer, you understand your freedom "sitting at the table in the idol's temple," and there may have been even a freedom to..., they may have had a snack bar in the back of the idol's temple for all I know, "shall not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols?"

So, he says, "Hey, he can do that, so I'll go over to the idol temple and have a snack." And through that act, the weaker brother is devastated for whom Christ died. And he adds that line there, the same line in Romans chapter 14. It's simply to point up that Christ went to great lengths to save this individual, how can you treat one whom Christ died to save with indifference? The implication here is if Christ loved that person enough to die for them, you ought to love them enough to be cautious about how you exercise your liberty in front of them. So, it's the same issue there. Now you can go back to Romans, for a moment.

Don't devastate your brother. Don't plunge them into deep spiritual loss. "Stumbling" seems to mean a sort of momentary stumble, a momentary fall. "Grieving" is the grief over a guilty conscience. But this one is a devastating thing, where the person very likely could be plunged right back into the whole milieu of pagan worship.

So, Paul says then, build up your brother, build him up in love. How? By not causing him to stumble, not causing him to grieve, and not causing him to be devastated by falling into sin because you've exercised your liberty in front of him and he cannot experience that without sin and a guilty conscience. Now he broadens his appeal, let me give you the last three, and they are very much the same and they'll go by rather rapidly.

The fourth principle, and this is a sort of broadening of his thought, the fourth thing you want to remember now in not offending another is don't forfeit your witness. Don't forfeit your witness. And I want to show you some things that I think are so important. It is possible, beloved, to so abuse our liberty among ourselves that we create such conflict between the weak and the strong that the world in general is turned off to Christianity because of what they see. And that's the issue here.

Look at verse 16, "Let not then your good be (What?) evil spoken of, for the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, for he that in these things serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved (By whom?) by men." Now that's the thrust. That's the idea. It is possible to so abuse our liberty that our good is evil spoken of in the world around us, that instead of men looking and saying that group is *dokimos*. That's the word "approved." That group is worthy, that group of people is admirable, that group of people is proven to have something genuine and real. By the conflict of abusive liberty, the world will look and disapprove rather than approve.

So the word "men" that comes at the end of verse 18 is probably men in general. He's not talking about a brother here or he would probably say a brother. He's talking about the world that's watching us. It is very important that we set aside our liberties for their sake.

Look at 1 Peter 2, 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 15 and follow this thought, verse 15, "It is the will of God" he says in verse 15, "it is the will of God that with well-doing" that is, by goodness of life and character "with well-doing you put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." What that means is you shut the mouths of the critics of your faith. Now how do you shut the mouths of the critics? How do you do that? Verse 16: "As free, yet never using your freedom as an excuse to cover your evil." See.

In other words, you have to be very careful. If you want to silence the critics by your good life, you can't abuse your freedom. And you certainly can't use your freedom as an excuse to cover your sin. I just point to those two passages by way of passing reference so you'll know that this is not the only text that speaks to the matter of Christian liberty affecting evangelism.

Now Paul seems to be concerned with developing this very thought as we take it up in verse 16. "Let not then your good be evil spoken of." What is your good? Well, it's *agathos*. It means qualitative good, intrinsic good, real goodness. And he has in mind your freedom in Christ, your freedom in Christ. All that salvation provides, all the goodness of being a believer, all the goodness of enjoying that everything that God has for you, all that good that you've received through salvation will be evil spoken of. That's another way to say "blasphemed," if you abuse the freedom it provides. If you abuse your freedom, it will be blasphemed.

Now let's face it. Everything God has given us, we could enjoy. We could enjoy it. And the strong Christian could give thanks for it, be rejoicing in it. But if he damages other people and the world is watching the church and they see these liberated Christians absolutely indifferent to the pain of a weaker brother, do you think they will conclude that this is a marvelous group of people? Not at all. Not at all. In Romans 2 Paul says that the Jews, while obviously trying to show the world how righteous they were, were literally destroying the reputation of God. In Romans 2:24, he says, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." Because of you the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 28, the apostle Paul, speaking similarly, says, "If any man say to you," and listen to this, this is really marvelous, "if any man say to you, 'This is offered in sacrifice to idols,' this meat, 'then eat it not for his sake and for his conscience's sake.'" If you're having a meal and the guy says, "Hey, this is offered to idols," don't eat it. Now listen to this. "Conscience, I say, not yours but the other's, why would your liberty be judged by another's conscience?" Now listen, "For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that which I give thanks?"

Now let me tell you what he means here. You go to dinner. And here's the issue. You're at meal with a pagan and a believer. And the pagan happens to be your host. And he serves meat offered to idols. Now you're stuck. You're a strong brother, he's a weak brother and this pagan that you're trying to evangelize is serving you dinner. He serves you meat offered to idols. You say, "Hey, this is terrific." Your weaker brother puts an elbow in your ribs and says, "I can't eat that. I can't. That is meat offered to idols, my conscience will not allow me." And your host is happy, verse 28. He says to you, "This is offered in sacrifice to idols." He's proud about it. And the weaker brother is paralyzed.

What are you going to do? Now you're stuck. Do you please the pagan or do you please the weaker brother?

The answer is, you offend the pagan. That's right. You offend the pagan, because if you offend your weaker brother you've discredited the significance of Christian love. If you offend the pagan in order to show love to your brother, you've given a profound testimony to that pagan. Right? That love overrules everything. And that's the kind of association most pagans would like to get into, an association where people cared enough about each other to set aside perfectly good liberties so as not to offend. The pagan will see your love and your care for a fellow Christian and be drawn to the gospel, perhaps.

So, what Paul is saying now, back to Romans 14, is don't forfeit your witness by overdoing your liberty and offending your brother in the face of an unbeliever. The unbeliever needs to see you loving your brother. I mean, we don't need to show the world how free we are, we know...we need to show the world how loving we are. Is that right? Look at verse 17. I mean, the whole point of the kingdom is not food and drink. "Kingdom" here refers to the sphere of salvation by grace through faith where God rules in Christ over the souls of those who believe. It's the sphere of salvation. It's the kingdom we all belong to when we're saved. And the essence of this kingdom which we all belong to is not meat and drink. In other words, we're not here to promote externals, are we? We're not here to fight over non-essentials, though for the most part we do a wonderful job at it.

You know, I guess I believe that fighting over non-essentials is a wide-spread Christian recreation and probably a key reason so many people reject the gospel. Sad. We want to fight about so many silly things and people who want to maintain their freedom don't care what anyone else says and as a result of that, we miss the whole point of the kingdom. The kingdom is not meat and drink, the kingdom is not the things that you can do or not do, the discretionary things. The kingdom is — watch this one — righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Frankly, in those three elements you have a comprehensive summary of the Christian life. You want to know what the Christian life is all about? You want to know what it's like to be in the kingdom? First of all, it's righteousness. The issue is righteous living, righteous living, holy living, a holy, obedient, God-honoring life conformed to God's wonderful will. You see, my concern is not liberty, my concern is holiness. My concern is not my right to eat, my right to drink, my right to do this and do that and do the other thing, my concern is righteousness, holiness, integrity. And that's what the watching world is looking for, that I might be filled with the fruits of righteousness, that I might have on the breastplate of righteousness, practical godliness.

Secondly, peace; the kingdom is all about demonstrating the tranquil relationships between people and God and people and people. It is our loving caring. It is our oneness. It is the tranquility of our relationships that have such a profound testimony. It is when the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, is manifest that the watching world sees something that they would like to possess. The essence of the kingdom is not our freedom to do this and do that and offend if we wish. The essence is holy living and tranquil relations with fellow believers. And righteousness means I seek to honor God, and peace means I seek to have harmony with my brother.

And then joy, joy comes to one who is right with God and at peace with his brother. Wouldn't you say? Joy is the personal joy of knowing God, experiencing forgiveness, grace and mercy and love. It is the blessed, happy life of salvation, which rejoices in everything.

What we want the watching world to see is people who are righteous, people who are at peace and people whose lives are filled with joy. And that kind of environment is created by self-sacrificing love that does not necessarily exercise its liberty no matter how it offends somebody else. And what I'm saying to you is a message to the strong believers because most of you would fit into that category, to say this, we must move down to the weak brother and sister and honor and respect that weakness until we can by love nurture it to strength. And so there are things we are perfectly free to do that we choose not to do in order that we might demonstrate to a watching world that the kingdom is not a celebration of our rights, but it is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. And when the world sees our lives marked by righteousness, when they see a person with real integrity, a person with real honesty, a person who speaks the truth, who is good and fair and just and virtuous, that is a loud testimony to the reality of Christianity because even in the fallenness of man there is enough of the *imago dei*, the image of God residual in that mind to long for that which is unattainable to them. And when the world sees relationships of peace, it is so utterly foreign to them. Can you understand that? Because they live in a world of chaos. And when the world sees deep profound joy in the Holy Spirit, a settled happiness, they see the real heart of kingdom living. And that is the attractiveness that can bring them to Christ.

So, verse 18 says, "He that in these things serves Christ in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, if in these things you serve Christ, you're acceptable (To whom?) to God." And isn't that our prayer? Isn't that Romans 12:1 and 2? "This is your reasonable service which is acceptable to God." You're not conformed to this world, but you're transformed to do that will which is acceptable to Him.

You see, one who serves Christ with righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit is acceptable to God. What does that mean? That means God's pleased. God is pleased. That's His desire. Not only this, he's acceptable to men. He's approved of men. This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote Tim...Titus and he wrote in Titus 2:10 that we are to adorn the doctrine of God. That is we are to make beautiful the truth about God in the face of those who watch. We are to live lives that make God attractive, that make the gospel attractive. In fact, in Titus 2:5 it speaks about women being discreet, chaste, keepers at home, kind, obedient to their own husbands in order that the Word of God might not be blasphemed. How we live together in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit is essential to our testimony.

The word "approve" is *dokimos*. It means to be approved after close examination. And we're under the scrutiny of the world. And what they need to see is our love. So, you see, we don't want to cause a brother to stumble and we don't want to cause a brother to grieve and we certainly don't want to devastate a brother, neither do we want to offend a brother in any way, so as to forfeit our witness. That undermines what we're really all about.

You remember in 1 Corinthians 9 the apostle Paul? He says I have every right to take an offering for what I do. That's right. I'm an apostle. Am I not free, he says, can I do what I want in areas that are not sin issues? Sure. I have a right to eat. I have a right to drink. I can eat anything, drink anything, I'm free to do what I want. I even have a right to lead about a sister. What do you mean by that? I have a right to get married. I don't need to be celibate. God doesn't ask that. I have every right to lead about a sister as a wife as well as the other apostles and as the brethren of the Lord and Peter. Peter had a wife. It's curious that he never said anything about her. I can only imagine what that dear woman endured. And in verse 6 he says I have...I have a right not to work. I have a right not to work. I should be paid for my ministry. I mean, a soldier doesn't go to war and pay his own expense. Nobody plants a vineyard and doesn't eat the fruit. Nobody feeds the flock and doesn't drink the milk.

I mean, it's basic.

And he goes on talking about all his rights and all his rights. And then finally he says, but in spite of all of this, in spite of all of this, I don't want anything. I don't want anything because I don't want anybody to think that I'm charging them for the gospel.

So, verse 15, "I have used none of these things, I have used none of these things." And Paul set those things aside. He had a right to all of them, but he didn't want to offend an unbeliever. He was so cautious. In verse 19 he says I'm free from all men, nobody can lay any trips on me. I'm free. But you know what I've done? I've made myself a servant of everybody in order to win them. Unto the Jews I became like a Jew that I might gain Jews. To those that are under the law, as unto the law. To them that are without the law, that's Gentiles, as without the law. To the weak I became weak that I might gain the weak. I became all things to all men that by all means I might save some, right?

So we never want to get to the point where our exercise of liberty causes us to be unconcerned about whether we might be offending the lost. And he says in verse 23, "And this I do for the gospel's sake, I do it for the gospel's sake." I love that, that's the freedom of not using your freedom which is the ultimate freedom, to have a freedom and be free not to use it.

Therefore, in verse 19 of Romans 14, he says, "Therefore, let us...let us follow after the things which make (For what?) for peace and the things with which one may build up another." Let us pursue, *diōkō*. Let us chase down vigorously two things, the things that make for peace. You know what makes for peace? You ready for this? I'll tell you what makes for peace. Humility, you know why humility produces peace? Because humility says I don't care about my rights. Humility says I'm more concerned about yours than mine. Humility says the issue with me is you not me. Meekness, unselfishness and love, those are the things that make for peace. And those are the things that we should give attention to. We pursue those things.

At the end of 2 Corinthians chapter 13 verse 11, Paul writes, "Finally, brethren, farewell, be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace." "Live in peace." Why? That's all a part of testimony, that's all a part of witness. Ephesians 4:3: "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace." That's all a part of testimony. So let's learn that, pursue the things that make for peace. If you find in fellowship with a weaker brother that he doesn't have a liberty, then get down there where he is and make peace and don't flaunt your liberty, and certainly not when unbelievers are watching that they might see a wonderful fellowship of love.

And secondly, not only are we to pursue the things that make for peace like humility and meekness and unselfishness and love, but also the things with which we can build each other up. The things that are going to bring about a spiritual strengthening, that are going to build edification into people. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 14:12 he says, "You're all zealous of spiritual gifts, then seek the ones that excel to the edifying of the church." Seek the things that are going to build them up, not cause them to stumble and grieve and be devastated and lose their testimony. Don't do that.

Now there's a fifth principle here, and then a sixth. And we'll wrap them up quickly. The fifth one is, don't pull down the work of God. When you cause a brother to be offended, you're pulling down the work of God. Look at verse 20, "For food, don't destroy the work of God." And food is symbolic of any discretionary thing that you might have a right to do. Here he has the idea of the offending the Jew

with food that wasn't kosher or offending a Gentile with food that had been offered to idols. But it's only symbolic of anything. Don't with your food destroy the work of God.

Now do you realize that's a marvelous statement? You know what that says about every believer, even a weak believer? That a weak believer is a what? A work of God. Ephesians 2:10: "For we are His (What?) workmanship, created in Christ Jesus." I mean, God is at work in every Christian, even the weaker brother is a work of God, a work of God. Don't pull down what God's building up. And there's some people who are so proud about their liberation, they find a weaker person who's coming out of legalism for whatever reason, if it was pagan or if it was sort of cultural Christianity, and instead of building them up, they tear them down. And it is the work of God you're tearing down. Present imperative here indicates to stop what you're doing. So there must have been within that Roman assembly at least some information about the fact that these liberated brethren were tearing down what God was trying to build up. Discontinue that, he says. You're not merely dealing with a man, you're dealing with a man, verse 15, for whom Christ died. You're dealing with a man who is part of the kingdom and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, verse 17. And now he says you're dealing with one who is a work of God.

I mean, to put it about as crassly as you could, would you take a black marker pencil and go into the local museum and find the masterpieces of art and scribble on them? Would you take a knife and cut through a Rembrandt? Would you take a Stradivarius and crush it over your knee? Then why would you tear down what is the work of the ultimate master of all?

Verse 20 reminds us all things indeed are pure. That is, all things that are pure are pure, not sin, but all things, not moral issues, but things are pure. But it's evil for the man who eats with offense. What he means by that is the one who exercises freedom and injures another brother and grieves another brother and leads him into sin and destroys his Christian testimony and pulls down the work of God, is doing evil even though in and of itself it isn't wrong. Do you see that? Yes, all things are pure, but they become evil if you do them and cause somebody else to what? To stumble or be offended or grieved or devastated. You're pulling down the work of God. Very serious. You're tampering with one for whom Christ died, in whom dwells the Holy Spirit, who is a member of the kingdom.

And that's why in 1 Corinthians 8:13 Paul says, "If meat makes my brother offend, I will eat (What?) no meat." No meat. So he says in verse 21, it's good neither to eat meat, nor drink wine, nor anything by which thy brother stumbles.

This, by the way, indicates that wine, as Paul uses it and understood it here, is considered to be a non-moral thing. It is not a sin or he wouldn't use it here as an illustration. Drinking wine in that period of time and that culture was not a moral evil. It was discretionary. Drunkenness was a sin. Wine in and of itself was not a sin, if that wine did not contribute to the losing of your senses, which is drunkenness. And you know from prior studies that the wine which was drunk and the wine which was consumed at that time and the wine which is approved, we know this historically, was wine that was invariably mixed with a high amount of water to avoid such. And I think in our next study I may go into that a little bit just to develop that thought for you so you'll understand it.

But the fruit of the grape unfermented, the fruit of the grape fermented and mixed with water to a very small potential alcoholic solution in and of itself isn't wrong. It isn't wrong. But anything which causes your brother to stumble, that's wrong, whatever it is. And if wine makes your brother stumble, it's wrong. If it throws him into sin, if he looks at you and sees you do it and all he can think about is his

old pagan life that he was delivered from and he thinks your doing it offends him to the very heart, then you've offended him, you've grieved him, you've caused him to stumble, it's wrong. And that...that primarily is the very reason why I don't do a lot of things including drink wine, or any other kind of beverage which has any alcohol in it because I know there would be some believers offended by it. There would be some who would look down on me, some who would deny me any virtue of godliness because of that. And if it were properly mixed with a content that would not relieve me of control of my faculties, in and of itself it wouldn't be wrong. But it would be judged to be so by many. And it is not something I reluctantly give up, it is something I joyously set aside because there is a greater issue and the issue is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

It's only a thing. Food is only a thing. Cards are only a thing. A TV is only a thing. Recreation is only a thing. It is how we use those things that is the issue. And sad to say, there are Christians who would drink their beer and drink their wine and drink a lot of other stuff and flaunt their liberty no matter what anybody thought. Consequently there is a rift in the fellowship.

So, the call to build up is very clear. And don't tear down the work of God. Then the last point, just briefly, verse 22: Don't flaunt your liberty. And this is a very simple point. "Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he that condemns not himself in the thing which he allows."

Now follow Paul's thought as he wraps up the point. It's a very simple point that he makes here. Do you have faith? In other words, are you a strong brother? You can believe through your freedoms? You believe you have legitimate freedoms? You understand your liberty? Then have your freedom before God. You and God enjoy it all you want, really have a great time.

"Lord, I'm free, I'm so excited, I'm thrilled to be free, I'm not bound to any taboos or any traditions or any of those legalistic things. I'm absolutely free." Wonderful. But just have it between you and God, okay? That's what he's saying. Because happy is the one that is not condemning himself in the thing which he permits, or approves. You're happy because you can enjoy your freedom and not feel self-condemned because you have a guilty conscience and because you've caused someone else to stumble. See, just enjoy it between you and the Lord. And you can enjoy it to the full and not have to cause someone to stumble and create a guilty conscience and a devastated believer or one led into sin.

On the other hand, verse 23, "He that doubts," that's a weak Christian, "he's going to be condemned if he eats," his conscience is going to condemn him, because he doesn't believe he can eat. "And whatever is not of faith to him (Is what?) is sin." So, weak Christians, don't try to emulate the strong until you really believe it's right or you'll be condemned by your own conscience.

So, how you going to be happy? Strong Christian, you going to be happy? I'll tell you how. Set your liberty aside and just enjoy your freedom before the Lord. Just enjoy it. And you'll enjoy it a lot more, you'll be happy, verse 22 says, if you don't condemn yourself for the things that you're doing that are causing others problems. And if you're a weak believer, if you don't think you can eat, don't eat because what will happen is you'll go against your conscience and to you it will be sin and it will condemn you and cause you guilt and take away your joy. Does that make any sense? Of course not. Of course not.

So, the point here that he wraps up with is don't flaunt your freedom. Enjoy it before the Lord and

don't abuse yourself either as a strong or a weak believer.

Now that's point number two. First, we receive each other. Secondly, we build up each other without offense. And whatever we do, we seek never to offend another believer. It can be summed up in the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 10, "Whether therefore you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all (What?) to the glory of God. Give no offense, neither to the Jews (That's the unsaved Jews.) neither to the Greeks (That's the unsaved Gentiles.) neither to the church of God." Don't offend anybody. Then Paul says, "I please all men in all things, I never seek my own profit. But I seek the profit of many that they may be saved."

Listen, the ultimate goal of unity between strong and weak believers is a profound testimony to the world that brings about their what? Salvation. There's a lot at stake here, beloved, a lot at stake. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, it's been good to be together tonight. I thank You for these dear, faithful people. Bless them every one for coming to sit under Your Word and to praise Your name and to enjoy Your people. I thank You for the encouragement they are to my own heart by their hunger for Your truth, by their attentiveness as we spend an hour together in the Word. Lord, I pray that these things will find their way deep into their hearts. I pray, Lord God, that You will cause us to know that the kingdom is righteousness, and peace and joy. And if we are to know that, then we have to be more concerned about godly living, about tranquil and peaceful relationships and about the personal joy that comes to one who knows no guilt for having offended or violated his conscience.

And therefore, Lord, when we live the life of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, the watching world is going to be attracted to us. Help us, Lord, as the apostle Paul, to become in a sense all things to all men that by any mean...any means we might win them, that they might be saved by seeing our righteousness and our peace and our joy. May it be, O Lord, that we are more anxious to set aside a liberty which we can enjoy between us and Thee but freely set aside for the sake of a weaker brother, that we might bring him to maturity, that we might help to move him along the road of spiritual growth without a stumbling or a fall or a devastation or a loss of testimony. God, help us never to tear down what the Savior is building up. Use us for Your glory, everyone for Christ's sake. Amen.

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