

Agreeable, yet Unprofitable # 47

Romans 14: 13-23

Today as we continue to move through Romans 14, the focus of our text remains the same as last week. Paul continues to address the matter of Christian liberty in relation to those around us. He knew the bondage of legalism, and rejoiced to be free from its snare; and yet Paul well understood the dangers of unchecked liberty. While he enjoyed great liberty in Christ, he was aware of his witness before others. Just because he was free to behave in a particular manner or engage in a certain practice publicly, there was also the potential for hindrance through his actions. Paul determined to make personal sacrifices, though free to engage scripturally, for the good of the entire body. If something he engaged in created a hindrance or division, he chose to refrain from that in order to promote unity within the body of Christ. He knew that although his actions were agreeable biblically, they may not be profitable spiritually. [1 Cor.10:23-24, 31-33 – All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.](#) ^[24] [Let no man seek his own, but every man another's *wealth*...](#) ^[31] [Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.](#) ^[32] [Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:](#) ^[33] [Even as I please all *men* in all *things*, not seeking mine own profit, but the *profit* of many, that they may be saved.](#)

We may not be aware of it, or chose to ignore it, but our lives are being observed by those around us. Our actions speak so loudly that most people don't hear a word we say. If an action or behavior is perceived negatively by those around us, even though we are not restricted from that biblically, we ought to consider abandoning that practice for the sake of our witness. We must ensure that our liberty doesn't create a hindrance for others. The freedom we have in Christ is accompanied by a responsibility to promote unity and harmony within the body of Christ. Let's consider the [principles](#) Paul shares as we think on: [Agreeable, yet Unprofitable](#).

I. Our Diligence in Liberty (13-15) – Paul speaks of our awareness and carefulness regarding Christian liberty. Notice:

A. The Caution (13) – [Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in *his* brother's way.](#) Having reminded us that we all will give account of ourselves before the Lord, we are cautioned against judging one another regarding personal preferences. Rather than judging others, we are cautioned to judge ourselves, ensuring we never create a stumbling-block that would hinder a brother in the faith. We must make a diligent effort to prevent our actions from causing another to stumble or trip in the faith. This requires placing the concerns and needs of others above our own desires and behaviors, even though we are not restricted from such actions biblically.

B. The Conviction (14) – I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that *there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean*. Paul refers to the personal convictions individuals possess. For him, there was liberty to eat any kind of meat, but many saw certain foods as unclean and unprofitable. He reveals that he would never seek to persuade someone to abandon their convictions over a matter of preference. He could eat the meat without conviction, but others felt strong conviction regarding the same meal.

▪ I want to share a word of clarification here: we don't hold convictions; our convictions hold us. Preferences can, and do change, but genuine convictions should remain. However, we must never seek to persuade or challenge someone who feels genuinely convicted regarding a particular matter. If they are convicted by an attitude or action, then for them to participate in either constitutes sin. We should respect the honest convictions of others.

C. The Conveyance (15) – *But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died*. Our Christian liberty is not the priority when it comes to our witness before others and the way we convey our liberty. If a brother is grieved or hindered by our actions, we cannot walk in love toward him while continuing that behavior publicly or to his knowledge. We are admonished not to destroy, or hinder the faith of another simply because we have liberty in a certain area. Their spiritual wellbeing and growth are much more important than our Christian liberty. My personal sacrifice and restraint may prevent a stumbling-block and promote growth instead of creating a genuine hindrance. *Gal.5:13 – For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another*.

II. Our Discernment in Liberty (16-18) – As we practice liberty in Christ, we must properly discern the benefits and implications of our liberty. We must be aware of:

A. The Witness (16) – *Let not then your good be evil spoken of*. Paul continues to make the basic argument regarding our Christian liberty: it must be well received and never allowed to create a hindrance or stumbling-block. If our actions and behaviors, our personal preferences, create a hindrance while prompting others to speak against them, we are not being a good witness for Christ. He reaffirms that the cause of Christ and the advancement of the kingdom take priority over our personal wishes and desires. If anything we do creates a hindrance, we must seek to alter our behavior in order to promote unity. (Now I am not advocating taking this to an extreme. There are likely those who will find cause for accusation regardless of our actions, but we must use every reasonable effort to promote unity and prevent hindrances.)

B. The Wisdom (17) – *For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.* The kingdom of God, the reaching of the unsaved for Christ, is not focused or made up of meat and drink, but the divine characteristics of God. Paul proclaims that God's work is not to be characterized or controlled by personal preferences. There is much more at stake than whether one could have a piece of meat in the presence of those who are offended by such activity. That seems trivial to us, but it was a major point of contention for those in Paul's day. Let's look at it from our perspective. Some find making any type of purchase on Sunday offensive and they are convicted by that. Godly wisdom teaches me that if I am to encourage that brother in the Lord, I should not ask him to go to a restaurant for lunch on Sunday. While I may not share that conviction, his spiritual wellbeing is more important than the location of the meal. Instead, I should invite him to our house for lunch on Sunday.

- Our salvation and service to the Lord isn't about external or personal preferences. It is about a relationship with the Lord that is internal and significant. We cannot minimize the Gospel in order to safeguard personal preferences.

C. The Wholeness (18) – *For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.* Paul urges consideration of the big picture. We must strive to be acceptable to God through our service for Christ while also being approved of others. He isn't implying that we seek the approval of the world and its point of view, but that we please the Lord while bearing a positive witness before others. Our lives are pleasing to Christ and encouraging to the church. We are faithful to serve the Lord and beneficial to the health of the body of Christ. We seek to please the Lord and live in such a way that promotes the kingdom. We are right with the Lord and with men.

III. Our Duty in Liberty (19-23) – Finally Paul discusses the duties associated with our liberty. He speaks of:

A. Commitment (19) – *Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.* While living a life of liberty in Christ, we must remain committed to living in a way that fosters peace and growth among the church. As we have discussed, this may require sacrificing certain liberties to ensure they don't create hindrances among others. We are more concerned with pleasing the Lord, and encouraging others, than we are having our way.

B. Concern (20-21) – *For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.* ^[21] *It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.* It would be impossible to examine

these verses and miss the genuine concern Paul has for those who are weaker vessels. He admonishes not to be guilty of hindering the work of the Lord and the growth of the Kingdom for such trivial things as meat and drink. He challenges to avoid anything that would be viewed as a stumbling-block to others.

- For a believer to knowingly continue in a particular practice or behavior that hinders the growth and spiritual wellbeing of another is sin. While we may have liberty, not experiencing personal conviction, we still have to be concerned for the growth of others. It is sad to see some of the trivial issues that are allowed to create division and hindrances within the body of Christ. Our lives cannot be pleasing to the Lord if they create stumbling-blocks for others.

C. Confirmation (22) – *Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.* This reveals the need to serve God faithfully, with full assurance that our lives are not creating conflict and hindrances. Although we may feel at liberty, our actions may condemn us before others. God is pleased with those who practice restraint and are not condemned of others by what they allow or practice in life.

D. Condemnation (23) – *And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.* Some chose to live as they pleased regardless of what others thought or the implications within the church. In regard to eating certain meats, some chose to do so even though it hindered others. Eating in that manner was not a matter of faith; it became a matter of sin. Their actions created a hindrance among the brethren. Those who made such decisions may have had liberty to do so, but their liberty didn't guarantee blessing. In fact, they would be accountable to God for the hindrance they created.

Conclusion: These verses have been easy enough to understand, but they are difficult to live out before others. Our flesh desires to please itself. Most have the attitude: if God's Word doesn't forbid it, then I see no reason to refrain from it. We don't like the idea of making personal sacrifices just because someone else may be offended by our actions when there is no biblical principle being violated. It isn't a question of "can we" behave in a particular manner; it is a question of "should we" behave in that manner. If our actions are offensive and hinder others, even though they are not forbidden biblically, we must refrain for the good and growth of the body.

When we consider all that Christ endured for us, this seems a small price to pay. If you are struggling, seek the Lord and His guidance. If you are unsaved, respond to the Lord as He calls you to salvation by faith.