

BIBLE LIFE MESSAGES

The Sacrificial Life Involves Sacrificing Freedom for Fellowship

Romans 14:13-15:6

1 You live in the greatest country in the world; America. With all of its faults, our system of government is still the best in the world. You have greater individual freedoms here than anyone else.

As a Christian, you have not only been set free from the Law of Moses, you have been set free from the sinful way of life. 2 Romans, Chapter 6, verses 19 through 22 says, I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. 3

Would you be willing to sacrifice some of your freedoms in Christ for your Christian brother's sake to promote fellowship? ⁴

I. What's the Secret to Establishing Genuine Christian Unity? – v13-20

What's the secret to establishing genuine Christian unity? ⁵ Let's look at Romans, Chapter 14, verses 13 through 15. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. The first secret is not allowing your freedom in Christ to hurt others. ⁶

So what's freedom in Christ? ⁷ What it is not is compromising a matter of principle; particularly a doctrinal teaching that is clear in God's word. One of the tragic practices of current attempts to bring about denominational harmony is to compromise biblical truths for the sake of agreement. A clear biblical teaching needs to be the source of agreement, not a distortion of it. Obedience to God's revealed will, His lordship, is what our faith is all about! ⁸ What freedom in Christ does mean is that opinion matters are non essential issues of life! ⁹

Here are some examples of some freedoms in Christ worthy of sacrificing. Clothes women choose to wear. Is dressing modestly, in contrast to being stylish, more scriptural? Not really. But ladies, please help us Christian men not to be distracted from maintaining a godly mental focus when you are in our presence! Be considerate of our attempts to please the Lord with our thought life. ¹⁰

What to eat. Is a healthy diet a command? It isn't in the New Testament. But wouldn't you like to live healthier in order to keep your body fit and more productive for the Lord? Adding extra years to your life through diet and physical fitness could be used to love and serve Him. ¹¹

What kind of entertainment do you use? Does what you watch on television or at the movies violate the Bible? Probably not. But what you expose yourself to contributes to what you think! Wouldn't you want, as a committed Christian, to keep your thoughts pure and moral? ¹²

A Bible example we find in the early church was the food question. ¹³ To the Christian no food is spiritually unclean in and of itself. There's an indication of that in the visions Peter saw on Simon the Tanner's rooftop in Acts, Chapter 10 ¹. ¹⁴ There were some Jewish

¹ Acts 10:9-16, About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well

Christians who couldn't break away from their kosher food laws. So verse 14² tells us they would be sinning if they broke those laws.

So how would a brother from a non Jewish background respond to someone who felt this way? ¹⁵ Romans, Chapter 5, verse 1, is an answer, **We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.** Why not become a vegetarian when associating with vegetarian Christians? Sacrifice your freedom in Christ for fellowship with them. ¹⁶

What happens when you deliberately offend a Christian brother? Verse 15, **If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your**

as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

² Romans 14:14, As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean.

brother for whom Christ died. You are not conducting yourself in love towards him. ¹⁷ Verse 20 ³ concludes that you could be destroying his faith by tempting him to forsake his conscience! ¹⁸

Another secret to establishing genuine Christian unity is found in verses 16 through 20, **Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.** ¹⁹ **So conduct yourself in a way that no one could speak against your lifestyle.** ²⁰

³ Romans 14:20, Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.

What is the kingdom of God in verse 17? ²¹ It's living in **righteousness**. You give to God and your fellow man what they deserve; love, respect and dignity. ²²

It's living in **peace**. It's not the absence of trouble but what makes for another person's highest good. ²³

It's living in **joy**. Joy isn't selfish. It isn't just making you happy. It's sharing your happiness with others! Philippians, Chapter 2, verse 3, puts it this way, **Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves**. ²⁴ The result of this type of living is that you are not only pleasing to men but also to God! ⁴ ²⁵

II. Why Can't the Other Guy Take the Initiative? – v21-23

So why can't the other guy take the initiative? ²⁶ Verse 23 gives us that answer, **But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not**

⁴ v 18, . . . because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin. Your Christian brother, if he is forsaking his conscience to participate with you, is committing sin! ²⁷

Some of my brothers and sisters in the Lord worship in the Church of Christ. They believe very strongly that the Bible does not authorize the playing of a musical instrument to accompany their worship on Sunday mornings. They are afraid to participate in what they believe to be wrong, even though we believe it isn't. ²⁸ Their participation would be against their conscience. It would be in rebellion against what they think is God's will. Since their faith doesn't support using an instrument, their participation would be sin to them.

I don't believe that way, but I love them! When I invite those people to worship with us we sing together without the instruments. Why? ²⁹ Because we can abstain from the instrument without committing sin. It's a freedom in Christ to use or not use an

instrument to us. We can sacrifice worshipping without an instrument for their sake ⁵. ³⁰

III. So How Can You Take the Initiative? – 5:1-6

So how can you take the initiative? ³¹ By deciding who you really want to please! ³² Romans, Chapter 5, verse 1 says, **We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.** You are specifically not to behave just to please yourself. You don't live in a vacuum. ³³

One of the issues that affected my wife and me was the social drinking issue. It is not an issue where the Bible has clearly spoken. ³⁴ Bible passages that talk about it assume social drinking. First Timothy, Chapter 3, verse 8 says, **Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain.** ³⁵ First Timothy, Chapter 5, verse 23 says, **Stop drinking only**

⁵ Romans 14:20-21, Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.

Years ago my sister-in-law and her husband were beginning to attend a church after not doing so for awhile. They had a renewed interest in serving the Lord and were excited about their new church and new friends. They were ready to make a complete break with the world and its ways. Alcoholic beverages, to them, were associated with the way of life they wanted to leave behind. When invited to a church member's home one evening, however, they were offered a drink. They were so disillusioned they didn't return to a church for the next several years.

Is social drinking wrong for Christians? It isn't according to the Bible. But I always abstained from drinking because of the damage it did to my family as I was growing up. My wife and I never saw social drinking doing anything good for anybody. This incident with my sister-in-law renewed our commitment to remain total abstainers for the sake of

our Christian witness. I urge you to do the same; not because it is biblically wrong but because of alcohol's association with the world's ways. ³⁶

Romans, Chapter 5, verse 3 ⁶ tells us that Lord Jesus didn't please Himself when He volunteered to go to the cross! He didn't have to die on the cross. He did it because that was the price that had to be paid for your sins. He did it because He loved you! ³⁷

When you live to please your brother instead of yourself, you encourage his faith ⁷. When you encourage your Christian brother's faith, you are doing your part to provide unity to the Lord's church and glorify God. Verses 5 and 6 read, **May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ**

⁶ Romans 5:1-3 - We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."

⁷ Romans 5:2 - Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 38

You have a lot of freedom in Christ where His word has not clearly spoken. But Lord Jesus would have you relate to your Christian brothers and sisters in love. Will you sacrifice some of those freedoms to win another person to the Lord or encourage a brother's faith?

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