

Freedom in Christ – Part II

1. Last week I spoke about the freedom we have in Christ, and how our righteousness is a gift from God and not something that we developed on our own...so that we have lost all of the “bragging rights” to our personal morality and goodness.
 - a. This week, we are going to look at how the gospel has set us free from external standards, the standards of men and leaves us to stand before the standard of God alone.
 - b. We forget that the gospel is “good news,” it is the good news of freedom from bondage to fear, to rules, to works and performance based living.
 - c. God desires you and I to so receive the gift of His unconditional love that we become agents and vessels of His love.
 - i. As long as we live as if our rightness with God depends even a tiny bit upon us, we will be unable to love people with God’s love.
 - ii. **Our love for others will be as conditional or unconditional as the love we think we have from God.**
 - d. There was this problem in Rome and Corinth and other cities where meat that had been offered to idols.
 - i. Some Christians said that if you ate that meat that it was the same as worshipping the idol to which it was offered.
 - ii. Other Christians said, "Oh, no. How can that be? Meat is meat. The fact that someone else thinks of it as offered to idols does not mean that I have to."
 1. "The “easy” solution to this problem would have been to form two churches: “The Church of the Carnivores” (perhaps not a bad name for some churches I have heard of!) and “The First Church of the Vegetarians.
 2. "One side (the meat-eaters) could criticize the vegetarians, while the vegetarians criticize the meat-eaters."
 - iii. Let’s see what the apostle Paul had to say about this subject and how it relates to us today.
2. Open your bibles to Romans 14:1-22 *Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. 2One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. 3The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. 4Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. 5One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. 7For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. 8If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. 9For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. 10You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. 11It is written: " 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.' " 12So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. 13Therefore 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. 14As 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. 15If 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. 16Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. 17For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. 19Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. 20Do 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. 21It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. 22So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. 23But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

- a. This is an absolutely amazing chapter in the bible.
 - i. The amazing thing about this passage is that it tells us that a Christian, who may be weak in their faith, may not believe that they can operate in the full freedom of Christ.
 - ii. I say “amazing” because nowadays, it isn’t the new Christian who is weak in their faith and freedom in Christ, but the older, religionized Christians, who have been imprisoned by institutionalized religious beliefs.
 1. One would expect that the longer a person is a Christian, the better that they would understand their liberty in Christ.
 2. But our culture has shown us the opposite.
 3. There is a story told of two culprits who broke into a department store one night. They didn’t steal anything—they just switched all the price tags. The next morning, refrigerators were tagged for \$9.95 and candy bars for \$500.00!
 - a. As I studied this week, it occurred to me that someone had switched the labels on me.
 - b. I had always been taught that the “Strong” Christian was the one who knew he couldn’t or wouldn’t do certain things—and the “Weak” Christian was the one who still did things that the more spiritual Christians had overcome..
 4. If this has also been your opinion, perhaps you should also take a closer look at Romans 14.
- b. Look at Verse 1: *Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.*
 - i. NLT: *Accept Christians who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong*
 - ii. The unique thing in Paul’s teachings here is that both groups are acceptable to God and each will be welcomed into fellowship, IF each is doing what they’re doing based on Faith! Faith is what makes them acceptable to God.
 - a. David Guzik notes "There are many reasons why someone may be weak: they may be a babe in Christ (babies are weak), they may be sick or diseased (by legalism), they may be malnourished (by lack of good teaching), or they may lack exercise (needing exhortation, "coaching")."
 - b. "The one “whose faith is weak” is not weak in basic Christian faith, but is weak in assurance that his faith permits him to do certain things, such as eating meat.
 - i. These “weak” are to be wholeheartedly accepted—they are not to be accepted with the ulterior motive of straightening them out.
 - ii. There is to be no phony condescension on the part of the “strong,” no hidden agenda, but rather simple, unqualified acceptance." (Hughes)
 - c. William Barclay referring to the one "weak in (the) faith" says:

- i. "Such a man is weak in the faith for two reasons: He has not yet discovered the meaning of Christian freedom. He is at heart still a legalist. He sees Christianity as a thing of rules and regulations. His whole aim is to govern his life by a series of laws and observances. He is frightened of Christian freedom and Christian liberty.
 - ii. Or...he has not yet liberated himself from a belief in the efficacy of works.
 - 1. In his heart he believes that he can gain God's favor by doing certain things and abstaining from doing others.
 - 2. Basically he is still trying to earn a right relationship with God & has not yet accepted the way of grace.
 - 3. He is still thinking of what he can do for God more than of what God has done for him."
- ii. *Verse 3: The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.*
- 1. (Stedman) *Those who think it is morally wrong for a Christian to drink wine, smoke cigarettes must not look down on those who feel free to do so. They must not judge them. The word "judge" means "to sit in judgment" on them and it involves several things: It involves, first, no criticizing of such people or censoring of them.*
 - a. We are not to go up to them and tell them, "I do not see how you can be a Christian and do things like that."
 - b. That has nothing to do with being a Christian.
 - c. Their Christian faith is established on grounds other than those.
 - d. It means no categorizing of such people, no classifying them as carnal Christians or reproofing or rebuking them. We have no right to reprove or rebuke in this arena of their lives.
 - e. I have found that those who do not fully understand the freedom in Christ, are the majority party and they often make artificial standards for Christians and impose them on everybody who comes into the church, with the implication that you really cannot be a Christian unless you do these things or do not do these things.
 - i. That has given rise to a tremendous distortion of Christianity in the eyes of the world. It has given rise to the idea that Christianity is a "do not do something" or a "don't" religion.
 - ii. This distorts the freedom that is the message of the gospel. It makes it sound like Christianity is a set of rules to be obeyed, and the freedom of the sons of God is denied.
 - iii. The world therefore, gets a totally false idea of what the church is all about.
 - iv. This has happened widely in our day. And, I think, the "narrow party" has triumphed in the evangelical churches. This is why many people will not touch the church with a 25-foot pole, even though they are fantastically interested in the gospel.
 - f. *I read about a conversation a pastor had with a man who was passing through Tokyo on business about his spiritual life. He said that he was a Christian but he hadn't been attending church for a long time. As they talked the pastor could tell that this man was dry as a bone and thirsty for the Lord. So he asked him why he didn't go back to church. He told the pastor that he was afraid what people would think of him, because he had not been to church for so long. It makes the pastor want to cry. This man is afraid to go to the one place*

where he should feel that it is perfectly safe to go. He was afraid that he would be judged by those who should be loving him unconditionally

iii. v4: *Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.*

1. If it is really wrong, God will straighten him out and it is not up to you to do it. This is why I enjoy so much that little pin that Bill Gothard gives out with the letters **PBPGINFWMY**, i.e.,
 - a. **"Please be patient, God is not finished with me yet."**
2. If the problem is one of not understanding truth, the solution is teaching the truth more plainly. As people hear it and understand it, they will be freed from this. To try to force them into some kind of compliance with something they yet do not understand is ridiculous and futile. Therefore, be patient. If they are being exposed to truth, they will change. Let the Lord change them; it is his responsibility. Not only will he do so, but he is perfectly able to do so.
 - a. I'll never forget the young Christian in Texas who after three months came to the senior pastor and said, "I just read I am not supposed to be sleeping with a woman w/o being married to her."
- i. He got the message. We take it for granted that everyone knows God's standards, but they do not. Our world teaches people so deeply in wrong thinking that sometimes it takes years to break through the false teachings we have been brainwashed with.
 - b. Phillips' translation here in v4 says, *"God is well able to transform men into servants who are satisfactory."*
 - c. It should however be clear that such a principle applies only to matters that are morally neutral -- the externals but not the eternal.
 - i. When it comes to fundamental eternal doctrines of the Christian faith, there is no room for individual opinions. But in the area where things are neither right nor wrong in themselves, and Scripture is silent, there is room for differing views. They should not be allowed to become tests of fellowship.
3. It is said that when the British and French were fighting in Canada in the 1750s, Admiral Phipps, commander of the British fleet, was told to anchor outside Quebec. He was given orders to wait for the British land forces to arrive, then support them when they attacked the city. Phipps' navy arrived early. As the admiral waited, he became annoyed by the statues of the saints that adorned the towers of a nearby cathedral, so he commanded his men to shoot at them with the ships' cannons. No one knows how many rounds were fired or how many statues were knocked out, but when the land forces arrived and the signal was given to attack, the admiral was of no help. He had used up all his ammunition shooting at the "saints." (Daily Bread) Unfortunately, the same could be said for many Christians today. When God calls on them to do something great for Him they have nothing left to give for they have used up their ammunition shooting at the saints.

a.

iii. Ray Stedman says *"the favorite indoor sport of Christians...is trying to change each other."*

1. As this passage indicates, this has been a major problem in the church for centuries.
2. All through the history of the church, the problem arises from the attitude that most of us share, I am sure, that God is pleased with the way we live -- but there are those "others" around.
 - a. They drink beer and play cards; they go to movies; they smoke cigars; they work on Sundays; they wear lipstick; they dance; they play musical instruments; they use zippers instead of buttons. There is an endless list of

things that can be included, debatable matters that the church has never been able to settle because of a misunderstanding of the principles that are set forth here in this very passage.

3. We are dealing with the problem of Christian taboos, all the no-no's of the Christian life that we encounter from place to place, and from time to time.
4. We are facing the question of how much fellowship you can have with somebody who lives in a different way than you do, who does things that you do not approve of as a Christian."
- iv. PHILIP PETITE, the famous tightrope walker, walked a tightrope in NY from the twin towers of the world trade center. When the wind picked up the buildings would sway 6-8 inches. A friend of his set up a safety harness and begged him to wear it. 'NO WAY, IF I ATTACH MYSELF TO A BUILDING I AM NOT FREE!'
 1. The average Christian tries to put everybody else in his own harness: rules, regulations instead of experiencing the grace of God and the freedom it brings we re-introduce more and more religion.

v. .

3. Convictions and Biblical Truths

- a. We confuse our personal convictions with absolute truth.
 - i. Convictions are strongly held beliefs.
 1. According to Webster a conviction is, "a strong persuasion or belief."
 2. In verse 4, Paul urges each to be "*fully convinced in his own mind*" (14:5).
- b. Consider the following spectrum or hierarchy of beliefs:
 - i. Prejudices: Men are better drivers than women or visa versa.
 - ii. Opinions: President Bush was right to declare war against Iraq.
 - iii. Theories: Taking vitamin C reduces one's chance of getting sick.
 - iv. Convictions: The rapture will come before the great tribulation. As a Christian, I should not drink wine.
 - v. Knowledge or Understanding: Area = length times width.
 - vi. Biblical Doctrine or Theology: God is omniscient—He knows all.
 - vii. Biblical Principles: Whatever is not of faith is sin.
 - viii. Biblical Statements: "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23).
 - ix. Biblical Commands: "*Flee from immorality*" (1 Corinthians 6:18)
- c. The convictions of which Paul speaks are behavioral beliefs.
 - i. In Romans and 1 Corinthians, convictions are beliefs which govern our behavior.
 - ii. Convictions here are not as much a decision concerning what is true as a decision about what we should or should not do.
 - iii. Our convictions determine whether we will or will not eat meat, drink wine, or observe certain holidays.
 4. Convictions are not necessary when something is obvious. For example, murder. Murder is sin.
 5. It is also against the law, whether God's Law or man's.
 - iv. Convictions are conclusions we reach when there are no hard and fast answers or clear biblical injunctions.
 - v. Almost always, these convictions are inferred, we extend our beliefs we hold to be true to the given circumstance or choice.
- b. **Christian convictions do not define what is "right" and "wrong."**
 - i. God's Word defines what is right and what is wrong.
 - ii. Biblical revelation is not a matter of personal discretion.
 - iii. It is not a conviction to believe that murder is evil or that loving our enemy is good.
 - iv. Convictions take up where biblical revelation and human law leave off.

- v. Convictions determine what my conduct should be in those areas not specifically prescribed by Scripture.
- vi. My convictions draw the line between what I will do and what I will not do as an exercise of Christian liberty.
- c. **Convictions reach the conclusions of “should” and “should not.”**
 - i. The question is not so much, “Can I do this or that?” but “Should I do this or that?”
 - 1. *All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything* (1 Corinthians 6:12).
 - 2. Within the category of “all things which are lawful,” there are things which do not contribute to my own spiritual life and growth or that of others. Even though I “could” do some of these things, I may decide I “should” not do them—not because they are evil, but because they do not promote what is good or best for us.
 - 3. These decisions fall into the category of my convictions.
 - ii. **Christian convictions are matters of conscience.**
 - 1. *However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled* (1 Corinthians 8:7).
 - 2. According to this verse, convictions are the result of the interaction of several things.
 - a. **Knowledge**—biblical teaching and doctrine.
 - b. **Conscience**- which causes us to feel either guilt or moral affirmation.
 - iii. Christian convictions are also matters of faith.
 - 1. Knowledge and conscience are factors which determine our convictions.
 - 2. Faith also plays a vital role in our convictions.
 - 3. We should only practice those liberties we can do in faith.
 - 4. If we doubt (the opposite of faith), we are condemned by doing what our conscience does not approve.
 - 5. *The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin* (Romans 14:22-23).

4. Learn to Yield Personal Preferences for Love..

- a. **Gray is not a primary color.**
 - i. Things that we would be willing to die for (Salvation by grace alone through faith; the Bible as the inspired, inerrant Word of God, the virgin Birth of Christ, the resurrection, etc.)
 - 1. These are things that are specifically addressed in Scripture.
 - 2. There are, however, some areas that the Scriptures do not specifically deal with. These are commonly called “gray areas”, or “personal convictions” like we just spoke of.
 - b. *v15 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.*
- i. Let me illustrate this verse:
- ii. **Stedman comment that...**”I liken this to crossing a swinging bridge over a mountain stream. There are people who can run across a bridge like that, even though it does not have any handrails. They are not alarmed by it, they can keep their balance well. They are not concerned about the swaying of the bridge, or the danger of falling into the torrent below. That is fine; some people can do that. But others cannot. You watch them go out on a bridge like that, and they are very uncertain. They shake and tremble; they inch along. They may even get down on their hands and knees and crawl across. But they will make it if you just give them time, if you let them set their own speed. After a few

crossings, they begin to pick up courage, and eventually they are able to run right across. It is like that with these moral questions. Some people just cannot see themselves moving in a certain area that they have been brought up to think is wrong; they have difficulty doing so. As in the case of the swinging bridge, it would be cruel for someone who had the freedom to cross boldly to take the arm of someone who was timid and drag them across, to force them to run across. They might even lose their balance and fall off the bridge and suffer injury. This is what Paul is warning about in [V15]:"

- iii. Love would not try to harm someone else just to make themselves feel better or superior
 1. That is the tragedy of legalism. It strangles love.
- iv. Have you ever noticed how good parents talk with children: they stoop down to their height, speak at their level, and don't criticize them for their way of expressing themselves.
 1. It is the same with us as believers.
 2. We are not to look down on newer believers because they don't "know it all"
 3. We are not to criticize them for their maturity level, instead we are to relate to them "where they are."
 4. We must love them to maturity.
- d. Verse 13 tells us that we are not to look down on people or put traps in front of our brothers:
 - i. v13 amp: *Then let us no more criticize and blame and pass judgment on one another, but rather decide and endeavor never to put a stumbling block or an obstacle or a hindrance in the way of a brother.*
 - ii. Only God, who is aware of all the facts, is able to judge people righteously.
 - iii. John Wesley told of a man he had little respect for because he considered him to be miserly and covetous. One day when this person contributed only a small gift to a worthy charity, Wesley openly criticized him. After the incident, the man went to Wesley privately and told him he had been living on parsnips and water for several weeks. He explained that before his conversion, he had run up many bills. Now, by skimping on everything and buying nothing for himself he was paying off his creditors one by one.

"Christ has made me an honest man," he said, "and so with all these debts to pay, I can give only a few offerings above my tithe. I must settle up with my worldly neighbors and show them what the grace of God can do in the heart of a man who was once dishonest."

 1. Wesley then apologized to the man and asked his forgiveness.
 - iv. The word for stumbling block is *scandalon*, which referred to the movable part of a trap that the bait was attached to.
 - v. We are not to use our liberty to cause someone else to stumble.
 1. One who has a libertarian view of alcohol consumption must never flaunt his view because he may lead a person who has a propensity (or be a former) alcoholic to then imbibe and be ensnared.
- e. v7 *For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. 8If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. 9For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.*
 - i. We are not on this earth for the purpose of exercising our freedoms.
 - ii. Nor are we here for the purpose of adhering to strict religious convictions.
 - iii. We are here for one purpose and one purpose only -- to live for the Lord.
 - iv. If we exercise our freedoms, we do so for the Lord.
 - v. If we adhere to strict religious convictions, we so do for the Lord.
 - vi. If we live, we live for the Lord. If we die, we die for the Lord
 - vii. He alone makes us stand. It is in Christ alone that our future exists.

5. Folks, the gospel is this. Jesus Christ died for sinners, of which I am the foremost. That is it. There are no add ons. There are no conditions to the conditions. All you need to do is to respond to His invitation

in simple faith. The bible says that all who believe on His name shall be saved. The gospel is good news because it says you don't have to become what you are not. God has already done the work for you at the cross. He paid your price of admission to heaven for you. You only need to receive it.

- a. If that is your desire today, I want to encourage you to bow your head and pray this prayer with me. You might not understand what I said today other than you want to have a relationship with the God who loves you beyond your wildest imagination. You can today if you pray this prayer and mean what you are saying.
6. Lord God, I am a sinner. I have done wrong things. I have tried to live life on my own power, and tried to earn your approval. Thank you that I don't have to do it anymore because Jesus, your Son, took my place on the cross. I want to know you God. I believe Jesus died for me and rose again. I receive your free gift of your love today. In Jesus Name, amen.