

LOVE, LIBERTY, AND EXPEDIENCY

Background: The 1st century Roman Empire was littered with pagan religions and pagan temples. Many of these temples sacrificed animals during their “worship”, cooked and even consumed the fresh meat as part of worship. The temples also served as large facilities for social functions and it is believed that the freshly sacrificed meat was offered for sale to the public. Without refrigeration, this might often be the only fresh meat in town. Before being saved, the people of ancient cities bought & ate the meat without questioning the right or wrong of doing so. After salvation, immature believers, especially Jews often considered eating meat that had been sacrificed to a pagan god or a demon as sinful. The more mature believers had come to realize that an idol was nothing and sacrificing an animal to nothing did nothing to ruin the meat. It was fine with God to eat the meat.

A conflict arose between the **weak believers** whose religious training caused them to believe it was a sin to eat the sacrificed meat & the **strong believers** who understood (Mk 15:10-17; Mk 7:18-19) that food enters not into the hearts, but the stomach & is eliminated. God cares nothing about it. Paul addresses this issue with believers in Corinth & Rome.

1Cor 8:1-13 – Weak/Strong Believers – Love, Liberty, Expediency Rom 14-15

Vs 1-3 – we all have knowledge (sarcasm), knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies
Act 15 – Jerusalem Conference & Act 21 – Paul’s Old Man Rebellion in Jerusalem – Jews emphasized that Gentile believers must abstain from “things sacrificed to idols”

- vs 1-3 likely directed at Jewish bel’s who think they know about the issue, but don’t

a. Weak Believer: religious OM beliefs must be rejected b4 can understand/believe truth
Rom 14:1-2; 15:1

Vs 4-8 – idols are nothing, only one true God through Jesus Christ – sacrificed meat is nothing; food itself is nothing (Mt 15:10-17); not all understand this; defile their own conscience
False issue raised by Jews struggling to give up the Law, pushing it on the Gentiles.

- Part of Jerusalem Conference (AD 49) Act 15:29; AD 55 Paul has rejected & abandoned the idea

b. Weak Believer: religious superstitions - food, drink, language, politics, social life

Vs 9-13 – be careful with your liberty; stumbling block to weak bel’s; weak bel sees your liberty is emboldened to follow; your liberty leads him to sin; improper use of liberty is your sin; never eat meat again if it causes brother to sin.

c. Strong Believer: realizes that idols are nothing & what we eat/drink is nothing to God.

d. Strong/mature believer loves all believers & refuses to allow liberty to harm another.

1. Paul describes a weaker believer as one whose conscience remains in bondage to false religious beliefs, causing them to be unable to understand & accept the truth.

- Alcohol – Eph 5:18 don’t get drunk – if you use it, use it wisely in moderation.
- Cursing – Eph 5:29; issue with words is to use them carefully to edify others, not indulge self
- Believe things that are not sins to be sins – become sin for them if they do it

Rom 14:22-23 – whatever you believe about questionable issues, believe it with conviction as unto the Lord, if you go against your own conscience, in your heart you sin against God.

1Cor 8:9-11 – abuse your liberty, influence weaker believer to partake against his beliefs, he is ruined/destroyed/damaged by going against his own conscience.

2. **A Stronger Believer is one who has laid aside false ideas, learned, believed & embraced the truth of the word. 1Tim 1:5 cleansed heart, good conscience, faith w/out hypocrisy**

- Cleansed Heart – believer purifies beliefs, removing false ideas from religion/superstition
- Good Conscience – mechanism evaluates right/wrong with beliefs based on divine good
- Belief System Undivided – Agreement among individual beliefs; minus inner conflicts

Act 15:29; 21:25 - Jewish bel's AD 55 holding ML & false doctrine – Paul & Peter Gal 2:11-21

3. **Stronger Believers are required to guard expression of their liberties to avoid inappropriately influencing weaker Believer's to violate their own conscience. 1Cor 8:9-12**

- Watch out – awareness of the people around you, their status & what love requires
- Unrestrained, self-indulgent liberty in the wrong company is sinful behavior
- Behaviors in which we participate believing it is sin, becomes sin Rom 14:22-23

Law of Liberty: the freedom the believer has to enjoy the things of this life in moderation that religion often declares to be sinful. Foods, drinks, entertainments, dancing, cards

- Religion & ascetic trend believes that God's will rightly produces misery, not fun

Law of Expediency: do only that which is beneficial & edifies others. Restrain your freedoms for the sake of not inappropriately influencing a weaker believer to sin.

- Willingly setting aside the use of your freedom to avoid conflicting fellow believer

Law of Love: agape God the Holy Spirit develops a mind-set, attitude in the heart of believer that is a commitment to never for any reason, any circumstance to do harm & only do good to others

Col 3:12-14 And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of **compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience**; ¹³ **bearing with one another, and forgiving each other**, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you & over these virtues put on love, **which binds them all together in perfect unity.**

- Mind-Set: Committed to never do harm & only edify when seen in action (1Cor 13) incorporates all the fruits of the Spirit into a cohesive system of Christian behavior.
- Walking with God the Holy Spirit develops a habitual surrender that allows Him to spontaneously bring to mind/behavior both the viewpoint & virtues needed in the moment to edify another.