
BIBLE TALK

This week the question is: **What does the Bible teach about matters of liberty?**

The NT devotes four chapters to the subject of Christian liberties. These chapters are Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8, 9, and 10.

These chapters are not discussing matters of law. For example, baptism is a law of God.

- Baptism is commanded in Acts 2:38.
- It is required for the forgiveness of sin.
- Baptism is not a liberty. It is a requirement.

Therefore, the teachings of Rom 14 and 1 Cor 8, 9, and 10 do not apply to the subject of baptism.

Another example is the law of God concerning fornication. According to 1 Cor 6:9-10 it is sinful for anyone to have sex with another person they are not legally married to. Therefore, the teachings of Rom 14 and 1 Cor 8, 9, and 10 do not apply to the subject of fornication.

Rom 14 (and 1 Cor 8, 9, 10) apply to matters of liberty (matters of permission).

What Are Matters of Liberty?

Q: What are matters of liberty?

A: Matters of liberty are things which Christians are permitted to do, but are not required to do.

The examples given in scripture are:

- Whether to eat meat or to not eat meat (Rom 14:2-6).

- Whether to observe a holiday or not to observe the holiday (Rom 14:5-6).

In order for something to be a liberty, God has to say it's a liberty. In other words, God has to explicitly say in scripture or imply in scripture that an action is permitted. People are not allowed to decide for themselves if something is permissible to God (Col 3:17).

Defining Terms

Notice the passage:

Romans 14:1-2

¹ Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

² For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.

There are three terms which must defined here:

1) The word "faith."

In this passage the word "faith" does not refer to "saving faith." We know this because v22 says this:

Romans 14:22

²² Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

NASV

²² The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God.

Saving faith is something which we are commanded to share with other people (Mk 16:15). The "faith" mentioned in Rom 14 is a personal conviction concerning a matter of liberty. If a Christian is completely confident about participating in a liberty, then he has "faith" that what he's doing is the right thing. He needs to keep this personal confidence to himself because,

after all, this is simply a matter of liberty – he is not required to do it – and if it causes problems, he must refrain.

2) The word "weak."

Romans 14:1

¹ Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

In this passage, one who is "weak" in the faith is someone who has an overly sensitive conscience. All Christians should have sensitive consciences, but some have overly sensitive consciences. Some are convinced that eating any meat whatsoever would be wrong and so they refrain from all meat.

The point to remember here is that the "weak" person in this context is not someone who is unfaithful or someone who barely comes to church. This is not necessarily a recent convert. This is not an unreliable Christian. This is a faithful Christian with an overly scrupulous conscience – a conscience which will not allow him to participate with confidence in a matter of permission.

3) The word "strong."

Romans 15:1

¹ We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

The "strong" Christian is not a more reliable, more dedicated, more mature individual. In this context, the "strong" Christian is one who does not have an overly scrupulous conscience. (He has a scrupulous conscience, but not overly scrupulous.) This person feels very confident that eating meat is permissible and he can eat meat with a clear conscience.

Application

If you will take time to read the entire chapter of Rom 14, you will see all the rules and applications made concerning matters of liberty.

The keys to understanding this passage are:

- First, remember that the rules of Rom 14 apply only to matters which God has granted as permissions. We are not free to include matters of law in the teachings of this chapter.
- Second, remember that the "weak" brother is a good Christian with an overly scrupulous conscience. This person should never participate in anything which he has doubts about (Rom 14:23).
- Third, the "strong" brother is one who feels very confident in participating in a matter of permission, but he must refrain if, by practicing his liberty, he encourages someone else to participate in something they have doubts about (1 Cor 8:10-11).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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