

LIBERTY WITH A PURPOSE

Romans 14:22-15:6

How do we respond, when facing issues
not defined in God's Word?

Wide disagreements exist over many practices.

At international gathering of missionaries,

Woman from Orient didn't feel free to wear sandals

Canadian thought it worldly to wear wedding ring,

European woman thought it immoral not to wear a ring

Danish man upset by British students playing soccer

British students struggled over his pipe smoking.

No one thinks OUR issue is debatable

If I want to do something,

the rules are stupid—they're "legalistic!"

If I don't think Christians should do it, to do it is carnal!

So, how do we decide what we ought to do?

If God has spoken, DO what God says.

Someday we're going to wake up & realize our country is *NOT*
committed to what God says!

But WE, as **God's people, must be!**

Paul talked to God's people about doing what God says in
pagan, sex-saturated Corinth & Nero's Rome

In Middle East, people are beheaded for Jesus' name;

It may cost us to take a stand for what God says.

We may lose business; lose our jobs; suffer ridicule.

We *could* suffer physical persecution.

It shouldn't surprise us when pagans act like pagans!

God's concern: when His people act like pagans!

Will we establish reputation for **doing what GOD says?**

–*Whatever* it may cost?

God says: rather than *murmur against* leaders, pray for them!

Pray that God's will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

...that He be glorified–*through us!*

If God has spoken, we do what God says!

But *today* we're talking about...

What we do when God *doesn't* tell us what to do

When God's people *disagree* about what He says, or about **how to apply** what God says,

2 principles we've seen:

1. Don't judge others!

Let *God* speak to them! 1-13

2. Avoid anything which causes others to stumble 13-21

[Rom 1-11 =>]

Salvation by faith has freed us

Neither sin nor law have dominion over us.

We have liberty because we're in Christ;

Reasons God has given for this freedom

1. Our liberty is not intended to allow us to do whatever we feel like doing.

Freedom shouldn't be pretext to satisfy *our* desires!

Gal. 5:13 "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature [= flesh => to do what WE want to do!]; rather, serve one another in love."

We don't have freedom so we can do anything we feel like

Our liberty has specific, God-defined purposes:

2. We have liberty to please God 22-23 *“Whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself & God. Blessed is the man who doesn’t condemn himself by what he approves. ²³But the man who has doubts is con-demned if he eats, because his eating isn’t from faith; & everything that doesn’t come from faith is sin.”*

Be sure you trust God concerning what you do!

We’re not to judge others; we *are* to judge *ourselves*!

*Does what we do **please GOD**?!*

We’re content when we’re convinced we’re doing what’s right –we know we’re pleasing God

Don’t do anything that causes us to doubt,

–leaves our conscience uncom-fortable! 23

We’re condemned when *we* have doubts about what we do!

When we’re unsure–& do it

–We’re not at peace

Confidence to enter God’s presence based on faith

Don’t do *anything* that harms that confidence

Any activity that leaves conscience uneasy is sin for us!

=> **2nd principle**–2-edged sword.

Some translations present this as ?

“Do you have faith?”

Great! Keep it between you & God!

Enjoy that trust in your personal relationship with God

Each one be sure we're in a place to **please God**.

Isn't whole picture.

Consider **welfare of others** also.

If I'm sure God isn't trying to change my conduct;

if HE's content with what I'm doing,

I can be confident in my relationship with God.

World's axiom:

"IF YOU'VE GOT IT, FLAUNT IT!"

That idea doesn't fly with God's people.

Paul advises: Better keep knowledge to self so I don't cause *others* to fall—even when what we do is good in itself—

we should avoid *anything* that will harm a brother.

If someone sees *us* do something *they* consider wrong, & imitates our example, for them it's sin; *they* can't do it by faith.

=> Our good thing becomes bad for them

Paul will **do NOTHING that causes another to fall** 21

"It's good not to eat meat or drink wine

or do anything that causes your brother to stumble."

Everything we do without faith is sin

[because of that] strong people

should protect weaker people!

We give up our rights for good of the weak,

so we don't get in their way & cause them to fall! =>

3. We have liberty in order to please others 1-4

Previous principle leads to conscience free from sin:

15:1a Moves issue to another level: “*We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak.*”

Responsibility falls on people who have confidence to do something, on **the strong**, to watch out for the weak.

People who have faith to participate are under obligation to watch out for those who don't

It's our responsibility *to carry the burden* for them.

We lay aside *OUR* desire; seek their welfare

Don't live to please yourself 1b “*We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, & not to please ourselves.*”

Live to please our neighbor—so *they* become all God wants *them* to be

2 “*Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.*”

Natural tendency: want to enjoy our rights.

Something's more important than my rights.

Building up *others* more important

We give up our rights, seek to please our brother so *he* may be built up—become all God wants him to be

Imitate Christ's example 3-4 “*Christ **didn't** please **himself**, but as it's written, “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” ...*

Who had more cause to insist on *his* rights than Jesus?

He gave Himself, became man & died on the cross.

Our welfare's more important than His rights Phil. 2:5-8

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷but made himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸& being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself & became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”

If Christ was willing to give up *His* rights because *our* edification was more important than *HIS* rights,

how much should WE be willing to give up?

If Christ insisted on *His* rights, where would we be?

Christ didn't live to please Himself. 3a

We shouldn't live to please ourselves either.

Jesus bore insults of crowd for Father's sake & for ours

His example encourages US to persevere for others, with a view to our future hope. 4 *“Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance & the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

We look beyond present –beyond sacrifices we make

Christ's example in the past

Gives us patience & motivation in present which leads to hope for the future

Today also, God gives us patience & encouragement;

He teaches *us* to think as Christ thought.

GOD produces that attitude in us!

Paul's desire is that God use biblical example to produce in *us* willingness to give up our rights.

4. We have liberty to live in harmony 5-6 “May the God who gives endurance & encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

He’s source of patient endurance & encouragement

His example motivates *us* to harmony

Ultimately, **HE’s glorified** by our unity =>

5. We have liberty to glorify God 6 “that with 1 heart & mouth **you may glorify** the God & Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Together we recognize what God has accomplished in us:

**Unity that results
when we give up our rights
glorifies God**

Review 5 principles for dealing with debatable issues:

1. Don’t judge others.
2. Avoid anything which might cause others to stumble
3. Use our liberty to please God.
4. Use our liberty to live in harmony with each other.
5. Use our liberty for God’s glory.

NOW IT’S TIME FOR A TEST:

Consider **YOUR** issue:

Identify which you are [*in this issue*]: **weak** or **strong**.

If we apply these principles, how should a _____
(weak/strong) person respond in this situation?

How will we respond if we don't apply them?
***If BOTH groups practice these principles, what difference will
there be in lifestyle of strong & weak?***
So what does God want ME to do about it?