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Walking the Line of Liberty and Love

Romans 14:13-23

INTRO: As a child of God I have tremendous freedom, freedom to enjoy life, to enjoy good clean fun and Christian fellowship. Under the New Covenant, I do not have to follow the dietary laws of the Old Covenant; I can eat and enjoy fish that have no scales (catfish, shark); I am free to eat shellfish (oysters and shrimp). I am free to enjoy all the good gifts of God, but I am not free to sin! Nor am I free to cause the weaker brother to stumble. I am not free to hurt, shame, or badger the weaker child of God.

The Bible tells me that I have freedom in Christ, freedom to enjoy fellowship with Him because I am in Him. I am a new creature in Christ (I Cor 5:17), and I am not to get entangled again in religion (Gal 5:1). "God's desire is that we enjoy our freedom in Christ. And yet without self-imposed limits, we risk becoming selfish islands and careless rebels with little regard for others" (Swindoll 38).

I. VS 13, PAUL'S EXHORTATION: "Don't cause your brother to stumble."

A. This verse opens with the words, "Let us not therefore judge another any more."

1. This means that they were judging one another.
2. The weak were to stop being critical of the strong, and the strong were to stop finding fault with the weak.
3. The church at Rome was a local, visible church, and Paul is saying that the critical spirit is not good for the local body.
4. Some folks spend most of their time griping, criticizing, and complaining. If you stay around critical folks, you too will become very critical and unhappy.

B. We need to be sure we do not cause our brother to stumble.

1. J. Frank Norris said: "Just let some new convert see one of the old members do something that shakes their faith! Just let them hear the old man or woman criticize somebody in the church....that is what is meant by a stumbling block" (211).
2. Listen to the words of I Cor 8:9: "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak."
 - a) Our actions could cause a weak brother to stumble into sin.
 - b) "The same principles applies to any activity or practice that is not inherently sinful. Problem areas vary from society to society and from person to person; but the principle never changes" (MacArthur 291).

- II. VSS 14-15, PAUL'S STRONG ASSERTION, "Don't grieve your brother."
- A. Vs 14, What a strong assertion; distinction of foods are groundless. Not everybody sees it; yet it is true. If you want to eat chitterlings, be my guest!
1. Paul's persuasion was based on the teaching of Jesus (Matt 15:10, 16-20).
 2. Keep in mind that those things that are clearly sin are not a matter of opinion.
 3. Paul was persuaded that Christ, not diet, would get him to heaven (II Tim 1:12).
- B. Vs 15, We are not to intentionally hurt our brother by the food we eat or the things we do.
1. Love says be kind and tenderhearted.
 2. The weak Christian is grieved when he hears an older Christian say something that is dirty or destructive. He is grieved when he sees a older Christian do something that is wrong, or something that he considers to be sin. The hurt and pain is worse when the weaker Christian is offended by the actions of an older respected believer.
 3. Because of your selfishness, you can destroy or ruin a weaker brother. Church spats over things can cause much pain.
 - a) Destroy- to seriously damage the spiritual growth of the weak.
 - b) To hurt one of the elect is serious business.
- III. VS 16, PAUL URGES: "Don't harm your testimony."
- A. There are things that can harm your testimony.
1. Being a mean, fighting fundamentalist will hurt you. If you are against everything and constantly stir things up, if you are in a kickative mood, folks will see do's and don't's but not the Gospel.
 2. There are lots of things that you could do that will not harm you, but you are to refrain from them because they will hurt your testimony.
- B. The good that can be evil spoken of, I believe is the Gospel.
1. Paul called it, "my Gospel" (Rom 16:23; II Tim 2:8).
 2. Eph 1:13, "The gospel of your salvation...."
 3. Paul was willing to suffer all things that the Gospel be not hindered (I Cor 9:12).
- IV. VSS 17-18, PAUL DECLARES THE TRUTH ABOUT THE KINGDOM
- A. The kingdom of God is not meat and drink. The way to heaven is Christ. The royal reign of God in our hearts is not based on food and drink.
- B. What the kingdom is:
1. Righteousness- to be right with God. The only way to be right with God is to be justified (Rom 5:1).
 2. Peace comes when we are justified.

3. Joy- this is what we have when we know Christ (I Pet 1:8).
4. No one can see the kingdom of God without being born again (John 3:3).

C. Vs 18, Folks despise that which is phony and hypocritical, but appreciate the real believer.

1. When we serve Christ in accordance with what we have received (vs 17), we are well pleasing to God.
2. Our walk and talk are important.

V. VSS 19-21, PAUL'S URGENT PLEA: "Don't destroy the work of God."

A. Vs 19, Christians are to pursue those things that make for peace. The believer needs to steer away from unnecessary conflict.

1. The church needs to aim for that which produces peace.
2. Edify- this means to build up. This is something that is not finished; it is a lifelong process.
 - a) The main building material for us is love (Eph 4:16).
 - b) Many want to build with knowledge, but knowledge puffs up the person who has it. But love builds up: "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth" (I Cor 8:1b).

B. Vs 20, We are to build up the work of God, not tear it down.

1. There are more things than food that can destroy the work.
2. Remember this: when you let pride and selfishness tear down the church, you are tearing down the work of God.

C. Vs 21, We are not to cause the weak ones, the little ones, to stumble (I Cor 8:1).

VI. VSS 22-23, PAUL'S REMINDER TO THE SAINTS AT ROME

A. Vs 22, "The believer should be able to look back on his conduct without any qualms of conscience" (McGee 744). There are things we can do that make us unhappy, they make us sad. We are happy when we do right.

B. Vs 23, We are to believe in what we are doing. If you don't believe it is right, you ought not to do it. We are saved by faith; we are to walk by faith.

CONCLUSION: Our conduct will either build up or tear down the work of God.