

Doctrine of Liberty versus License

Introduction

1. There are essential matters concerning which a Christian may not compromise and then there are the non-essentials or "gray areas."

2. The essentials involve specific prohibitions in the Word.

2.1 There are non-essentials like using expletives, drinking alcohol in moderation, praying out loud over your food etc.

2.2 Although these non-essentials are not prohibited in the Word, on occasion they may become offensive to a fellow believer.

2.3 Even socializing with certain people who do questionable things may be offensive to others.

2.4 There are many essentials mentioned in Scripture that demand separation.

2.5 Many such essentials are obvious like idolatry, crime, drunkenness etc. but there are other more subtle essentials requiring separation such as legalism.

Rom 16:17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

Rom 16:18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

2.6 Often the non-essential conduct of others demand separation and it is here that discernment and expertise on the part of fellow Christians is required.

2.7 The application of Liberty versus License will become perspicuous as you ingest and metabolize doctrine. We have an obligation to be discerning and expert.

3. This doctrine relates to two specific non-essentials found in Scriptures. There will no doubt be more than two encountered as we live our Christian lives. Paul in his epistles to Corinth and Rome establishes principles to follow as we become "our brother's keeper."

3.1 This doctrine will teach that a Christian may need to eschew certain conduct permitted by the Scripture, but because of the ignorance of our "neighbor," certain restrains may be required.

3.2 In the faith there are all levels of Christian growth. People are constantly moving toward and away from spiritual maturity.

3.3 Liberty versus license is best taught in 1Co 8:1-13; 1Co 10:23-33; and Rom 14:12-21. Let's look at these Scriptures, first as an overview and then we will develop some principles later.

1Co 8:1 Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

1Co 8:2 The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.

1Co 8:3 But the man who loves God is known by God.

1Co 8:4 So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one.

1Co 8:5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"),

1Co 8:6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

1Co 8:7 But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.

1Co 8:8 But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

1Co 8:9 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

1Co 8:10 For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols?

1Co 8:11 So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.

1Co 8:12 When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

1Co 8:13 Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

1Co 10:23 "Everything is permissible"--but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"--but not everything is constructive.

1Co 10:24 Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

1Co 10:25 Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience,

1Co 10:26 for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

1Co 10:27 If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.

1Co 10:28 But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake--

1Co 10:29 the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience?

1Co 10:30 If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?

1Co 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

1Co 10:32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God--
1Co 10:33 even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

Rom 14:12 So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Rom 14:13 Therefore 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.

Rom 14:14 As 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.

Rom 14:15 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.

Rom 14:16 Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil.

Rom 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,

Rom 14:18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

Rom 14:19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Rom 14:20 Do 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.

Rom 14:21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

Background

1. There were great idolatrous temples in Corinth with a cafe, temple and fornication area.
2. There was also a meat market outside the temple where meat was sold.
3. Many Christian converts came from these idolatrous religious backgrounds.
4. Many of these converts had strong feelings about the practices associated with the idol worship and their role in the abominations.
5. They were offended by anyone who would eat at the temple cafe or buy meat in the market outside the temple.
6. There were on the other hand certain believers who saw nothing wrong with buying the meat since to their mind there were no such thing as an idol and therefore why not?
7. A schism developed over this matter which for some was an essential and for others a liberty.
8. Paul was apparently asked to adjudicate.

Principles

1. He begins his judicial opinion by asserting that knowledge of doctrine carries with it certain responsibilities.

1Co 8:1 Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge (**Gnosis**). Knowledge (**Gnosis**) puffeth up, but charity (**Agape**) edifieth.

1Co 8:2 The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.

1Co 8:3 But the man who loves God is known by God.

2 He then teaches that an idol is nothing and therefore the group partaking of the meat is on solid doctrinal ground technically speaking.

1Co 8:4 So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one.

1Co 8:5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"),

1Co 8:6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

3. Paul next however concludes that not everyone has this maturity and that there are those who are offended albeit in error.

1Co 8:7 There is not in every man the knowledge that idols are nothing: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

4. The great Apostle then opines that eating or not eating does not recommend anyone to God.

1Co 8:8 But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we do not eat, are we the worse.

5. Paul then issues the bitter medicine to the eaters: refrain from eating because of your weaker brother.

1Co 8:9 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

1Co 8:10 For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols?

1Co 8:11 So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.

1Co 8:12 When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

5.1 We may have liberty to do something but there is never a general license; each situation requires discernment.

6. In verse 8:13 Paul explains why.

1Co 8:13 Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

7. In verses 1Co 10:23-33 Paul uses this same example to teach flexibility and how Christianity is not an easy relationship to apply in time.

7.1 When you go to the meat market says Paul “Don't ask whether the meat has been sacrificed to idols or not sacrificed to idols.”

1Co 10:23 "Everything is permissible"--but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"--but not everything is constructive.

1Co 10:24 Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

1Co 10:25 it is certainly ok to eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience,

7.1.1 He then continues, “Do you want the meat to be the issue to the outside world or do you want Christ to be that issue. Do not for example make this an issue before the clerk in the store, just buy what you want.”

7.2 Paul then asks "What if someone asks you to dinner, is the meat going to be the subject of the conversation?" I should hope not says Paul.

1Co 10:27 If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.

7.3 What however if the unbeliever host asks you about eating the meat as though he or she is testing you? “Don't eat says Paul.”

1Co 10:28 But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake--

1Co 10:29 the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience?

7.4 “You must be flexible” says Paul “Make Christ the issue and not the meat.”

1Co 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

1Co 10:32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God--

1Co 10:33 even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

8. The same lesson is taught by Paul to the Church at Rome.

8.1 Here however the drinking of wine is added to the teaching example.

8.2 None of us can live our lives unto ourselves.

8.3 You must not judge others but rather judge yourself says Paul so that you do not offend a weaker brother in Christ.

Rom 14:13 Let us not therefore judge one another anymore: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

8.4 Paul tells those in the Church at Rome that there are weaker brothers out there.

Rom 14:14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

Rom 14:15 But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.

8.5 Under the same principle of not casting your pearls before swine we must not let that which is a non-essential (but a correct principle) be ridiculed by the “ignorant” Christian.

Rom 14:16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of:

Rom 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

8.6 By correctly applying this doctrine we can be approved of both God and man but it does require flexibility.

Rom 14:18 For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

Rom 14:19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

Rom 14:20 For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offense.

8.7 Now we have the 20th century example of wine added to the meat list.

Rom 14:21 It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

Conclusion

1. It is certainly true we live our lives unto the Lord. It is also true; however, that living the Christian life also includes applying impersonal love toward all people but especially fellow believers.

Rom 15:1 We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

Rom 15:2 Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification.

Rom 15:3 For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.

2. The test of flexibility is very difficult because many weak believers and unbelievers may try to impose their standards on you and you may be tempted to react.

3. Our job is to relax and let doctrine have a chance to change us all and this demands flexibility concerning the non-essentials.