

The Greatest Story (Part 43):

Christian Liberty For God's Glory

1 Corinthians 10:23-33

Memory Verses: 1 Corinthians 10:31

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

Two weeks ago we dove into Romans 8 and saw how we as born again followers of Christ, we must choose to yield to Holy Spirit in order to activate the abundant life. We must choose to abandon religion in order to have a relationship. We must choose to abandon the flesh in order to yield to the Spirit and live in righteousness. We must choose to listen to Holy Spirit and be encouraged and empowered by his voice. We do these things and we will experience the abundant life which Christ promised us. But it's not automatic. If we just put our christian life on auto pilot rather than manually choosing to put our lives in Holy Spirit gear everyday we will miss out on the abundant life. So put it in gear everyday.

Then last week we grouped up and got real about seeing the Lost in our community saved through relational outreach. I hope you enjoyed that more intimate time... you never know when we might do that again. It could be next week. But for now I want us to go back to the Holy Spirit.

So.. Holy Spirit helps us have abundant life... and as we will see this morning, Holy Spirit helps us to deny ourselves. You see, we must deny ourselves certain rights for the sake of the Gospel and God's glory. Often we don't equate abundant life with denying ourselves... but in order to truly be free of the bondage of sin, there are times we must deny ourselves of things that aren't actually sin.

I have been in countless **conversations** with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ concerning this very topic. The conversation usually starts out like this; "is it wrong for a Christian to _____." It could be drink, or smoke, or cuss, or eat shell fish, or read a certain version of the Bible, or get a Tattoo. And then one person will acknowledge that the Bible doesn't necessarily say that those things are a sin, and another person will bring up the fact that we aren't under Old Testament law anymore. And then another person will bring up the fact that Christ says that our bodies are the Temple of the Holy Spirit and that we should have better discernment. And then one person makes the statement that if you do _____ then you are a sinner. And the other person says... well it's my personal liberty and I can do it if I want to... it's my right and if it's not clearly a sin then you can't stop me.

Have you ever been in this conversation before? Some people

would call the topic of these conversations; these personal Christian liberties, "grey areas." They aren't specifically wrong and they aren't specifically right. They aren't black or white but somewhere in the middle. And it is only through an understanding of scripture and the guidance of Holy Spirit that we can even begin to wade through these grey waters.

This morning I want us to see exactly what scripture says concerning our own personal Christian liberties... these grey areas that some claim as a right while others claim as a sin. And what we will see here is the words of **Martin Luther: "A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone."** In other words... **In Christ You Are Free To Live In Christian Liberty. In Christ You Are To Deny Your Christian Liberty For The Sake Of The Gospel**

Turn over with me to **1 Corinthians 10:23-33** and let us see three principles for the exercise of Christian Liberty.

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing we see here is that... **You Shouldn't Flaunt Your Christian Liberty**. It's quite fine and a good thing to recognize a Christian liberty that you have... it is a gift from God, that when personally enjoyed as a gift from God gives him glory. Look at the first part of **vs23** – all things are lawful. You are allowed to have Christian liberties. All things not specifically labeled as sin are allowed for the Christian.

But when you flaunt them you can do more harm than good. Look at the next part of **vs23** – but not all things are helpful. Unhelpful to you and unhelpful to others. For instance **1 Cor 6:12** says that your christian liberties can enslave you just like sin. You can be dominated by things that aren't sin. Meaning... anything can become a sin if you are dominated by it... if it has a hold on your life... if it becomes an idol. You've heard the phrase "all things in moderation." Well thats true. In moderation your Christian liberty can be fine... but if you find yourself "having" to do it... well now it's become something that is a hinderance to your walk with Christ. When you HAVE to exercise your Christian liberty then you are in bondage to the very thing you insist on doing. Look at **Romans 14:17**. If all you are concerned about is drinking / your Christian liberty... you've missed the point of the gospel. It's about his glory... not your liberty.

So your Christian liberty, if flaunted, can be harmful to you... but also to others. There are certain Christian liberties that if flaunted can be unhelpful to others. Look again at **verse 23**. They are lawful but might not build up. **Ro 14:19** asks us this question... if you flaunt your liberties will it help make others stronger in Christ... will it encourage others if you flaunt your liberty. If it doesn't... if it actually does the opposite... you shouldn't do it. When partaking of your Liberty... are you building up Christ or yourself?

Bottom line is that you should keep your beliefs concerning your Christian Liberties between you and God – **Ro 14:22**. If you make it a public thing then you can cause divisions in the body, and you can cause unnecessary judgment on yourself. The point being... **You don't always have to exercise your liberty in order to enjoy it**. Simply enjoy it privately. **In Christ You Are Free To Live In Christian Liberty. In Christ You Are To Deny Your Christian Liberty For The Sake Of The Gospel**

The second thing we see here is that... **You Shouldn't Allow Your Christian Liberty Cause Someone To Stumble**. Look at **vs24**. We aren't to seek our own good but that of others. Christianity isn't about getting our way, but about drawing others to Christ no matter what. If we exercise our liberty in front of non-believers we may cause them to stumble and never truly accept Christ. Look at **vs28**. If you have no problem with eating meat sacrificed to idols... good... that's your liberty. But if you do it around a non-believer then you may muddy the waters for them as to what Christianity truly is. They may believe that... "hey he is eating food that he knows was sacrificed to our god... so I guess being a Christian means you can worship as many gods as you want." You see how it gets confusing. For the sake of the Gospel we must abstain from liberties in their presence that may muddy the waters of Christianity.

Our love for the lost and Christ is way more important than the use of our personal liberty. Look at **1Cor 8:1**. It tells us that we have a personal knowledge of our christian liberty but love is more important than our christian liberty. Meaning... we don't exercise it when the Gospel is on the line! Look down at **vs. 32-33**. We are to give no offense to Jews or Greeks, the lost, in order that they may be saved. It's not about me its about them... it's about the gospel... it's about God's glory.

But it's not just about causing non-believers to stumble. If you aren't careful you could cause your brothers and sisters in Christ to fall into sin and wander from Christ. Look at **1 Cor 8:13**. Paul says that if by using his Christian liberty it causes a brother to stumble then he will never do it again. Look at **Ro 14:13** – there are liberties that if you exercise them could cause your brother or sister to betray their conscience... or cause them to fall into sin. You say.. how does this work. Well let's take the most common illustration... a brother in Christ sees you drinking a beer. He feels convicted that for him that is a sin... but when he sees you drinking it he says... what the heck... If he thinks its alright then it must be okay. By doing so he sins against his conscience and feels guilty. He also doesn't know how to handle the responsibility of drinking alcohol and becomes drunk... which is an absolute sin. You are now responsible before God for having caused your brother to sin twice. In the extreme case.. whats if he becomes an alcoholic. Now you are responsible for a

causing your brother to fall into a terrible skid that may never end except by the grace of God. Or how about my example. I started smoking when I was 13. I stopped when I went into full time ministry in 2002. At the time I stopped I was fully addicted and still cheated from time to time. I was quit until 2006, four whole years, when between ministries I was working a regular job and a co-worker of mine when on his smoke break and offered me a cigarette. Little did he know that by offering me that cigarette I would be fully addicted again, smoking up to 2 packs a day, for the next year. He had no idea how I would stumble.... but stumble I did. **You may have the right to exercise your liberty but you don't have the right to cause someone to stumble**. **In Christ You Are Free To Live In Christian Liberty. In Christ You Are To Deny Your Christian Liberty For The Sake Of The Gospel**

Thirdly, **You Shouldn't Discriminate Based On Christian Liberty**. We've all been there. You go to a gathering with some friends and you are offered a beer and you say no thanks. They say... what... you don't drink? And then you stand there all sheepish like... yes. And then you aren't asked to come back to the next gathering. I remember being asked to go out to eat with a family at our previous church. We really liked them and wanted to be friends with them. They took us out to a very nice restaurant and as soon as we sat down they asked... should we get some wine. Me and Lisa said.. no thanks. And then they, knowing that we weren't going to drink, gave us the face like... well then that means we can't drink. They felt put out... even though we weren't judging them at all. Needless to say... we weren't invited to dinner again. **Christian liberty does not mean that you welcome fellow Christians only when you have sorted out their views on X or Y.**

Look at **vs25-27**. When you go to dinner with someone... just go with the flow and don't make a big deal about it. This way issues of Christian liberty don't become a problem, and your conscience is clear and so is theirs. If the issues come up anyway... welcome them anyway. **Ro 14:1,3** tells us that Christ welcomes them just as they are and so should we. We don't have to agree on the issue but we can agree on unity in Christ. And we shouldn't judge - **Ro 14:4**. I've been judged for not drinking, and I've judged others who have had a drink... this shouldn't be.

So the question remains... **Can you be in Christian unity with those who exercise different Christian liberties than you?** If Christ is the common denominator... and they aren't in blatant sin... you had better find a way to make it work... because it glorifies God. **In Christ You Are Free To Live In Christian Liberty. In Christ You Are To Deny Your Christian Liberty For The Sake Of The Gospel**

Application (Resolution, You)

The bottom line is this... Is the exercise of your Christian liberty healthy for you? Is it healthy for others? Are you becoming enslaved to something? Remember we shouldn't be dominated by anything other than Christ! Is your Christian liberty causing the lost to stumble? Is it causing your brothers and sisters in Christ to stumble? Everything we do we should do it, not for our own benefit or pleasure... but for the glory of God. - **1 Cor 10:31**. When you exercise your Christian liberty is it hindering the glory of God? Then you shouldn't do it!

Perhaps the greatest way you can bring God glory is by denying yourself something that you personally are allowed. By refraining from your liberty you may in fact be helping to lead someone to Christ. By refraining from your liberty you may in fact be helping a brother or sister continue in their transformation for Christ. That's way more important than you exercising your rights... right? **In Christ You Are Free To Live In Christian Liberty. In Christ You Are To Deny Your Christian Liberty For The Sake Of The Gospel**

Conclusion

So what are your Christian Liberties? Alcohol, smoking, chewing, going to R-rated movies, cursing, gambling, not wearing a tie to church, or maybe wearing shorts to church, or physical stuff like kissing before marriage. Whatever it is... you need to recognize what yours are... and what yours aren't... And then you need to resolve to lay them down if need be for the glory of God. The biggest question you need to answer is this... How are you allowing a focus on the Glory of God to direct the way you handle these liberties in your life? **In Christ You Are Free To Live In Christian Liberty. In Christ You Are To Deny Your Christian Liberty For The Sake Of The Gospel**