***We Should not Judge Weaker Christians
RO176-02***

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Please open your Bibles to Romans 14:13-23, as we begin today a new section. Our subject is "Christian Consideration." This is segment number one.

**Weak Christians**

The apostle Paul has observed, in Romans 14:1-12, that Christians have different opinions on what constitutes proper Christian conduct. The spiritually immature Christians have a lot of misconceptions about what pleases God, so they are the subject of many unbiblical hangups. Immature Christians, Paul has called here in the Romans 14, "weak Christians." They have not progressed very far in the spiritual life, and they have limited understanding of what their freedom and liberties are in Christ. Therefore, they are very religious, but it's a great deal of human religion that they have created for themselves, and God has nothing to do with it.

It is very important for you to understand that in the vast number of religious activities (church activities) that exist in the United States today, God has very little to do with most of them. They are human operations with human hangups.

Paul illustrates this problem by pointing out that some Christians eat meat, while others feel that that displeases God, so they are vegetarians. Another illustration that Paul uses is that some Christians consider certain days, like Sunday; Christmas; and, Easter as special holy days, which restrict their activities in some way, while other Christians treat every day alike. The weak Christian thinks that are holy days. The strong Christian knows that there is no such thing – that every day is a holy day unto the Lord.

Under the system of Judaism, there were holy feasts, and there were holy days. There were all pictures of Christ and what He was going to do. Having come, all that has been wiped out. To continue it is an insult to the living God.

Paul says that there are we Christians, and we have to live with them. They think that they must go to church on certain days because they're holy days. Now how are we going to deal with those people? What should our attitude toward them?

Paul says that in the present age of the church, every Christian is now free to follow his own preference in these matters, because these are non-moral and non-doctrinal issues. This is not a matter of what's right and wrong. When God has declared something that is right, and something that is wrong, then the issue is settled. But where God has not spoken in Scripture, then the issue is left up to the individual believer, between you and the Lord as to what you feel is acceptable for you to do in any particular situation.

Christians follow a certain lifestyle because they seek to please God their Father. And Paul says that we should remember that even about the weak Christian. Yes, he does crazy things. Yes, he has stupid hangups. Yes, he won't wash his car on Sunday, but we recognize that he's doing that because he wants to please the Lord. And we say, "OK, we accept you in Christian love on that basis, even though it is all right to wash your car on Sunday, because Sunday is not the Sabbath day. It is a totally different day. It is not a day of restriction. As the Sabbath was. It is a day of great freedom and of great personal joy in the Lord.

Therefore, Paul says that since Christians have these differences, they should not condemn each other in these matters, but they should leave it up to the Lord to deal with any individual Christians if he is out of line in something that he is doing.

**The Judgment Seat of Christ**

Paul further says that both the spiritually weak and the spiritually strong Christians belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is their Lord. For this reason, He is the final judge of each Christian's lifestyle in Jesus Christ. This judgment of the Christians is going to take place in heaven after the rapture of the church, when the church has been caught up to meet the Lord in the air. There is, of course, no such thing as a judgment day in the Bible. That is one of the old fallacies that was brought down from the Reformation era. There are a series of judgments that we actually face. And we Christians will face one of them. We will suddenly, at any moment, be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and then we will enter heaven. Then we will face what the Bible calls the Judgment Seat of Christ that point your life will be evaluated for what you did with your time; your talents; and, your treasures.

**Salvation**

The issue grace salvation will not come up. That issue is settled here on earth. Once you have trusted in Jesus Christ as personal Savior, the issue is settled. You can never again lose your salvation. That's why the Bible describes it as being born again. Anybody knows that you cannot cause a baby to be unborn once he has been born. It is a permanent relationship.

**Our Works**

So, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, which takes place in heaven, we will not be dealing with the question of salvation, but we will be dealing with the question of the quality of our works. And there are two kinds of works. There are divine good works, which are the works which God has led us to do. And there are human good works, which is what we have ourselves, through our own sin nature, been encouraged and propelled to do. Divine good works, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, are going to receive rewards, while the human good works, produced by our old sin nature, will suffer loss of rewards. We have that describe for us in 1 Corinthians 3:9-15. And we have looked at that in detail in the past few sessions.

**Rewards and Loss**

I want to remind you again, however, that the two keywords in that passage (and you need to read it carefully) – the two keywords are "rewards" and "loss." And that makes you uncomfortable, then you'll have to deal with it. You don't have to believe what I tell you. All you have to do is read the Scripture, and decide what God is telling you there. And what He is telling you there is that some people are going to come to heaven, and God is going to say, "Well done, you good and faithful servant. You have stored churches in heaven, and I have a reward for you. And you will be an enriched Christian in heaven. You're going to have something more than the other believers have.

Then the kicker in all that, as I showed you in the last session, in the book of the Revelation, is that when the Christians are brought back from heaven with the Lord to the earth, they are wearing their divine good works. And the Bible says, "They're clothed in their garments of righteousnesses (plural), so that we will indeed form our own style fashions. The loss has to do with what could have been for the works that God has designed, and which you did not execute.

So, we're talking about serious business that, unfortunately, most Christians are not even aware of. And yet, when they get to heaven, they're going to say, "I wish somebody had taught me that doctrine. I just wish I had understood. Then I would have known what to do with my life."

So, Paul says, in view of this issue, that you should not be so concerned about what other people do, and about criticizing weaker Christians for their spiritual hangups. Instead, Paul's point is that you better worry about yourself, and about your own works and your own lifestyle, because someday you will answer to God for what you did with your time; your talents; and, your treasures. Someday, as a matter of fact, Paul has pointed out every human being, whether in heaven or in hell, will bow in objection to Jesus Christ, and will confess that he is Lord of all.

**We Should not Judge**

Today we begin a new section at Romans 14:13. The apostle Paul says, "Let us not therefore judge." The word "therefore" is referring back to what he has just said in verse 12. It's an inference that he is drawing. Verse 12 says, "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." Paul says, "Since that is the case, what should we conclude?" Since we Christians are going to answer for our own lives to Jesus Christ, then we should respond to the activities of other people in a certain way. And what he says is that: "We should not judge." The word "judge" is this word "krino." This word in the Greek Bible means "to judge in the sense of criticism and condemnation." It refers here to Christians passing judgment on what the weak Christians do. It is an exhortation to us that we should not be criticizing and judging Christians who are immature, and who have spiritual hangups. They do not understand the freedoms and liberties that they have in Christ. But that's OK. Let them do what they feel they must do in order to please the Lord.

It so happens that in the Greek Bible, the grammatical form here indicates to us that the Christians in the city of Rome, to whom Paul was writing, were already doing this thing. So, that actually what he is telling them is: "Stop it." And this is in the form of a command: "You Christians in Rome, you're criticizing and condemning these weak Christians, and you shouldn't do that, so just stop it." It was already in force" "Stop judging; condemning; and, criticizing one another. But instead." And then he uses this same word "judge" again ("krino"). Except this time, it has a different meaning. This time it has the idea of determining something. And again, it's an exhortation: "Let us not, therefore, judge in the sense of condemning (criticizing) one another anymore, but judge (that is, determine) to do something else, rather than criticize the weaker brother. Do this, rather, instead.

We could translate this in this way: "Therefore, let us stop passing judgment on one another, but rather decide to do this. Decide to avoid passing judgment on weak Christians in matters of personal choices between themselves and God." Some ladies will not come to church without a hat on their head. Some ladies understand that the apostle Paul has said, "A woman's covering is her long hair. Therefore, to wear long hair is a sign that you have assumed the role of the effeminate female position. That's why the same 1 Corinthians 14 passage says, "It is an enormous shame for a man to walk in wearing female style hair."

However, now some woman wants to come to church wearing a hat, and what are we going to do? You could say in grace, "You don't have to wear that hat." We have a family that periodically visits us here in the church, and that have a bunch of little girls, and they bring them, and they all wear little hats. And what should we do about that? You could say, "Take that hat off. In grace you don't need that anymore. Your hair is your covering that indicates your subjection to the authority of your husband, and to male spiritual leadership. And if you have long hair, then you do belong in the subjective female category, and you take that role of subjection to the male authority." No, wear all the hats you want. And don't wear the hats you want. How shall you dress when you come to church?

Sometimes people say to me, "I just wish so-and-so wouldn't wear those blue jeans to church." Some of you come in very relaxed. We haven't had anybody come in with just wearing a barrel yet. We might draw the line there. But it's between you and the Lord. If you want to come in here looking like a bum, that's OK with us. We all recognize that that's what you look like. You have these freedoms in Christ. These are irrelevant, neutral issues. The Bible has not said, "Come to church wearing a tuxedo."

In Chicago, I used to admire the great Dr. Ironside at the Moody Memorial church, because it was a very large church in downtown Chicago. And when Dr. Ironside stood up in the pulpit, he wore a Prince Albert coat, with tails and everything. I loved it. You know, every time you sit down, you have to flip the tails out. I've wanted to do that for a long time, and maybe I will someday. I haven't gotten to it yet. But some people would be offended by that.

Some people are offended by the fact that you don't have robes in the pulpit. These are irrelevancies. If you want it, fine. You should understand that it is not an issue with God. It's only an issue between yourselves and other Christians.

This is an important point. Paul says, "Let the weak Christian do what he thinks is proper between himself and God." That does not mean that, in any moment, we can condone the weak Christian doing what the Bible condemns. He cannot break the moral code.

He cannot come up, for example, with a substitute gospel. This is one of the things that Paul was very careful to stress. In Galatians 1:8-9, the apostle Paul says, "But though we, or an angel from heaven." And I think it's significant that he says, "An angel from heaven." The charismatics are always talking about an angel that has appeared to them to give them a certain message – a glow standing at the foot of their bed in the middle of the night that has announced something directly from God. The apostle Paul says, "Though we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached, let him be accursed." The gospel of Paul preached was salvation without human doing. It was salvation, by the grace of God – a gift from Him, because you have faith enough to believe this gospel and accept it. And you don't butt in with some ritual like water baptism; the Lord's Supper; good works; or, anything else. And if you do, you have undermined the grace basis of salvation, and you've got nothing. God does not allow you to come into heaven on the basis of what Christ has done plus what you have added to that yourselves.

This is very important. Paul says, "Don't let anybody come in here." And remember that this is to the relations. The people in the territory of Galatia were legalists. These people in Galatia, some of them with Jewish background, said, "You cannot go to heaven (if you are a male) if you are not circumcised." And Paul said, "That's it. You've gone too far. And I'm drawing the line. The very fact that you would perform circumcision in order to get to heaven will keep you out of heaven, because you have injected a human work into what God has provided in grace salvation."

So, Paul says, "As we said before, so I say again. If anyone preach any other gospel unto you than that that you have received, let him be accursed;" that is, brought under the judgment of God.

**Christian Consideration**

Christian consideration, of course, will always seek to lead a sinning brother in Christ to repentance, and back into temporal fellowship.

There are so many misconceptions among Christians today. There are actually few Christians, in point of truth, who really have been taught the Word of God so that they know how free they are in Christ. There's always somebody that's going to come and say something to somebody that's having a hard time in life. They're suffering something, and they say, "God is punishing you because you did this." What arrogance, and what stupidity! That is not the way God works, and that is human arrogance in the worst degree. We do not abuse the weaker Christian in his sincere attempts, as misguided as they may be, to try to do that which pleases God. Most Christians just do not understand how absolutely free they are in Jesus Christ.

In the Old Testament era, God said to the Jewish people, "You be good, and I'll bless you." But He never gave them any capacity for being good. All they had was the sin nature constantly butting against that, and causing them to do that which brought down God's judgment. In the age of grace, God says, "Be good because I've already blessed you with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, from salvation on down. You have it all, and you don't have to earn it. And if you try to earn it, you won't get it. Most Christians, therefore, because they are not taught, follow the beliefs and the policies of a denomination that they just happen to have been born into. And when discussing spiritual matter, I notice that when I speak to people in that category, and I ask them why they do this or why they believe that (including their very pastors and preachers and authorities), I'm interested in noting that the response I often get is: "We believe" – not: "Well the Bible says;" or, "The Bible teaches." They are quoting their official church denomination statements. And many of those are humanly created, and they have nothing whatever to do with the Scripture.

For 1,000 years, from the time that Christianity began, that very problem snowballed until, finally, Martin Luther and the other reformers came on the scene, and they began reading the Bible, which was unheard of. And they said, "All of this stuff we're doing to get to heaven is not in the Bible. As a matter of fact, all of these things we're doing is keeping us out of heaven. The result was the Protestant Reformation, because the Word of God is very clear. The Bible is an understandable book. But if you are not under the instruction of the Word of God, and if you go to church and walk out as ignorant as when you came in of what the Bible teaches, then you're never going anywhere.

**A Stumbling Block**

So, the apostle Paul, in verse 13, says, "Don't be occupied with judging other Christians for the way they want to live, but rather determine to do something else." Determine that you're not going to put something in the way of those weak Christians. He mentions two things. One he calls "a stumbling block." In the Greek Bible, that word looks like this. It's the Greek word "proskomma." The word "proskomma" refers to something that causes you to fall. It causes you to make a misstep, and you fall flat on your face. Here, it refers to a hindrance to your personal spiritual ability.

So, the strong Christian is not to use his liberty in Christ, that he understands, to do something that, though it's legitimate, is going to cause a weak Christian to sin. Weak Christians can see you doing something that you do in a restrained and limited way. But because they do not have the spiritual maturity, if they did the same thing, they're going to go over the edge. So, you have to be careful, when you know that this person is weak, that there are some things that you just don't do in their presence. The weak Christian, if he follows your pattern, is violating his conscience. And that's the problem. You start being willing to go against something you feel inside, you think: "I shouldn't be doing this. This is wrong. It may not be wrong. But if you feel that this is not right before God for you, and you go ahead and do it, you have violated your conscience. And what you is that you begin to put callouses on your conscience. The Bible says, "You sear your conscience, so you become insensitive to what God is leading you to do, and then you are willing, indeed, to stumble into many sins.

However, this word "proskomma," describing a stumbling of a fall also implies that you can get back up on your feet again.

**An Occasion to Fall**

Now Paul says, "You shouldn't do that to a Christian – to cause him to stumble into sin by something you do. But even worse," Paul says, "You should not put an occasion to fall in your brother's way." This is the word "skandalon." The word "skandalon," in the Greek language, refers to the bait stick on a trap. It's the stick that has the bait that an animal comes up to. It hits that stick, and the trap comes down, and it kills him. This word is much more serious. You don't see that from the English, but the Greek Bible is saying, "This will kill you." This is a much more serious thing. Don't do something that's going to cause a weaker Christian (a brother in Christ) to do something that is going to destroy him spiritually. It doesn't mean physically killing him. And it certainly does not mean killing him spiritually in the sense of losing his salvation. We know that that's not true. This is talking about the fact that he does something that takes him out of the inner circle of fellowship.

**Rewards in Heaven**

All of us are in eternal fellowship. When we trust in Christ as Savior, we come into an inner circle of temporal fellowship. This is your day-by-day life. Now when you're outside of the inner circle, you're in carnality, and you're running by the sin nature. When you're inside the inner circle, you're being guided by the Holy Spirit, and you are a spiritual Christian. What he is talking about is: "Don't do something to lead that Christian out of this inner circle where he is really walking with the Lord. That is because if you're not in the inner circle, you can pray yourself blue in the face, and God doesn't hear. If you're not in the inner circle, you can do all kinds of good works, and it's of no interest to God. But when you're inside, the good works that you produce are the result of God's leading. And for that, the result is the next thing: rewards in heaven, which is the subject we've already been talking about.

So, what he is saying here is: "Don't cause an occasion for your brother to fall." He's saying, "Don't lead him into something that's going to be a trap for him, that's going to destroy him spiritually, so that: he will be taken out of the place of temporal fellowship; his life will count for nothing for eternity; he will lose his joy; he will lose his peace; his life will come apart at the seams; and, there will be no guidance for him. And worst of all, he will not have lived in such a way that God has rewards for his service.

Christians are to be preoccupied, therefore, with judging themselves such that they're neither a hindrance nor a snare to a weaker brother. Strong Christians are at liberty in Jesus Christ, but they have to limit that freedom on occasion, so as to not cause a weaker Christian to violate his conscience. You should not lead him to do what he thinks is wrong, even if he's mistaken about that. Do not disillusion another Christian by your conduct, which will discourage his devotion to righteousness.

**Curse Words**

Some people come to Christianity, and they feel their language should be appropriate to that which is a Christian. I know of some pastors who are good students of the Word of God, and good teachers of the Word of God, but they feel that Christians are too legalistic, and too hung up about language. So, in order to teach them better, they pepper their sermons with swear words. You know that the Christians that are going to sit up, and they're going to be jolted. They're going to cringe when they hear those swear words. And I sat in those services, and I've listen to them. And they said, "The trouble with you people is that you're an old blankety-blank dud. You're putting on this blankety-blank pretense. And after a while, you get the idea, but you come out feeling kind of contaminated, because some Christians do not feel free to use curse words, because it is a respect for the power of Satan – his power base. All curse words are associated with Satan. That's why they deal with words like "damn;" and "hell;" and, obscene obscenities. All these things are attached with the province of Satan. So, some Christians say, "I just don't like to use language like that because it honors Satan. I can use the English language.

You people here do not speak in tongues. Some of you do not even speak in English, as a matter of fact, and you're working on it. But at least you're going in the right direction. Christians are at liberty, but you should not do something that causes a Christian that is weak to hear something. Suppose that he starts talking like that. You say, "Well, I only use I use the innocent swear words. I don't use the real bad stuff." What's going to keep him from using the real bad stuff, because you have acclimated him that it's OK to talk like that?

So, there are so many things that you may feel free to do, and maybe it's OK between you and the Lord to do it. But this passage is telling us that we have to consider those sincere, but misguided, scruples of weaker Christian brethren. And we had to deal with them gently to try to help them to overcome their taboos, and bring them to an understanding of their freedoms in Christ.

The apostle Paul deals with the same issue of hindering, or ruining, the spiritual life of a weak Christian in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13. And I would encourage you to read that through. We have gone through that passage too.

Paul says, in 14, I'll give you an illustration of what I'm talking about. Paul says, "I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus." Now Paul says, "I want to tell you something that I know. It is relative here to diet: foods to eat; and, foods not to eat. Under the Old Testament order, there were clean foods and unclean foods. It was sinful to eat the category of unclean foods. Part of that was because those very foods, we know today, are not good for you to eat. They're bad physically from a health point of view, for a variety of reasons.

Nevertheless, the apostle Paul says, "I know something." He uses this Greek word "oida." This is the word for knowledge that you get not by experience – not knowledge that you get by learning how to put together an automobile engine, but knowledge that you got by reading a book on how to do that. And Paul says, "I have been taught by the Holy Spirit." That is what he means: "And I have an understanding now. And as a result of this information I've been given about food, I also come to a persuasion." The Greek word is "peitho." This refers to his personal conviction. Paul has received some knowledge, from God the Holy Spirit, about food. Now he has a persuasion to his personal conscience. And he has come to a conviction. And he says, "I have this by," by which he means "'in' the Lord Jesus;" that is, Paul is not telling you something that is his opinion. He wants you to understand that this is not the result of his personal reasoning and viewpoint.

**There is Nothing Unclean**

He says, "As the result of the instruction which the Lord Jesus Christ has given me." And remember that Paul had three years of personal instruction by Christ out in the Arabian Desert, right after he was saved. Paul says, "By personal instruction (and that direct revelation that Paul had), I have learned something from Jesus Christ; that is, I have a knowledge that is absolutely true as an apostle. I have this avenue of communication, and I have become convinced of something as a result of this knowledge. And what is that? That there is nothing unclean.

The word "unclean" looks like this: "koinos." This is the Greek word from which we get the word "Koine" Greek. "Koine" Greek was the kind of Greek that was spoken in New Testament times. The word "Koine" means "common." It was the ordinary language of the business world. Everybody spoke Greek who did business, regardless of whatever other language spoke. This is like today, where most of the world who does business knows to speak English. English is the "Koine" language of this point in time?

**There is Nothing Impure of Itself**

Well, this word "koinos" means "impure." And Paul says, "There is nothing impure of itself." The Lord Jesus Christ is the Creator. He is the one who created everything. And in 1 Timothy 4:4, we're told that everything that He created was a good thing, and worthy of thanksgiving: "For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving." So, Paul says, "I have learned that there is nothing in God's creation which is impure in itself per se." Now not every Christian is spiritually mature enough to understand that there is nothing unclean of itself.

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself pointed out, in Mark 7:15, that it is not the foods you eat that make you unclean and sinful. But it is what comes out of your sin nature through your mouth – that's what brings you condemnation before God.

So, there is a necessity for being spiritually mature enough to know that everything that God has created has a place in the order of things. That doesn't mean that everything is good for food. Everything has a place. It is not an evil in itself.

**Gnosticism**

In the ancient world, one of the earliest New Testament heresies was Gnosticism, which said that: "Anything material was evil. Your body is evil. Therefore, man is evil, and therefore you should punish your body, so that you can become holy." That is not true. There is nothing sinful about your body as such, per se. There's nothing sinful in itself. Paul says, "Jesus Christ taught me this. It has persuaded my conscience. I know that there is nothing impure (unclean) of itself."

**Clean and Unclean Foods of the Old Testament**

Things have changed. In the New Testament era of the church, there is no longer this Old Testament distinction between clean and unclean meats. But some Christians, in conscience, still recoil from violating the Mosaic Law regulations about these foods. There are some Christians who come from a heritage and a background that still do not like to eat pork chops, and it's a smart thing not to eat. I have great reservations about eating food that the Old Testament condemned as being unclean. There are some Christians who still gag on eating shrimp, because it is an unclean food under Old Testament conditions. Some of you don't like to eat horse meat. Good. It's condemned as unclean. But there are other foods that Christians eat. Some of you don't mind eating ham. The Bible says, "That's an unclean food." But now, in the New Testament, there is no rule against this. In the Old Testament, it was sinful if you ate a ham sandwich. And if you put cheese on it, . . . there goes the cholesterol. That finished you off. There is nothing so terrible as a ham and Swiss cheese sandwich, especially on rye bread, with those little sesame seeds around them.

So, if you like to eat that, that's fine. In the New Testament church era, that is no longer forbidden. Some things indeed are not good to eat for health reasons, so we don't do it for that reason. We don't avoid foods today because of religious reasons. That's the way it was under the restrictive legal system of the Old Testament.

For this reason, the apostle Paul understood that there had come about great changes in the age of the church – in the era of the freedoms of grace. There were now regulations that freed us from these Old Testament restrictions. The apostle Paul knew that you should not sacrifice animals anymore for sins. You don't have to do that. That symbol in that picture has been fulfilled by Christ. You don't sacrifice animals anymore. He knew that you should not have a priest wearing robes standing in front of an altar, trying to intercede to God for the people, and leading them in worship. That's false worship. That is no longer the way to approach God. Now there is no longer a specialized priesthood – the line of Aaron, the Levites. Now all of you are priests of God, and you only represent one person before God – yourself. Nobody can stand before an altar and intercede for you and God. Only you can stand before God. And that altar is no more a place of sacrifice. If you don't have sacrifices, then an altar is an insult to God. It's a thing that has been removed. Paul understood this.

So, Paul says what? Paul says, "Well, I go to some of these churches in the New Testament, and they still have their altars, and they still do their procedures with the robes. Paul says, "So what? That's OK. If you want to do it that way, just do it. Just understand that you're still your own priest before God. But if you want to follow that, you can go ahead and do that. Paul understood that burning incense was out. Burning lamps, like in the holy place, the lamps stands and candles – all that is out. Circumcision for your males is out. You can do it for medical reasons (for hygienic reasons). You don't do it for religious reasons. The Sabbath day observance is over. You no longer go to church to worship on Saturday. Saturday worship is terminated. And along with it, all the restrictions of Saturday worship, which meant that if you worked (if you did wash your car on Saturday), then we're going to stone you. Those of you who like to live under law, you'd better not let us catch you washing your car on Saturday. But, fortunately for you, that has been terminated. Paul knew that. Paul did not mind washing his chariot on Saturday, because that system was removed.

Paul understood that you didn't have to commemorate holy days or feast days. Paul knew that there was nothing special about Christmas or Easter. If you want to commemorate it, fine. There are some Christians that wouldn't commemorate Easter for anything, if their life depended on it. They wouldn't commemorate Christmas. They wouldn't give gifts to their children. And they have a point. And we all know that December 25th is connected with the great pagan holiday of the Saturnalia, and that it was a great day of giving gifts in honor of the pagan gods. And in the Middle Ages, it was brought down by the Roman Catholic Church, and incorporated as a holiday of Christianity. Yes, we know that the Christmas tree was an idol God in the Old Testament, and it's described very clearly.

However, that isn't the meaning today, and that isn't our purpose. And if you want to observe Christmas, you're free to do it. If you want to celebrate a special Easter Resurrection Day, you're free to do it.

Paul knew that foods were now clean. The dietary restrictions no longer applied. Paul knew that tithing was out. Tithing was no longer God's way for Christians – that now you don't own 90%. The Jewish people loved that system. God had 10%, and they owned 90%. When you come into grace, you have now become God's banker and manager. And you are what the Bible calls "His steward." And everything you have, every buck you ever earned, all 100% of what you have, belongs to God. And then you disperse out of that paycheck God's money. Now when you understand that, then you'll have second thoughts when you are willing to indulge something – that you give a second thought: "Do I really need to do that? Is this where I should be spending my money? Or maybe it ought to go into some area of the Lord's work, and I'll send it up to heaven as a treasure for my rewards there. That might be a better thing for me to do."

Here is a place of great sensitivity of conscience – once you understand that you're God's steward, as to how you're going to dispense His money. And a great deal of this loss of reward that we've been talking about is going to be from Christians who have had great financial means placed at their disposal, and then they squandered it on human viewpoint decisions instead of interjecting it into their eternal blessing and welfare through the guidance of the Spirit of God.

The apostle Paul understood that all of these Mosaic Law regulations were passed. Some of the Christian Jews still hung on to them. He said, "That's all right. Go ahead and do it." As a matter of fact, Paul tried to be so cooperative with the Christians, on one occasion when he came to Jerusalem, that he took upon himself about a vow. It was a very bad thing. He shouldn't have done that. Christians do not take these Jewish vows. And Paul took that vow, and he was disciplined with four years out of operation. Because of that vow, a riot was created in Jerusalem, and the Roman authorities had to come in, and put him into prison, and put him under protective custody. And for two years, he languished in jail in Jerusalem, trying to get this thing straightened out, and going before various authorities there, arguing his case. And finally, nobody could find anything that he did wrong, except that he had raised the Jews because he told them about Jesus the Messiah.

He had tried to do this by taking a vows, saying, "Yes, I'm an apostle teacher of the gentiles, but I'm still true to my Jewish heritage." Finally, he got fed up and he said, "That's it. I'm going to appeal to Caesar. And I want my case dealt directly by Caesar" (Nero at the time). And they moved him to Caesarea Philippi. And for two years, the court system worked there before they got around to him. I've been to Caesarea Philippi on the Mediterranean Sea. It's a lovely spot. But you'd hate to have to be imprisoned there.

Finally, after four years out of operation, because of taking that Jewish vow, and trying to show the Jews that he was still their friend, it was an act of legalism that brought him that discipline. We thank God that the prison epistles, at least, were written while he was in custody.

**A Theocracy**

So, the apostle Paul understood that this system was gone. He did not, however, discard the moral laws of God, nor the principle of salvation by grace. These are still God's way. The only way a Jew in the Old Testament was saved was by the grace of God. He have certain national privileges that gentiles did not have, but he was only saved through the coming Messiah, and he was saved on the basis of faith, looking ahead; as we are saved on faith that looks back. The Jew lived under a theocracy. Therefore, he had direct communication from God. And the leaders of Israel were directed by God. It was a wonderful system.

**Homosexuality**

Under a theocracy, homosexuality was a capital crime. Under a theocracy, God told the government, "If you find a homosexual, he is to be executed properly. This is a moral cancer. It will destroy this nation of Israel if you permit it to exist." We do not live under a theocracy today in the United States. And every now and then I hear some well-meaning, but ill-advised, Christian leaders saying that we ought to apply the death penalty to homosexuals. And what they're trying to do is to bring over a condition that existed when God was the king and ruler in direct communication to the people of that nation. That isn't the case today. But has God's moral law against homosexuality changed? Is that no longer in force? Is it no longer a capital crime? Yes, it is. But who executes the penalty today? It is not the government of the United States. Because God is no longer in charge as they were in a theocracy in the Old Testament, God Himself is imposing the death penalty on homosexuality – through the AIDS plague, for one thing, and many others as well.

So, when the apostle Paul says that this old system is gone, he never was implying that the moral rights and wrongs were involved. Those still applied to Paul's day. However, Paul still considered those Christians who mistakenly retained the way of life of the Mosaic Law, but when they violated doctrine, then he drew the line.

**Violation of Conscience is a Sin**

So, Paul says, "I know and I am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing that is unclean in itself. But," he says, "we have a problem. To him that esteems something unclean." The word "esteems" is the word "logizomai." The word "logizomai" means "to think" or "to regard." It refers to feeling some way about something. Here he is saying, "If a person feels that something is unclean, then, to that person, it's wrong to do that. If you feel it is wrong to eat certain kinds of food, and somebody puts it before you, they shouldn't try to cause you to violate your conscience. But if it is wrong for you to do it, then for you to eat it, it's a sin. It is an impure act on your part. If you view something before God as impure, then to you it is impure. Why? Because for you to ignore that is to do the worst thing you can do to yourself. You violate your conscience. You don't feel right about doing something, and you go ahead and do it, do you know what's going to happen next time? It'll be easier to do the next time. You won't feel bad about it, but it'll be a little easier to do it, and a little easier. If you don't feel right about doing it, you don't do it.

With God, there is no objection to these foods in Paul's illustration. It was only in the person's. But the mistakes of the mind result in these unscriptural taboos that irritate the strong Christian. Paul is not saying that something is sinful just because you feel it is sinful. What he is saying to you is that something that you feel is sinful, though it is not sinful, will cause you, if you ignore that, to violate your conscience. And when you violate your conscience, you start building scars on the conscience, so that you become insensitive to right and wrong. That's the problem. The point is that you need to think something is sinful, then in all practical effects for you, it is sinful. You'll feel terrible if you do it. You'll come under a guilt complex. And Paul's plea to the strong Christian is simply to avoid injuring the spiritual life of a weak Christian. Concerned tactfulness is what he is saying.

Paul says, "Yes, I know. I have been instructed. I know the difference between Old Testament order and New Testament grace. But I understand that there are some Christians that still think that these things are out of line. If they want to do it, I let them do it. And tactfully I try to instruct them so that I bring them up to their full freedoms and liberty in grace. Do not get yourself frozen back into somebody's theology that has not progressed beyond a certain point, because they did not understand the full impact of the full counsel of the Word of God. What the Bible teaches is not something you're going to learn overnight by snapping your fingers. The reason most Christians are trapped in religion and in emptiness is because they do not take seriously the learning of doctrine and hope.

I hope when you leave today, you have an understanding of some portion of the Word of God that is much deeper than when you walked in. As a result of that, you'll be able to capitalize on that, and to take that into your soul to function upon it. The result you will discover is that you will blossom out in personal integrity; personal strength; personal peace with God; personal joy; and, personal satisfaction. And, best of all, you'll stay in that inner circle of temple fellowship, and when you get to heaven, God's going to put His arm around you and say, "Well done, you good and faithful servant." Why? Because you knew what the rules were. You knew what the principles were by which God operates. And you were not hung up with the principles of the operations of human beings that actually led you down a blind alley chasing rabbits, and away from the things of God.

Some of you who've been around a long time, like many of our tapers who hear what you hear (later), have not yet caught on to the fundamental principle of the Word of God that doctrine is your life. Without the knowledge of the doctrines of Scripture, such as you've learned today, you don't know what it's all about. May God help you to have a new appreciation for your freedom to Christ (in Christ), and for your sensitivity to the people who have not yet caught up to you in your spiritual maturity. That is not a position of arrogance, but you certainly should thank God that, in His grace, He has led you to the point where you have been taught enough that you know what the score is, and you know how to operate successfully in your own personal life.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1988

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