



# On Christian Liberty

I really like it when my church resumes its regular Bible study program in the fall, especially when we pick up where we left off before our summer break. We've been studying the book of 1 Corinthians and we picked it up again tonight in chapter 8.

Over the last couple of years I have been called a Pharisee and a legalist by some people on the Internet because I don't think that Christians should live in blatant, unconfessed, unrepentant sin. I've been told by people living in blatant sin that I'm unloving for pointing it out to them, because after all "the greatest commandment is to love one another." I've been told by some that it's wrong to tell Christians that they should honor God and obey his word because we have complete freedom in Christ and all that is required for salvation is to simply believe in Jesus — whether one's life shows evidence of that belief or not.

While I could answer in kind and say that the state of my soul is a matter that is solely between myself and the Lord, I would be lying if I did. The state of my soul *is* a matter between myself and the Lord, but it's also a matter between myself and my pastor, between myself and my family, and between myself and my local church. It's also of interest to other people I interact with, if I want to glorify and honor God, and if I want to act as a witness to his glory and to the gospel message. If I claim that he has saved me but my life doesn't demonstrate that he has, my witness to others is worthless.

I am immensely grateful that the Lord loved me enough to choose to save me from my sins and to adopt me into his family. No one, other than the Lord, knows better than me how undeserving of that great gift I am. I am thankful that his word says "whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:15). I believe it in my heart, and I'm willing to confess it with my mouth (and my fingers as I type this).

I think though, that when Jesus said that, that he wasn't saying simply that believing that Jesus is the Son of God was enough to earn eternal life. He also taught a parable about two sons...

*"What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son go and work in the vineyard today.' And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his Father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the*

*kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him."*

*— Matthew 21:28-32*

It's not enough to simply say you believe in Jesus, you have to really *do* it. Jesus *did* say "whoever believes in him may have eternal life", but John went on to say "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." (John 3:36). The word used here is *apeitheo* (απειθεω). *Strong's Dictionary* defines this word as meaning to "not allow one's self to be persuaded", "to refuse or withhold belief", "to refuse belief and obedience", and "not to comply with." This isn't mere intellectual assent. Believing in this context implies obedience.

The apostle James also said that "Even the demons believe — and shudder" (James 2:19). This implies that mere intellectual assent is not saving faith. The demons after all, though they know that Jesus is the Son of God, are not saved.

This raises another point though. If you recall from just a couple of paragraphs earlier I indicated that I had been told that the greatest commandment is to love one another. I left it alone then, but James was speaking of that commandment here. The full quotation is...

*You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe — and shudder.*

"You believe that God is one" is a reference to Deuteronomy 6:4, which was quoted by Jesus when he was asked what the greatest commandment was. What Jesus actually said was that the greatest commandment was to love the Lord with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength. My friend's choice of the "greatest" commandment was actually the *second* greatest.

*Here, O Israel; The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might.*

*— Deuteronomy 6:4-5*

*And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is 'Hear O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."*

*— Mark 12:28-31*

Why is this important? Well, other than the fact that Jesus himself made the distinction, loving the Lord is clearly important. And what did Jesus say about that? “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15). Our Lord wants our love, and the purest expression of that love is to obey him.

The Lord is unchanging. He wanted obedience from Adam, and when Adam disobeyed him, his sin brought death and a curse into the world as a consequence. Fortunately the Lord also knew Adam would sin and had already put a plan in place to atone for that sin. But he has always wanted obedience, and that will never change. He said to Saul through Samuel “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.” (1 Samuel 15:22-23)

But, it is nevertheless true that the second great commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves. Think about that for a moment. If you were in deadly danger and unaware of it, wouldn't you appreciate a warning so that you might avoid it? If we are to love our neighbor as our self, how is it showing love to leave them blissfully unaware of a danger we can clearly see? Or how is it showing love to encourage them to dance on the edge of a precipice? Or to lead tempt them into the very sin that they were saved from by Jesus' death and resurrection?

Which brings us to tonight's Bible study. As I noted earlier, we were studying 1 Corinthians 8. This chapter begins with a discussion of food and idols. It discusses “knowledge”.

*Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.*

*Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth — as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords” — yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and through whom we exist.*

*However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.”*  
— 1 Corinthians 8:1-7

Now a Christian who truly believes in the Lord is no longer under the Law of sin and death. We know this is true. And so, a Christian might say that his behavior no longer matters, that the only thing that matters is that he trusts in the Lord. We have freedom in Christ after all. I'd dare say that most of the people who will read this are Gentiles, at least according to the flesh. When the apostles met to decide what burden, if any, to lay upon Gentile converts to

Christianity they didn't require them to be bound to the law of Moses, instead they agreed to write to them saying...

*For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.*

— Acts 15:28,29

I bring this up, because some, who call themselves Christians and yet who also advocate for accepting homosexual behavior, transgenderism, and abortion as “normal” and “acceptable” to God have rebuked me on the Internet for saying that these things are still sin and still subject one to God's discipline and wrath. It seems to me that if these people are truly Christian that they are going to be facing some disappointment at the judgement seat of Christ. And make no mistake, all who are saved *will stand before the judgement seat of Christ*. This isn't to say that they are in danger of their salvation, for “There is therefore now no condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1) but we will all give an account to God.

While it's true that the saints will judge the world (1 Corinthians 6:2), the time for that isn't yet. On the other hand, we are to judge those inside the church now (1 Corinthians 5:11-13). We should be trying to reach the world for Christ, teaching them that such things are sinful and that Christ died so that they might be forgiven and have life. We cannot allow people teach that it's OK to lead *Christians* into sin by approving of it.

Tonight's Bible study helps to answer such people, and serves as a warning to us all. Continuing on...

*Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.*

— 1 Corinthians 8:8-13

You see it don't you? We have Christian liberty. Jesus' death on the cross paid for *all* of our sins. Yet he still wants our obedience, and our weaker brothers are precious to him. So precious that he *died for them*. If they're that precious to him, how precious ought they to be to us? If we truly love them, how can we, by our actions and our “knowledge” lead them

into sin? Is our “right” in our liberty worth the soul of another?

*“Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

*“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.*

*“Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes.”*

*— Matthew 18:5-7*

The “child” here isn’t a literal child, but rather a child of God, one who believes in our Lord Jesus. What a terrible thing it is to lead such a one into sin. We know that God forgives sin, and sets us free from it. He does this for his glory, not so that we can continue in sin and bring reproach to his name. And not so we can teach our brothers to sin.