

BLACK AND WHITE IN A GRAY WORLD
ROMANS 14:1-23

BIG IDEA: SOME SINS ARE IN THE EYES OF THE BEHOLDER.

I. THIS MEANS GRACIOUSNESS ON THE PART OF THE SPIRITUALLY MATURE. VERSES

1-3A, *Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.* ² *One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.* ³ *The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does...*

NOTE: Nobody knows for sure what issues prompted this instruction from Paul.

A. What's Soft?

1. *Clergy in the United Pentecostal Church have been informed that they must follow a strict code of conduct or leave the denomination. The new rules forbid watching television, swimming in mixed groups, dancing, playing sports and other worldly amusements, dressing immodestly, going to movies, or listening to unwholesome music. Women are not to wear makeup or cut their hair short.*
*Church officials claim the code is biblical, but some of the 7,500 ministers have promised to quit the denomination rather than allow their freedom of conscience to be violated. The ultraconservative UPC has about half a million members. (Quoted in *Current Thoughts and Trends*, April 1993, 8)*
2. In the first century it tended to be food issues and holy-day issues.
3. Legalism is not a specific code of behavior. A legalist is not just any other Christian who lives a **more restrictive lifestyle** than you do.
 - Legalism is really not defined by **what** you do or don't do.
 - It is defined by **why** you do what you do or don't do.
 - *In the time of Christ, the most notable legalists were the Pharisees. The Pharisees were known for their attention to the "oral law," which was added and accepted alongside the Mosaic Law as equally inspired and authoritative. Some 365 laws were added as a sort of "fence" to protect people from violating the written Law, either through oversight or accident.*
For example, the ceremonial washings prescribed in the Book of Leviticus were supplemented by the traditions of the Pharisees until they ultimately prescribed the occasions, the amount of water, the number of rinsing, and the use of one or both hands... (Mark Bailey, "Thou Shalt Not! Kindred Spirit, Autumn 1987, 6)
3. And our human tendency is to look down on Mr. Thatcher. Perhaps to laugh about him behind his back. And maybe to avoid him socially.
4. But God interrupts our smugness with the words, "**Why do you look down on your brother?**" (v. 10) In other words, "Give the guy a break!"
5. In the first century it tended to be food issues.
 - In I Corinthians 8 and 10 this issue was whether or not a Christian should eat meat that had been offered to an idol. Since idols don't eat the meat placed at their altars, the meat ended up in the markets. Some baby Christians, fresh out of paganism, wouldn't touch the stuff. Other mature believers looked at it and said, "Meat is meat and it's on a coupon special. God honors a wise steward of funds. Let's fire up the BBQ grill!"
 - We don't know if this Romans issue was the same as the Corinthian issue. Here the issue is not idol meat vs. non-idol meat. It is a meat diet vs. a vegetarians diet, and we can only speculate as to why some immature Christians were vegetarians. But whatever the reason, their young Christian consciences said to them: *It is wrong for a Christian to eat meat.*
 - And the Pharisees didn't help at all: One of their teachings that said "*it was permissible to eat an egg that had been laid on the Sabbath only if the chicken was killed the next day for having violated the Sabbath.*" (John MacArthur, The Gospel According to Jesus, Zondervan, 1988, p.40)

6. How about the hot issue of Christian boycotts of companies. Is it wrong to buy Levi jeans? Or to carry an ATT Universal Master Card? If someone does think it is wrong, can you love and respect him for his convictions?
- B. What's Not Soft?
1. There's a lot that's not soft. God has gone on record in black and white about a lot of behaviors that are patently wrong and He has called us to have nothing to do with such things.
 - Adultery
 - Fornication
 - Falsifying income tax returns
 - Addictions
 - Profanity
 - Homosexuality
 - Never going to church
 - Never using one's spiritual gift
 - Slander
 - And the list goes on
 2. These are not what the Bible calls "disputable matters." They are sin and the Bible is not soft on sin. When verse 1 tells us to not pass judgment on disputable matters, it does not tell us that we should never pass judgment on sin.
 3. In fact, the Apostle Paul indicted the Corinthian church for not judging sin in its midst. **I Corinthians 5: 4** *When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, 5 hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.*
 4. Another appropriate judging passage is **Galatians 6:1**, *Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.*
 5. Washington Times editor Wes Pruden takes the church to task for going soft on sin, *"Dwight Moody and Billy Sunday. Earlier giants of evangelism, never cut public sin any slack. The silence of preachers [today] with the duty to denounce sin is deafening and is the meaningless chatter of holy men with nothing to say to a "faithless and perverse generation." This leaves the field clear for shameless and secular men to mug facts and maim truth, seducing and ever widening pool of patsies."* (quoted in Intercessor of American Newsletter, May 1998, page 4)
- C. What Must I Do?--I must follow God's lead: God accepts (v. 3) therefore I accept (v. 1)
1. Clearly this is talking about true Christians. God's "acceptance" speaks of a true born again experience. This person has trusted Jesus Christ as his Savior and has been born into the family of God. His sins are forgiven. He is destined for Heaven. The Spirit of God dwells within Him and empowers Him. All the guarantees of **Romans 8** are His. He has been *foreknown* by God, *predestined, called, justified*. He is assured that *neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate [him] from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
 2. When it says in verse 1 that his faith is "weak", it doesn't mean that he has only a little confidence in Jesus. It means that his Christian scruples have not reached maturity. Remember, in **I Corinthians 8**, the weaker brother is called weaker because his *conscience* is weak, not his trust in Jesus.
 3. What does it mean for me to "accept" this weaker Christian? It means that I love and value him as a fellow member of God's household. This is now my brother in Christ, my sister in Christ. It is now my job to make this newer believer feel accepted into the body of believers:
 - By not making him feel stupid. "How come you always bring a veggie tray to the church potlucks?"
 - By welcoming him into my life and circle of friends. Real acceptance is communicated by an invitation to my Focus Group, or to coffee at my house, or to come on a hike with another of my family friends.
 - By accommodating myself to his scruples when we're together. In Rome that meant, don't serve meat to him when he's a guest in your home.

NOTE: By the way, this is a double-edged sword. Look at **verse 3**, *The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.* Believers on both side of the debate over disputable matters have a responsibility to accept each other. And weak Christians are to accept strong Christians just as the strong are to accept the weak.

- **MORRIS:** *[T]he weak, knowing that it would be wrong for them (thinking as they do) to do something that the strong do, all too easily hold that the strong are sinning and slip into condemning them. Not infrequently the weak is the greater tyrant.* (479)

II. THIS MEANS DEFERENCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY TO GOD. VERSES 3B-4, *for God has accepted him.* ⁴ *Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.*

A. God Is the Judge, Not Me.

1. I must not usurp God's role. I am not my brother's spiritual master. He is not responsible to toe the line to my position on each disputable matter. I have to be able to love him and walk in Christian fellowship with him and accept the fact that he may never agree with all my scruples. He is not accountable to me on these matters. Because I am not his master. I didn't die for his sins. I didn't open his heart to Jesus. I can't keep him faithful to the Lord through the days of his life. He's not going to answer to me in heaven. That's God's turf. I'm a spiritual sibling not a spiritual parent. Servant="a household slave"
2. I've had some pretty sharp disagreements with some Christians over the years. Some are distant disagreements, like reading some Christians book about why he believes every Christian should be using the KJV translation.
3. Others have been up close and personal. Those especially can provoke anger and disrespect. I've found a way to stay sweet toward Christians with whom I disagree on non-essentials. I give myself a little talking to and I say: "Tim, just remember, you are both children of God and you will be living with that person in heaven some day for all eternity. And that helps me. These disagreements we have....they will pass some day. We will be at perfect harmony when we get to heaven. Instead of living with the on-going tension of strife over these Christian differences, I try to live with the anticipation of forever harmony. I don't have to get everybody to agree with me in this life. Someday God will get us all on the same page. I can wait for that day.

B. God Is the Guarantor, Not Me.

1. If this person is truly saved, God is going to bring him along: **verse 4**, *And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.* That reminds me of **Ephesians 2:10**, *we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*
2. This is sanctification and security.
3. In the meantime, I want to be building relationship investments toward our eternal friendships in Heaven.

III. THIS MEANS ACCEPTANCE OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY. VERSES 5-9, *One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.* ⁶ *He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.* ⁷ *For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone.* ⁸ *If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.* ⁹ *For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.*

A. It Starts in the Mind

1. **MORRIS:** *Specifically the weak brother can hurt his conscience by following the strong brother's practice without holding the strong brother's convictions.* (481)
2. Not the idea here of "no man is an island," but rather this means that everything we do is done before God

- 3 Let's take a 20th century issue: appropriate Sunday behavior.
- Former British Prime Minister **Margaret Thatcher** grew up in a rigid Methodist home. *"Sundays meant nonstop religious activity. The girls went to Sunday school at 10 A.M., church service with their parents at 11 A.M., afternoon Sunday school, where Margaret played the piano, at 2:30 P.M., and vespers at 6 P.M. Alf [her father] was so strict he would not even permit Sunday newspapers in the house. The only work allowed was cooking and doing the shop's accounts because there was no other time to do them. Sunday meant no movies, no cardplaying, no games at all."* (Chris Ogden, Maggie: An Intimate Portrait of a Woman in Power, Simon and Schuster, NY, 1990, p. 39) The issue is muddled by the debate over whether or not Sunday is the Christian Sabbath.
 - (1) In the OT, the Sabbath was a sacred day in which no work was to be done, not even manna gathering or cooking. In Numbers 15, the story is told of a man who was stoned to death for gathering some firewood on the Sabbath.
 - (2) It is the 4th commandment (**Ex 20:8-11**, 8 *"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."*)
 - (3) But in Exodus 31:13, it is explained as a special sign of the covenant God made with Israel. No such sign was articulated for the Church.
 - (4) In fact, in **Col. 2:16** we are taught, *"16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ."*
 - (5) On the other hand, is there anything special about Sunday? Is it to be like just any other day? In Rev. 1:10, John refers to it as "The Lord's Day." What does that imply for Christian Sunday behavior? Inactivity? Or maybe high activity, but activity that focuses on worship and Christian service and fellowship with God's people and outreach to the lost. For instance, back in 18th century Scotland, a minister wrote a book called A Treatise Concerning the Sanctification of the Lord's Day. In it author John Willison focused on what Christians were to do on Sunday rather than what Christians were not to do. (Hughes Oliphant Old, "Rescuing Spirituality from the Cloister, CT, June 20, 1994. p. 27)
 - (6) But for all that, a Christian may still feel that, before God, it is wrong to mow his lawn on Sunday.

B. It Focuses on the Lord

1. Eight times in these 5 verses we see To the Lord/God
2. *In November of 1975, seventy-five prisoners in northern Mexico decided to tunnel their way out. After six months of digging, they finished their escape route. When they emerged, however, they discovered that they had tunneled into the courtroom where they were previously indicted. The surprised judge sent them right back to prison.* (Warren Wiersbe, "Defining a Spiritual Christian," *Moody Monthly*, October 1982, 38)

IV. THIS MEANS EXPECTATION OF DIVINE JUDGMENT. VERSES 10-12, *You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹ It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" ¹² So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.*

A. Maybe I'm Not So Sure After All

1. Whenever we get into Christian disputes, we need the humility to acknowledge that we all slant things in our favor. **Proverbs 18:17** is one of my all-time favorites, *"The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him."*
2. We all do and we all should be a lot more tentative. **Verse 10**, *"We will all stand before God's judgment seat."*

- Therefore, my human judgments are ultimately irrelevant (Morris). It is God's judgment which really matters.
 - Verse 11 quotes from (LXX) **Isaiah 45:23**, *By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.*
3. I've made judgments about other Christians that have, to my embarrassment, proved to be completely wrong. Sometimes I really peg people.
 - I never have all the facts
 - I can't see into the person's heart
 - And I don't even know my own heart for sure. (I may be way off base on some of my scruples because of my past traditions, because of the deceptiveness of my own sinful pride.)
 4. I'm not talking here about moral purity or important doctrines. I'm talking about those issues in the disputable category.
 5. I even try to practice this with people in the Bible. It's real easy to pass judgment on biblical characters, but I'm reminded that someday I will meet them in Heaven and I don't want to find out that I preached badly and incorrectly about them.
 - For instance, the dispute between Paul and Barnabas. I can't judge that either sinned. I prefer to give them the benefit of the doubt and conclude that it was just a conflict of differing giftedness and God used that to make two evangelistic teams out of one and God blessed both of them.
 - Was it wrong for Paul to do the purification right in **Acts 21**. Some say he comprised his grace convictions. I give him the benefit of the doubt and choose to assume that he was once again doing what he wrote about in **I Cor. 9:19**, *Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.*
- B. Maybe I Could Use a Little Mercy, Too.
1. **Verse 12**, *So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.*
 2. The Bible has a good word for all of us folks who will day have to answer before God: **James 2: 12** *Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, 13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!*
 3. I want to hear Jesus say something like this to me at His judgment seat: *"Tim, you were wrong on quite a few things...but one thing I like about you, you always treated the people with whom you disagreed, with kindness and mercy. Have fun in Heaven. See you later. Next, please!"*

V. THIS MEANS RESPONSIBILITY IN THE EXERCISE OF SPIRITUAL FREEDOM.

VERSES 13-23, *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. 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. 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. 16 Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. 19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. 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. 21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. 22 So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. 23 But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

INTRO: We Americans really love our freedom. Get in your car and you can drive 3000 miles across the country with no military checkpoints. You don't have to carry official ID as long as you don't drive. You are free to be as anonymous as you want to be. We bask in the warmth of the Declaration of Independence with its "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Our blood stirs with the patriot cry of **Patrick Henry**, "*Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, almighty God! I know what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death.*"

How about the Christian? The theme of the New Testament is grace. What does that mean? Am I as a Christian free to do whatever I want? Who has the right to tell me what I can or cannot do? Just how free is the Christian?

A. The Christian Is Not Quite as Free as He May Think He Is!

1. **Edmund Burke** wrote: "*The only liberty I mean is a liberty connected with order; that not only exists along with order and virtue, but which cannot exist at all without them.*"
2. **John Adams**, second president of the United States, wrote in 1789, "*Our Constitution was designed only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other.*"
3. **Victor Frankl** writes out of the experience of a death camp in the Holocaust, where he saw firsthand the Nazis exercising ultimate freedom to do whatever they wanted to anybody they wanted. Frankl wrote, "*[F]reedom is in danger of degenerating into mere arbitrariness unless it is lived in terms of responsibility. That is why I recommend that the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast.*" (Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Washington Square Press, 1984, p.156)
4. Christian liberty isn't the whole story—there is an important caveat. Here it is: **Romans 6:18**, *You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*

B. Love Takes Precedence over Freedom

1. **Verse 15a**, "*If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love.*"
2. We all have a choice. We can defend our Christian liberty to the wall, or we can ask, "What's the loving thing to do?" Maybe the loving thing to do is to restrict my liberty so as not to distress my brother or sister in Christ.
3. Does this mean that I have to restrict my liberty every time another Christian disapproves? Absolutely not. It **depends on the spiritual maturity of the distressed brother**. Read the rest of verse **15b**, *Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.* This is talking about a new believer; one with a weak conscience.
4. There are other pastors who object to what I believe and teach about grace giving. They teach 10% giving as a legal biblical requirement. My teaching on this issue would distress them. But I'm not being unloving to stick to my guns, because those pastors are mature. What I preach is not going to destroy their walk with God. In fact, they're not going to change their minds or behavior because of me.
5. In fact, when it comes to dealing with legalistic Christians, the right and loving thing to do is to stand up to them. It's written down in **Colossians 2:16-17**, *16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.*
6. If you like to drink a beer after mowing the lawn, don't worry about me. It's not going to make me drink and you're not going to wound my conscience. I've walked with God almost 50 years and my convictions are pretty much bombproof. So don't worry about me. But you should ask yourself if that beer's going to cause any problems in the spiritual development of your kids or any new converts you know. Asking that question and honestly answering it is the love principle in action.

C. Building People Takes Precedence over Freedom

1. Imagine the Apostle Paul interviewing a young Christian man applying to become a member of the St. Paul Evangelistic organization.

Paul: *My, my, Theodoris, your resume is quite impressive. And I see we have high recommendations about you from Peter and James.*

Theodoris: *Well, they are very kind.*

Paul: Tell me, young Theodoris, how do you feel about eating meat that was offered to an idol?

Theodoris: I'm glad you asked that question, Mr. Paul. I've really wrestled with this subject and I even wrote a paper about it at Jerusalem Bible Seminary. And I have concluded that meat is just plain old meat. It doesn't matter where it's been. Besides, idols are nothing: just wood and stone and metal. I really believe that as a mature, grace Christian, I have complete liberty before God to eat that meat. I can do it with a perfectly clear conscience before God.

Paul: Fine answer, Theodoris and I agree with you completely. Now let me ask you this. Next week we're sailing for Rome, and as you know, the church there is full of very young Christians who have been saved out of idolatry. Most of them wouldn't idol meat with a ten foot pole. If we eat that meat in Rome, we are going to risk making some of those young believers sin against their conscience by following our example. So if you join our organization, I must insist that you abstain from idol meat whenever I say so. Is that clear?

Theodoris: Paul, you amaze me! Aren't you being rather legalistic about this? You're messing with my Christian liberty! You, of all people, the great defender of grace! Shame on you!

Paul: Young Theodoris, listen to me and listen well. **[I'm not making the rest of this up. Look at verse 14.] (vv. 14-15)** "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. 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." **(vv. 20-21)** "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. 21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall."

2. The principle stands clear in Scripture. As a Christian, I am incredibly free. But my exercise of Christian liberty ends when the spiritual health of a young believer is at risk.
 3. Is this controversial. Of course! Christians don't see eye to eye on these things. The great London Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon, smoked cigars, as did many other famous British preachers.

"Once Spurgeon was gently reprimanded for his smoking by a Methodist preacher. 'If I ever find myself smoking to excess, I promise I shall quit entirely,' Spurgeon said.

"'What would you call smoking to excess?' the man asked.

"'Why, smoking two cigars at the same time!' was the answer."

(Warren Wiersbe, Walking with the Giants, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1976, p.74)
 4. Christians must regularly assess their cultural expressions of Christian liberty and evaluate whether their exercise of liberty in gray areas is hurting younger and weaker Christians.
 5. Listen to Paul again as he writes in **I Corinthians 8:9**, *Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. 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? 11 So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. 12 When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 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.*
- D. Peace Takes Precedence over Freedom
1. **Verses 16-19**, *Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. 17 For the **kingdom of God** is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, **peace** and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. 19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to **peace** and to mutual edification.*
 - **NOTE: Verse 11**, *The kingdom of God—This is the only use of the expression the kingdom of God in Romans. Indeed, Paul does not make a great deal of use of the*

concept....When he does use it, he mostly refers to the kingdom in its future aspect...
(Morris, 488)

2. Aside from all considerations of the weaker brother issue, there are times where a Christian with restrict his liberty for no other reason than the promotion of peace. There are some liberties in my Christian life from which I will abstain just because they aren't worth the risk of disturbing the peace among even my mature fellow Christians.
3. Because the building of the Kingdom of God is really a lot more important than my eating and drinking habits. I'm willing to lose a few personal checkers to be part of God's bigger game-winning plan. I want to do everything I can to make the church a place of peace and harmony. And I'm willing to give up a lot of personal discretionary things to do that for Jesus. After all, as verse 18 points out, the bottom line is not getting my way, it's being pleasing to God as a servant of Christ.

CONCLUSION:

1. So what have we said? We have said that the Christian is, on the one hand free, and on the other hand, not free. And, lest you think I am babbling, let me quote one of Christianity's greatest thinkers, **Martin Luther**, "*A Christian is the most free lord of all and subject to none; a Christian is the most dutiful servant of all and subject to everyone.*"
2. God giving us grace is like a dad handing his son the car keys for the first time. Those keys represent freedom but they also represent responsibility. It's a little risky handing over those keys. After writing his book, The Grace Awakening, Chuck Swindoll was asked, **Why is grace risky?** *Because it has fewer boundaries than a legalist system. And to live grace to the extreme means that some will take advantage of it. Some refer to grace as if it is the God-given pervasive covering for their outright disobedience which they call amazing grace; I call it abusing grace.*
3. If the generation of our Christian parents and grandparents struggled with legalism, today's Christian generation is struggling with liberty, or perhaps I should say, license, the abuse of grace. We need to remember that God's grace is a great gift and it is a great test. It is freedom tempered by love. It is freedom tempered by the concern to build the lives of younger believers. It is freedom tempered by a love for the peace of the church.
4. We couldn't end with a better verse than **Galatians 5:13**, *You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature ; rather, serve one another in love.*

Timothy G. Walton
Alderwood Community Church
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