

Arbor Foundations

A SOLID BASE TO BUILD UPON

Lesson 27: Christian Liberty



What Do We Mean By Christian Liberty?

- I'm not referring to the fact that we've been freed from the penalty of sin (although true)
- I'm not referring to the fact that we've been freed from the power of sin in our lives (although true)
- I'm not referring to the fact that we've been freed from the need to obey the Jewish ceremonial or civil laws (although true)
- My definition for this class: **In areas where there is no clear teaching in Scripture, Christians have freedom to make God-honoring decisions about what to do, and should not be judged by other believers for doing so.**
 - There will be some qualifications and caveats, but this is the essence!

The “Biblical Specificity” Spectrum

Scripture says
nothing

Scripture speaks
clearly



Example:
What color
car you drive

Example: Eating meat
sacrificed to idols

Example: We
should not steal



Christian
liberty applies
here (but is
easy)

Christian
liberty applies
here (but is
HARD)

Christian
liberty does not
apply here

Examples of Christian Liberty

- Next slide gives a list
- Warning: you may disagree with some things on the list
- Caveat 1: Meant to be illustrative—not a carefully thought out church policy
- Caveat 2: This list is not comprehensive—the fact that something is not on the list means nothing
- Predictions
 - For each item on the list, you'll think one of the following thoughts:
 1. **RED**: “That's obvious—I don't know why he would use that as an example in the 'purple area', because obviously there is liberty there”
 2. **PURPLE**: “That's a good example of something in the 'purple area'”
 3. **BLUE**: “Wait a minute—that's not an area of Christian liberty, because the Biblical position is clear”
 - Which item falls in which of the above categories will vary from person to person

Examples of Areas of Christian Liberty

Car we drive

Mothers working outside the home

Movies we choose to see

What our children do after HS

How we celebrate holidays (or don't)

Clothing styles

Smoking

Deciding when we stay home because of sickness

Food choices (e.g., eating Twinkies)

Packing a gun

How we school our children

Dancing

Hair (beards, hair styles, etc.)

How we care for aging parents

Drinking alcohol

What sports we play

House we live in

How fanatical we are about sports

Retirement (do we, and how?)

Hobbies

Level of security consciousness

What we do/don't do on Sunday

Why is this difficult?

Observations

- Biblically-derived principles apply in all cases
- Different people will make different decisions in all cases, and think that their position is morally acceptable/right
- Christian liberty is not unlimited—there are bounds in each example in which Christian liberty does or doesn't apply
- These are areas in which disagreement can be strong and divisive if we're not careful
- Many of these things can become a part of church culture, even if they're not explicit teachings

Examples of Areas of Christian Liberty

Car we drive	Mothers working outside the home
Movies we choose to see	What our children do after HS
How we celebrate holidays (or don't)	Clothing styles
Smoking	Deciding when we stay home because of sickness
Food choices (e.g., eating Twinkies)	Packing a gun
How we school our children	Dancing
Hair (beards, hair styles, etc.)	How we care for aging parents
Drinking alcohol	What sports we play
House we live in	How fanatical we are about sports
Retirement (do we, and how?)	Hobbies
Level of security consciousness	What we do/don't do on Sunday

Why is this difficult?

Romans 14:1-3

- Sets up scenario: not uniformity of agreement or practice (solidly in the “purple zone!”)
- Two commands are given in v. 3:
 1. Do not despise others who have a more sensitive conscience than you do
 2. Do not judge those who do things that would violate your own conscience

Romans 14:5

3. Each person should be fully convinced in his own mind

- What does it take to be “fully convinced”?
 - May require some effort to study the issue (including scriptural principles)
- Potentially surprising observation: Paul is, by implication, recognizing that two believers can come to two strongly held (“fully convinced”) positions that are different, and it’s OK
 - This is a big problem if we hold (by doctrine or by practice) that the essence of the Christian life is to live by a certain set of rules
- Important note: We will need to distinguish between Biblical truths and areas of Christian liberty

Romans 14:6-7

4. Everything you do or don't do should be for the purpose of honoring the Lord

- Note that participating or not participating should both be done to the honor of the Lord.
- This speaks of our motivation. What would be some other motivations for doing/not doing these things?
- How can we discern our own motivation?
 - Prayer
 - Spouse/close friend may have insight
 - Must be able to explain how something honors the Lord (although being able to explain it doesn't guarantee that it's our true motivation).

Romans 14:4, 10-12

5. We are primarily accountable for our own actions before God

- In v. 4, the picture is of a servant looking at fellow servants—we are responsible to do what our master says to us, not to make sure that the other servants do what their master says to them
- v. 12 says we will give an account of ourselves to God
 - One exception (of sorts): Hebrews 13:17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, **as those who must give account**. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.
- Brings to mind the log and speck (Matt 7:3-5)

Romans 14:13-15

6. We should act in love, with others' interests in mind

- Decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of others.
- We can “destroy” others by our actions in these things (v. 15).
- This concept sounds easy in practice, but takes great discernment and wisdom to apply.
- We should never flout our freedom before others.

Romans 14:17

7. The essence of Christianity is not strict adherence to a detailed list of do's and don't's, especially in areas that are somewhat extra-scriptural
 - Note that we are called to righteousness, so we still can't just ignore God's commands.

Romans 14:19

8. We should pursue a path that makes for peace and mutual edification

- Can apply to what we decide to do/not do
- Can apply more broadly to how we treat others in areas of Christian liberty

Romans 14:22-23

9. Keep a clean conscience

- Be more concerned about what God thinks than what man thinks.
- If we act in a way that is not consistent with what we think, then we in a sense are our own stumbling block!

Summary

1. Do not despise others who have a more sensitive conscience than you do
2. Do not judge those who do things that would violate your own conscience
3. Each person should be fully convinced in his own mind
4. Everything you do or don't do should be for the purpose of honoring the Lord
5. We are primarily accountable for our own actions before God
6. We should act in love, with others' interests in mind
7. The essence of Christianity is not strict adherence to a detailed list of do's and don't's, especially in areas that are somewhat extra-scriptural
8. We should pursue a path that makes for peace and mutual edification
9. Keep a clean conscience

So What?

- What can happen within a church when there is not a healthy understanding or practice of Christian liberty?
- How do we guard against that?