

Eternity Daily Bible Study

Romans 9-16 The Implications of Salvation

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE MINISTRY OF THE AIBI

Number: 617

Verses: Romans 14:18-23

Topic: Stumbling One's Brother

Date: 6th February 2007

Romans 14:18-23 MKJV *For he who serves Christ in these things is well-pleasing to God, and approved by men. (19) So then let us pursue the things of peace, and the things for building up one another. (20) Do not undo the work of God for food. Truly, all things indeed are clean, but it is bad to the man eating because of a stumbling-block. (21) It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything by which your brother stumbles, or is offended, or is made weak. (22) Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Blessed is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. (23) But, the one doubting, if he eats, he has been condemned, because it is not of faith; and all that is not of faith is sin.*

1. We are to serve Christ in "these things" that is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (17,18)
2. We are to pursue "the things of peace" - harmony in the Christian community
3. We are to build each other up
4. We are not to "undo the work of God for food" - that is use our freedom in Christ to upset another person's weaker faith
5. We are to restrain our liberty so as not to cause a brother to stumble, be spiritually offended, or made weak
6. We can still exercise our freedom to ourselves, before God.
7. If our faith and conscience is pure about what we approve then we are blessed
8. But if we find something to be doubtful - then don't do it. If it is not according to our faith and conscience then it is sin.

Lets take some controversial examples: tithing, drinking alcohol and attending church on Sunday. Each of these is a "strong matter of conscience" to some people and "not a problem" to others. Arguments rage about the rights and wrongs of these issues. As we have seen earlier on in this chapter "both sides are right" and should live in peace. If someone wants to attend church regularly each Sunday "unto the Lord" that is fine, if someone things Saturday is better or any day at all and does so "unto the Lord" that is fine too. Both sides should learn to get along! And if someone believes in being a teetotaler, that is good if they do so unto the Lord, and if someone drinks wine and praises God, that is also fine (as long as they do not get drunk), and if someone tithes exactly ten percent and gives diligently and faithfully unto the Lord they are blessed, and if another person gives 8% or 15% or whatever they feel moved to by the grace of God and do so unto the Lord, that is fine as well. Both sides are right - and the important thing is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, not the formula, not the exactly right religious practice!

However - and it is a BIG however, we are automatically WRONG if we exercise our freedom in a way that stumbles our brother. If I were to drink around a teetotaler - then

I could hurt that person and cause spiritual damage, around an alcoholic - I could even destroy them! This is wrong, plain wrong! I am never to exercise my freedom in a way that stumbles, offends or makes weak a brother!

Yet that does not mean that I am at the mercy of every legalistic and hyper-sensitive individual. Just because someone is offended by the car I drive, or the clothes I wear, or by my Australian accent does not mean I have to change! We are free to be ourselves in the Lord. However when it really is a spiritual issue for that person we should compromise.

Should Christian women wear mini-skirts? Is a brother stumbled by this? Surely he sees worse on TV or at the office? Yet it does not help! It adds to the burden of temptation, and is perhaps best avoided. Consideration means modesty – for both men and women.

On issue after issue we have to balance our freedom with the spiritual effects of our actions. Mini-skirts, lottery tickets, Sabbaths, meat offered to idols, alcohol, tithing or grace giving, or even driving an SUV or Hybrid can be contentious issues.

In the end we have to make up our own mind according to our own conscience. *Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Blessed is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.*

And if we do decide that something is doubtful or off-limits then we should abide by that and not try to do things just for the sake of “personal liberation”: *But, the one doubting, if he eats, he has been condemned, because it is not of faith; and all that is not of faith is sin.*

If you feel bad about not tithing – then you must tithe! If you feel guilty when you take a drink – then don't drink. If you feel something is wrong if you are not at church on Sunday – then you must go to church! You cannot violate your conscience but you can slowly reeducate it.

The apostle Peter was very strict about what he would and would not eat until Jesus showed him a vision and told him to eat that which Peter considered unclean. Then Peter had trouble visiting Gentiles – until God showed him that too was OK (see Acts chapters 10 and 11).

As our faith grows, so does our freedom in Christ. The “rules” we were so worried about before, rules about eating and drinking and Sabbaths and clean and unclean and Christmas and Easter - all fade away (see Colossians 2:8-23).

Yet there are some folk for whom those rules are still very important. To a new Christian in 45 AD eating a pork chop may have seemed like a terrible sin (if they were from a Jewish background) and serving them pork could have stumbled them in their obedience to God. In the end it is not pork that matters – but people.

Blessings,

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