

Freedom in Christ

Discerning the Difference Between Liberty and Sin Issues

As we have been learning this past month, we as Christians are now free from the Law of sin and have been made alive in Christ. However we have also learned that with this freedom comes two commandments: Love the Lord your God with all that you are and love your neighbor as yourself. We also learned that this is only possible by abiding in Christ and He in us as we receive His direction from the Holy Spirit.

As we have already learned, the Christian life is not following a set of rules of do's and don'ts; rather it is an intimate walk with God where we learn to listen to his voice and obey him.

Over the years however many Christians have fallen into habits of religious practice and have setup many rules that have nothing to do with drawing them closer to the Lord.

These habits find their bases in most instances, by what is accepted to be the standard for respect or manners by the culture at the time. After a period of time however the culture changes and the religious habits stay the same.

That is why we see churches that somehow seem to be stuck somewhere in the past.

Can you think of some churches or denominations that seem to exist outside of this time in history? (The Amish, Quakers, German Baptist, Catholic Church and others normally come to mind quickly).

They are cultures all to themselves. The more they stay the same the further away they seem to be from the rest of society. They have rules that they follow and require all their members to follow as well. Sadly this only serves to further them from society and separate them from the people they are supposed to be reaching.

There are many examples of these rules but I am only going to list a few of them now so that we can get an idea of what we are talking about.

- Using a particular Bible translation and banning all others.
- Deciding how people can pray and how they cannot.
- Deciding what people can and cannot wear and when.
- Deciding on how members should or should not cut their hair.
- Deciding what types of food and drinks are acceptable and which are not.

- Deciding which types of technologies are acceptable and which are not.
- Deciding what type of music styles are acceptable for worship and personal time.
- Regulating the order of service; what is acceptable and what is not in the church building, who can teach and who cannot. The list goes on and on.

Although these traditions were often started with good intentions they almost always have devastating results that cripple a church in it's effort to reach the lost and minister to one another.

Jesus knew that we were susceptible to this kind of thinking and warned his disciples often to be aware to avoid the leaven of the Pharisees and to love one another. In fact the group that got Jesus' harshest criticism was the people that were claiming to be the religious people of God.

Matthew 23:23-34

[23] “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. [24] You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

[25] “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. [26] You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

[27] “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. [28] So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

[29] “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, [30] saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ [31] Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. [32] Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. [33] You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? [34] Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town.

1. *Jesus did not mix words when he addressed the actions of the Pharisees.*
2. *Why do you think Jesus was so forceful with this group of people?*
3. *What were they supposed to be doing?*

4. *What had become their focus?*

5. *What was missing from their lives and actions? (Vs. 23)*

We as a church and as believers do not want to fall into this same snare of the Devil. What actions do you think we should take to insure this does not happen?

Let's look at one of the problems that the first church was having concerning liberty in the church.

1 Corinthians 8:4-8

[4] 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.” [5] For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”— [6] yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. [7] 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. [8] Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.

I want to give you some background so we can better understand what is going on here.

- The market place of that time . . .
- The story of Macabees.
 - Seven brothers that were tortured by Antiochus while their mother was forced to watch and then she too was finally murdered.
 - The promise of riches for eating pork.
 - Their gruesome deaths.

Although this story is a sad one to us, it does not have the same power or influence that it did to those of the early church. Many of their grandparents or great grandparents have lived during the time of Antiochus or had been killed by him. They were very proud of the ones that had stayed firm and not eaten the pig (the meat offered to idols). This would have still been on their minds and many were very upset with those who were eating the meat from the market.

Romans 14:1-12

[1] As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. [2] One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. [3] Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. [4] Who are you to pass

judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. [5] One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. [6] The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. [7] For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.

[8] For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. [9] For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. [10] Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; [11] for it is written,

“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,
and every tongue shall confess to God.”

[12] So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

- 1. We still have difficulty today determining the difference between liberty and sin. Can you think of things we sometimes have difficulty with?*
- 2. Some examples might be alcohol, gambling, dating practices, what to wear, what to watch, what to eat.*
- 3. None of these are directly stated to be sins, yet many of us still consider them to be things that we need to be very careful with.*
- 4. There are two things we need to be mindful of when it comes to liberties in the Body of Christ: the first is to know if this is a liberty issue or a sin issue, and the second is to know if this is affecting my testimony with others.*

Is this a sin issue? The Holy Spirit living inside of us convicts us of sin. If we have to ask “*Should I be doing this*” that is a very good indication that we should not be.

James 4:17

[17] So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Is this affecting my testimony? If we are doing something that God has not told us is a sin and yet we know it will cause damage to our testimony we should avoid doing it.

1 Corinthians 8:9-13

[9] But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. [10] 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? [11] And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. [12] Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. [13] Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

- 1. What is our concern as mature believers to be?*
- 2. How can we live this principle out in our lives?*
- 3. Consider your walk with the Lord and your fellow believers: are you walking with the Lord and obeying his spirit?*
- 4. Are you a stumbling block in any way to others?*
- 5. Have you fallen prey to the leaven that Jesus warned us about?*