

Love one another

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[0 : 00] Well, if you would turn with me to the passage that we read there in Romans chapter 14, in which Paul is telling us to love one another because we are united in one kingdom family.

The faith that unites us in a new relationship to God also unites us in a new relationship of love to one another. We're one kingdom family.

That's what this gospel tells us. Chapter 12, verse 5 says we are one body in Christ. We are members of one another, says Paul. We are truly brothers and sisters.

If you look in our passage today, you'll see Paul constantly reminds us of that in these verses. Your brother, he says, verse 10. Again, don't hinder your brother, verse 13.

Again, verse 15 and verse 21. We're all part of one family, he says, who have received God's love poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

[1 : 09] Remember chapter 5, verse 5. And so what that means is that the family trait that we must share must be this love and expressing this love.

We are to love one another with brotherly affection, he said in chapter 12, verse 10. We're to owe no one anything except to love one another. Chapter 13, verse 8.

But as we've been seeing in these chapters, love is not just a slushy, sentimental feeling. That's so often what people mean when they use that word today.

But not at all in the Bible, no. Love is not just what you feel. Love, in the Bible at least, is what you do. Love is never self-indulgence.

Love in the Bible is always about self-discipline. And Paul tells us that genuine Christian love means selfless putting others' needs before our own.

[2 : 10] Outdoing each other, he says, in doing honour to one another, even when we find ourselves in disagreement with one another. As we saw last time, that's what chapters 14 and 15 of Romans are all about.

When Christians disagree, as verse 1 of chapter 14 says, about opinions. About disputable matters. About what Christians should or shouldn't eat or drink.

Or what they should or shouldn't do on certain days of the week and so on. Now Paul tells us that mature and strong faith knows great liberation in all of these areas.

But he also tells us that that liberation, that liberty, is not for license, but it's for loving. We're not to please ourselves.

That liberty is for pleasing others and helping others, not hindering others in their spiritual growth and development. Even our controversies, therefore, says Paul, must be shaped by grace.

[3 : 13] And Christian liberty is never, ever the enemy of Christian love. How often, though, that's not the case.

How much time and energy is spent by Christians determined to convince others that their thinking, on this particular issue or that, is the right thinking. And how often our attitudes can actually be poisoned towards one another by that kind of thinking.

And that's so, isn't it? But no, says Paul, stop despising. Stop passing judgment on each other like that. And welcome one another.

Remember that we are all people who have been welcomed by this one God into his family. We have one Savior. We have one Lord. We have one Judge.

And so we should leave the judging to him. At least the judging of other people's behavior. So verse 12 is very clear, isn't it? Each will give an account of himself to God.

[4 : 16] So, he says in verse 13, let us not pass judgment on one another any longer. But rather, he says, judge this. You've got the authorized version.

You'll see that it preserves that deliberate pun of Paul's. Judge, he says, judge, he says, how to make sure that you will never put a stumbling block, a hindrance, in the way of your Christian brother or sister.

See, it's not enough, he says, to be truly loving, just to desist from negative behavior. He says, we're to invest positive energy in making sure that whatever we do in the Christian life, our exercise of our own Christian liberty will never ever be the cause of somebody else stumbling.

Because unless we live purposefully in that way, Paul says in verse 15, we are no longer walking in love. And only if we are walking in love by not doing these things, he says in verse 18, are we truly serving Christ?

Are we truly acceptable to God? Are we truly well-pleasing to God? It's the same word used in chapter 12, verse 2, of worshipping God in a way that's well-pleasing. So once again, you see, Paul's telling us that the test of our true worship is seen when there's disagreement in these areas of disputable matters.

[5 : 48] Issues where people's understanding of the faith and the full implications of the faith develop at different rates. In any family, there are different stages of growth and maturity.

Aren't there? Different ages of the children. And it's just that way in the Christian family all the time. And what Paul's saying is we can't coerce people into maturity. We can't do that.

We can't push people beyond what their conscience allows them. No, he says we must be patient. That's the mark, isn't it, of a maturing child in any family.

When they stop being impatient and knocking down the building blocks of their little brother or sister because they're all higgledy-figgledy and no good. When they stop doing that.

And when they learn patiently to help their younger brother or sister to build properly and nicely and straight. That's maturity. And so it is in the church family.

[6 : 46] The mark of the mature Christian, the person who is truly liberated by the gospel, is that they're liberated to love. To truly walk in love.

Not liberated to please themselves. But walking in the way of loving liberty that seeks to truly honour the Lord and to be well-pleasing to him. And therefore, to truly honour our brothers and sisters above ourselves.

Putting their needs before ours. Love one another, says Paul. That's what it means to be united in one kingdom family. Now that's the message of these verses, the second half of chapter 14.

But as always, Paul shows us how very concrete that is. How it must be in practice if we're to be really loving. As James might say, you show your love not in words, but in works.

And that's what Paul clearly does here in these verses. So let's look first in verses 13 to 21, where Paul shows us the way of loving liberty that honours our brothers and sisters in Christ.

[7 : 51] That honours one another. It tells us what we're not to do, and what we are to do, and why. And so the first command is very clear. It brackets the whole section.

He says, don't trip up one another by pleasing yourselves. Don't trip up one another. Verse 13. Never put a stumbling block or a hindrance in the way of a brother.

And again at the end, verse 20. It is wrong. It's evil for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats, says Paul. Now Paul's talking here principally to the so-called strong believers.

And he begins very clearly by affirming their view. Look at verse 14. He, as Christ's apostle, is persuaded, he says, in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself.

He's very probably referring there to Jesus' own very clear teaching that all foods are commanded clean. Mark 7, verse 19. All foods are clean. Whether you're a Jew or a Gentile, anything now can be eaten.

[8 : 57] Nothing in itself is unclean. But we don't take those words out of context. Remember here that Paul is clearly speaking about disputable matters.

Matters of argument. Matters of diet. And the diary. He's not here talking about universal things. As though there was nothing ever at all that was unclean in and of itself.

Of course there is. And to think that he was saying that would be to contradict what Paul says in many places in this letter. And of course in many of his other letters. Nor does Paul say that we are never ever to judge other people.

In fact he commands us in many places that we are to judge. We are to judge, he says, when the gospel message is being compromised. Read Galatians chapter 1. You'll see just how clear that is.

We are to judge others in the church when gospel morality is being compromised. Read 1 Corinthians chapter 5. You'll see how clear that is.

[9 : 54] But here he's talking about the issue of kosher food. He's talking about a lingering cultural issue for many Jews. And perhaps also for genuine and earnest Gentile converts.

Who want to be sure that they are living a life that's pleasing God. And so when they looked at the Jewish law and the Jewish customs. They felt, well this must be the right way to please God. Just like if somebody was brought up in a Christian culture perhaps.

Where drinking alcohol was very much frowned on. Or were doing certain things on a Sunday were very much frowned on. Or were other sort of things like wearing makeup or dancing.

Or wearing certain clothes. Or taking part in any kind of particular social activity. Where these things were associated very much with godless behavior. Perhaps for a very good reason.

But Paul is clear when he's talking about some of these things. Nothing is unclean in itself. But, and here's the extraordinary thing.

[10 : 56] Look at the second half of verse 14. It is unclean, he says. If anyone thinks it's unclean. And that's because it's our motivation. So often.

That gives the real meaning to our actions. If someone does something that they feel. That they think genuinely is wrong. Then they know that they're dishonoring God by doing it.

Don't they? You can't do that in honor of the Lord. As verse 6 of chapter 14 speaks about. You can't do that. If your conscience tells you that it's wrong. Even if in and of itself.

Paul can say the thing is neutral. It's not wrong. It is wrong. It is wrong if you feel it's wrong.

Because you know in your heart. You're dishonoring God as you do it.

Or you might be tempted to say. Well more fool that person. I'm just glad I'm not crippled by that kind of thinking. I can do what I like. I'm liberated. I'm not touched by that nonsense.

[11 : 56] But no says Paul. That's the wrong reaction. Verse 15. If you're a liberty. Right there it is. If your liberty is loving liberty.

Then you won't think that. Because it's not just says Paul. That your weaker brother or sister. Can damage themselves. Or injure themselves. By violating their own conscience.

In what they do. He says you. Can inflict a painful violation. On his conscience. By what you eat. You see he says.

If. If a brother is grieved. Or distressed. By what you eat. Then you've damaged him. And that makes you guilty. He says. Of no longer walking in love.

You see. What he's saying is. That for your behavior. To distress. A Christian brother or sister. Is to deny the gospel yourself. And worse.

[12 : 57] For you to deny the gospel like this. He says in. The second half of verse 15. Can potentially destroy. Destroy. The one for whom Christ died.

Your thoughtless behavior. Even though you're right. You're correct on the issue. Can endanger the salvation. Of a brother. Because he can be undermined.

And unsettled. So much in his own thinking. That it tempts him. To turn away from the faith.

Altogether. To turn away from the church. To be led into spiritual ruin. That seems strange to us.

Doesn't it? But don't be mistaken. That is how high the stakes are. According to Paul. The language he's using here. About stumbling blocks. And hindrances. Implies exactly.

That kind of seriousness. It's the very same language. That Jesus uses in Matthew chapter 18. You remember. Where he warns. How deadly serious it is. For anyone. To put a stumbling block.

[13 : 53] A hindrance. A temptation to sin. In the path of. A little one. Better a millstone. To be tied around your neck. And thrown into the bottom of the sea.

Says Jesus. Than for any of you. To be guilty of that. That's pretty serious. Don't you think? We can destroy. The one for whom Christ died.

By our attitude of lovelessness. Even when we. Are theologically correct. That's what he's saying. And not only that. Verse 16.

Do you see? The wider injury. Says Paul. To the reputation of Christ. And his church. Can be equally ruinous. The great. Gospel of true freedom.

Will be spoken of as evil. If you behave like that. Literally. He says. It will be blasphemed. Because of your behavior. That's the same. Devastating charge.

[14 : 47] That Paul leveled. Against Israel. As the people of God. In Romans 2. Verse 24. Where God's people. Instead of witnessing to God. Blasphemed the name of God.

Among the nations. By their behavior. That should make us think. Shouldn't it? Before we brush off. One another's scruples. And insist on exercising. Our own liberty to the fool. And we thought of the consequences. Remember once. When I was a young student.

I was at a wedding. In Northern Ireland. It was a wedding of a friend of mine. He was a minister over there. At the wedding reception. I was sat next to another minister. And he was rather a loud fellow. And all through the wedding reception. He made endless comments. Bewailing the fact. That there was no decent wine. At this wedding meal. In fact. There was no wine at all. There was only soft drinks.

[15:40] And again. And again. He made great mockery. Of anybody who was a teetotaler. Made a mockery of them. For being immature in their faith. And went on and on and on. About how the whole thing was spoiled.

Because we didn't have wine. Now I happen to know. That the couple who were getting married. Were not teetotaled. They knew that many in that culture. Were and would be. And they knew that some of them.

Would be very offended. Over that issue. If there was wine served. At their wedding. So they graciously opted to serve. Only soft drinks. At their wedding. And let me tell you.

That the gracelessness. Exhibited by that minister. Of the gospel. Compared with the graciousness. Of the couple. Who were getting married. And their thinking.

Their sensitivity. Was not lost on me. Or I might say. On many of the others. Who were sitting at our table. Some of whom were not Christian people. It brought dishonor.

[16:37] On the liberating good. Of the gospel of Christ. And who knows what damage. That may have had. On others who were there. What we need to realize.

Is that our liberated action. Can damage others. It can't make them strong. But it can destroy them. And it can destroy.

Says Paul. The work of God. So we're really willing. For the sake of insisting. On our freedom. To please ourselves. To pit ourselves. Against Christ.

To pit ourselves. Against our brothers and sisters. To pit ourselves. Against his precious blood. God. Well if so. Paul says. You see. It calls into question.

Whether we ourselves. Have really understood. The gospel of grace. At all. If we've understood. What the whole gospel of Christ. Is really about. And that's what he turns to. In verses 17 and 18.

[17:32] Don't trip up one another. He says. By pleasing yourselves. Look up. Remember. It's all about pleasing God. Verse 17. The kingdom of God.

Is not a matter of eating or drinking. But of righteousness. And peace. And joy. In the Holy Spirit. What is the essence of sin? According to Romans chapter 1.

Well it's the disastrous exchange. Isn't it? Of the immortal God. For merely earthly things. From turning. From worshipping God. The true creator. Into worshipping.

Mere created things. And salvation. Is the reversal of that. It's a rescue. Out of that world. Of blindness and folly.

And into right relationship. With God. Once again. It's into right relationship. With the things that really matter. And really are important in life. And in eternity. And verse 17 here.

[18:29] Is echoing the great summary. Of the gospel of grace. That Paul gave in chapter 5. Verse 1. Where he says that by faith. We are justified. We are declared righteous. In right relationship with God.

And we have peace with God. He says. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. And we rejoice. In the hope of glory. Because God's love. Has been poured into our hearts. By the Holy Spirit. We've been liberated.

Says Paul. Yes. Into a whole new world. We're no longer slaves to sin. Into a lifestyle of self-serving. To the pursuit of mere creative things.

Things that only lead to disharmony. And disintegration. And death ultimately. But no. Says Paul. In his gospel. We're now slaves to God. We're slaves to righteousness. And to the faith.

That leads to wholeness. And reconstruction. Of true humanity. And eternal life. Now that's the true gospel. He says.

[19:30] And we're being. Conformed. Into the likeness. Into the image. Of God's son. For a destiny. Of glorious new humanity. And that's happening to us.

Alongside many. Many. Brothers and sisters. In the church. Of Jesus Christ. Christ. And so. Even now. Paul says. We're walking. In newness of life.

Chapter 6. Verse 4. We're walking. In the newness of the spirit. He says. In chapter 7. And we're taken up. With the wonder. Of that coming kingdom. We're no longer.

Conformed. To this world's thinking. We're being transformed. By the renewal. Of our minds. And so. What's.

More important. To new. Christian believers. Than anything else. In this world. Is the things. That are going to last forever. Not what's merely. Transitory.

[20 : 24] And passing. And will decay. And disappear. But the things. That last forever. And the things. That last forever. Are God. And the family of God. That means.

That what matters. Above everything else. In this world. Is our relationship. With God. And our relationship. With others. In the family of God. Our brothers and sisters. And nothing.

But nothing. Is worth damaging. These relationships. For us. Certainly not. Mere food. Or drink. Or our insistence. On having it. Or doing certain things. In certain ways.

And we know. In our earthly experience. Don't we. That it's relationships. With others. With our families. With our loved ones. With dear friends.

These are the most precious things. In our lives. Aren't they? You might love your car. You might be pained. If you lose it in an accident. But you don't hold a funeral service.

[21 : 19] For your car. At least I hope not. But when you lose a loved one. That puts all other grief into perspective. Doesn't it?

You'd rather lose everything. Wouldn't you? Than lose your loved one. Imagine you had a fatal illness in the family. Your brother or your sister.

And there was a cure that was available. For a price. And that price was the money. That you would get. For your precious. Car. Or golf clubs.

Or boat. Or whatever it might be for you. Can you imagine? Can you imagine? Saying. I'd really rather just keep my car. Well how much more so here.

Says Paul. The kingdom of God. Is about inheriting. This world of right relationships. With God. And with his family forever. The world of righteousness. And peace. And joy in the Holy Spirit.

[22 : 17] Don't. Don't jeopardize that. For anything. Certainly not the mere chaff. Of bodily appetites. What you might eat or drink. Or so on. Don't live in liberty.

But in a liberty. That loves one another. Now. So as to seek first. The kingdom of God. And serve all of his people. So that as. As Paul says in chapter.

15 verse 6. So that we live in such. Harmony with one another. In accord with Jesus Christ. That together. With one voice. We glorify God. Now whoever serves Christ.

Thus. Says Paul in verse 18. In this way. Is acceptable. Is well pleasing. Literally to God. That's the living sacrifice.

That God desires. From you. And from me. And also. That is the same. Kind of sacrifice. Of self. And selfless service. That Paul says. Will be approved. By others.

[23 : 19] Approved by men. In other words. What he's saying. Is that if we live like that. With one another. It'll bear witness to all. Not just inside the church. But also outside the church.

It shows. The real life changing power. Of the gospel. It's the very opposite. Of verse 16. Where Christ's name is blasphemed. And the gospel. Is scorned.

Because where grace. Is powerfully at work. Through selfless love. Among Christian believers. In the church. Then the world will see that grace. And the world will be impressed by it.

And will thirst for it. Because it's the very antithesis. Isn't it? Of the way of the world. Where I assert my rights. To please me. My way. Regardless of what effect.

It has on anybody else. If the world sees me. Forgoing my rights. In order to protect. Your spiritual health. And good. Because all of us together.

[24 : 17] Rejoice above all. In the kingdom of God. And his joy and peace. Then the world will begin. To see something. Of Christ our savior. And thirst. And long.

For what it sees. By this. Said Jesus. Will all men know. That you are my disciples. If you have love. One for another. And that's what this means.

In practice. Says Paul. And so. As Paul says. In another letter. To the church in Corinth. Whatever you eat. Or drink. Or whatever you do. Do all. To the glory of God.

Looking up. Give no offense. To Jews. Or Greeks. Or the church of God. Just as I try. To please everyone. In everything I do. Not serving. And seeking my own advantage. But that of many. That they may be saved. To serve. Christ. Thus says. Paul. Both glorifies God. And displays his grace. To men.

[25 : 16] So don't trip up. One another. In order to please yourselves. Look up. Remember. It's all about being pleasing to God. And promoting the gospel. And thirdly. Therefore.

In verse 19 to 21. He says. Build up. One another. By pleasing others. Verse 19. So then. Let us pursue. Let us make. Every effort.

Towards what makes. For peace. And mutual. Upbuilding. That is the corporate. Building up. And strengthening. Of our brothers and sisters.

In Christ. Together. In the church fellowship. And what that means. That serving Christ. Thus. Is building up. The body of Christ.

That we are part of. It's the work of God. As he calls it. In verse 20. It's the living expression. Of the kingdom of righteousness. And joy. And peace. In the Holy Spirit. That I belong to.

[26 : 10] And that. Says Paul. Must take. Precedence. Over everything. All my own. Personal desires. Even. Legitimate. Personal desires.

Because real love. Says Paul. Is always interested. In building up. Christ's church. As opposed. To merely puffing up. Ourselves. In a loveless knowledge. And freedom. Knowledge.

Builds up. Says Paul. To the Corinthians. Sorry. Love. Builds up. Whereas knowledge. Often only puffs up. And this is. What real love.

Pursues. With every effort. By pleasing others. Otherwise. Otherwise. If we just please ourselves. If we tear down others. By doing that.

Not only destroy our brothers and sisters. Says Paul. But verse 20. He says. We destroy. The work of God. In other words.

[27 : 08] For the sake of asserting ourselves. Or our determination. To exercise our rights. Or our freedoms. Or our determination. To have our own views heard. Or to press our own agenda.

In the church. We can destroy. The work of God. But that's the tragedy.

Isn't it? That is often true. In many church fellowships. Where the forces of destruction. Are much more evident. Than the forces of construction. For personal.

Self-assertion. And self-determination. And self-expression. Where it insists. On its place. Instead of holding back. For the sake of mutual upbuilding.

Often today. In churches. It's a strong musical lobby. Isn't it? Pressuring an agenda. To change things. To their own particular. Enlightened view of music. Whatever that is. Or worship.

[28 : 06] As they might call it. That's a cause of great strife. In many churches today. It's ironic. Isn't it? When the spiritual worship. The real worship. That Paul's talking about here. Is saying. Don't destroy the work of God.

For trivial things like that. But often it is. Sometimes it's the person. In the church. Who knows. That they alone. Have the right view.

On this particular issue. They always insist. On making their point. About it. Pointedly. In a church meeting. Or any opportunity. As soon as somebody says. Are there any questions.

You know exactly. What that particular person's. Question is going to be. He doesn't want to know. The answer to his question. He wants to make a statement. And push his line. In front of everybody else. Like Winston Churchill's.

Definition of a fanatic. Somebody who won't change his mind. And can't change his subject. But that can be evident. Can't it? In a church fellowship. And that kind of attitude.

[29 : 02] Doesn't build up. It's destructive. Of the work of God. Sometimes it's the person. Who's truly liberated. And they know.

That the proper way. To run a prayer meeting. Or to run a Bible study. Or whatever it is. Is quite different. To the way it's run. In this church. And because it's no good here. I'm just jolly well. Not good to go. Until they learn.

To do it properly. Not caring about. What effect that has. On anybody else. Or young Christians. Who see that. And wonder. What on earth is going on. It could go on and on.

Couldn't you? With examples. But you see the point. Don't. Says Paul. For the sake of food. Don't. For the sake of your. Personal appetite. Destroy the work of God.

Because that's what. Those kind of attitudes do. It's the opposite. Says Paul. Of true worship of God. And it's deadly serious. Yes.

[29 : 58] Everything is indeed. Clean. But it is evil. He says. Evil. For anyone. To make another stumble. By what he eats. Or does. Or says.

Or promotes. In his own selfish way. See. Real worship. Is a spiritual battle. Because we live. In a still fallen world. Don't we? We live in still.

Sinful bodies. And that is always going to be. And that means that. Real worship of God. Is a war. When I want to do right. Said Paul. In chapter 7. Evil.

Evil. Lies. Close at hand. So we know it's hard. Don't we? But Paul says. In chapter 12. We are to abhor.

What is evil. And hold fast. To what is good. We're not to be overcome. By evil. But we are to overcome. Evil. By good. Well here. He's giving us.

[30 : 51] A real. Down to earth. Instance. Of what that spiritual warfare. Looks like. Spiritual warfare. Isn't some kind of. Rarefied. Super spiritual business. Spiritual warfare.

Isn't going marching around cities. Claiming the ground for God. It's not having. All night prayer meetings. Or all these sorts of things. Very often. The real battle. For worship of God. The real battle.

Against evil. Is just played out. In the mundane world. Of our relationships. In the Christian church. So here. In verse 20. It is evil.

For anyone. To make another stumble. By what he eats. But verse 21. It is good. Not to eat meat. Or drink wine. Or do anything. That makes your brother.

Stumble. In other words. What he's saying. Is it is evil. And anti-worship. To trip up. And to break down. To please your own ego. But it's good.

[31 : 48] To restrain. Your own ego. In order to bless. And to build up. The church of God. That's what he's saying. Notice.

He's not just saying. We're to tolerate. The scruples. Of others. But we're to be willing. To curtail. At times. Our own liberty. For the sake of love. And that might mean.

That you have to give. Careful thought. As to whether you serve. Wine or you don't. At a meal.

Depending on who it is. That you're having. To your house. And what you know of them. May mean that perhaps.

You're on holiday somewhere. There. And you happen to find yourself. In the same place. As somebody else. From your church. And it's not your practice. When you're on holiday. Abroad somewhere. To go to church on Sunday.

You enjoy the liberty. Of reading a book. On the beach. But you happen to know. That these are folk. Who always go to the church. On a Sunday. Wherever they are. On holiday. And you know. That if you don't go along.

[32 : 42] With them on a Sunday. They'll think it's. A poor show. And it might be damaging to them. What are you going to do? Well. You're going to pack up your book. And put on your clothes. And you're going to go to church with them.

So they see you there. And they're not ashamed. A whole host of other things. Where you have to be willing. To curtail your own liberty. Because.

It's relationships in the kingdom of God. That matter far more. Than any of these things. What you eat or drink. And real spiritual worship. Isn't about.

About songs. It's not about aesthetic things. It's not about mystical experiences. Real worship isn't about rituals. Or rules either. But real worship.

That pleases God. Is about a simple commitment. To living. Sacrificially. At our own personal cost. For the sake of peace. For the sake of mutual upbuilding.

[33 : 41] In the church of Jesus Christ. Real worship. Is the way of self-denying. Loving liberty. That honors our brothers. And sisters. But on the other hand.

Lest it be thought. That all these concessions. To weakness. Mean that the real freedom. At the heart of the gospel. Is somehow in danger. Being snuffed out. Paul turns.

In the last two verses. Verses 22 and 23. He turns back. To his preeminent theme. That mustn't be compromised. By anything at all. And that is. The matter of faith.

Despite everything. That he said here. There is. Says Paul. Real freedom. Unfettered freedom. For the believer in Christ. Our liberty. He says. Must be loving liberty.

But it is. Real liberty. And it's both received. He says. And it's both enjoyed. Fully. By faith. And by faith alone. So in these last two verses.

[34 : 41] He tells us. How to enjoy that liberty. The right way. He speaks of the liberated love. That honors the Lord. The faith you have. He says in verse 22. That is concerning these things.

I'm talking about. The faith you have. Keep. Between yourselves. And God. Now he's speaking to the strong believer again. Who's like Paul. Who's. Who's fully persuaded.

About the liberty he has. To eat all foods. And not to be bound. By special holy days and things. He has. No reason. Says Paul. To pass judgment on himself. For what he approves.

That is. He has a totally clear conscience. He's untroubled. In eating these things. Or doing these things. The language of verse 5. He. He is fully convinced.

In his own mind. And Paul says. There's great blessing. In that. And there's blessing. To be enjoyed. In that. But in the right place.

[35 : 36] And in the right way. He mustn't. Unhelpfully parade. His freedom. To do these things. In such a way. As is harmful. To others. Normously. Promote his liberty.

In a way. To try and coerce others. Into doing things. Against their conscience. Just to make him feel better. No. Don't do that. Says Paul. But rather. Quietly. And sensitively.

Keep these things. Between yourself. And the Lord. Enjoy the blessing. Of the freedom. That God has given you. In the right way. In a way. That brings no offense. To anybody else. Rather like.

In a. In a marriage relationship. It's within the intimacy. It's within the privacy. Of that relationship. That our. Our greatest. Freedom. Is often experienced.

Things that are just. Between you. And your wife. Or you. And your husband. You're free to enjoy. One another. In a way that wouldn't be. Appropriate. In company. You're also free. To relax.

[36 : 34] With one another. To talk. In unguarded ways. With one another. To share thoughts. And views. That perhaps. You wouldn't speak about. Publicly. With others. Because it might offend. You're even free.

Aren't you? To wander around the house. In your underwear. You'd certainly offend. Your brothers and sisters. In the church. If you wandered around. The church like that. But there's a place. For these things. Well in a sense.

Paul says. It's within the depth. And the privacy. Of your relationship. With the Lord. That you have. The greatest freedom. You mustn't allow. Your obligation. To your brother.

And to his weakness. To make you feel guilty. About things that you know. To be good. No. They're for you to enjoy. To the full. Says Paul. In the right place.

Before God. Nothing is to be rejected. Says Paul to Timothy. If it's received. With thanksgiving. For it's made holy. By the word of God. And by prayer. Obviously.

[37 : 29] Once again. He's not referring there. To things that God. Clearly forbids. You can't do something. That God. Forbids. And thank God. For it. Can't you? You can't make something holy. That God says is sin.

No. But in these matters. Over which. Some Christians. Are over scrupulous. What a blessing it is. Says Paul. To be liberated. To hold faith. And a clear conscience.

To be able to enjoy. Freedom. The right way. Where it won't harm. Others. I was speaking to. A Christian minister. Recently. A very fine man.

Indeed. And he told me. That. Here's a private get together. On occasions. With a few friends. To enjoy. Sharing three loves. Love for the Lord. And his word. And they study the Bible together. But also.

This might shock you. Love for a Cuban cigar. And a glass of fine malt whiskey. Now. He wouldn't dream. Of doing that publicly. He wouldn't dream.

[38 : 25] Of promoting that. Among the congregation. That he serves. Might be a stumbling block. To some. But he's the Lord's free man. And who's to say.

That he can't be blessed. By enjoying his Cuban cigar. I'd have to advise him. Not to inhale. But. But it'd be easy. Wouldn't it? To cause somebody.

To stumble. By handling that wrongly. Equally easy. To pass judgment. On that. For somebody. Behaving quite properly. And privately. A more spiritual example. Preacher I know.

Very very well indeed. He speaks. And prays. In tongues. He does that privately. Discreetly. Between himself. And the Lord. Because he knows.

That to promote that. He knows. That to exercise that. In his fellowship. Would not make for peace. And mutual upbuilding. And so he refrains. From that. Because he's walking in love.

[39 : 24] And there's no hypocrisy in that. Paul's not saying here. That there's a public and a private morality divide. He's not saying that at all. That's very clear in verse 23. Isn't it? The doubter. He says. Is not to think. That he's going to overcome his scruples. Just by doing things privately. No. He says. Whoever doubts. Is condemned. By what he eats. Or whatever else he does. That damages his conscience. Because. Paul says. His eating is not from faith. Even if he just does it privately. He's given in to peer pressure. Or coercion.

And he knows. He knows. Deep down in his own heart. That he's not really doing this. To honor Jesus. He's doing it to please others. Or to impress them. Or just to fall into line. No. Faith. Says Paul. Loving trust in Jesus. Is the absolute. Priority. Always. So that whatever doesn't. Proceed. From this liberated love.

[40 : 19] And faith. In Jesus. Whatever doesn't proceed. From that. Is sin. And always sin. It's faith. That really matters. It's faith. That's the great message of Romans.

Isn't it? It's faith. That brings you and me. And all our brothers and sisters. Into the righteousness. And joy. And peace. Of the kingdom of God. It's faith. That unites us together. As one family. Faith. Is expressed. In love. Love. That honors the Lord. And love. That honors one another. Our brothers and sisters. In the Lord. So love one another. Says Paul. Whoever serves Christ. Thus. Living not to trip people up. But to build them up. Is well pleasing to God. And is approved by men. Whatever doesn't proceed from that motivation. Whatever it is.

[41 : 14] Is sin. That's very challenging. Isn't it? Maybe all kind of indifferent activities. But there are no indifferent actions. For the Christian believer. Because either our motivation is faith. Faith. So whatever we do. And whenever. And however we do it. Our motivation is to make for peace. And mutual up building. And the fellowship of God's people. Our brothers and sisters. Either our motivation is that. Or. Says Paul. Our motivation is sin. And we're doing evil. Because even though. We might be theologically correct. Even though technically. We're in the right. Our real motivation is self. It's not the Lord. It's not the Lord's people. So it's not constructive. It's destructive. So we need to ask ourselves.

[42 : 12] Don't we. Is our church life. Or our own personal life. Marked by this. Loving liberty. Towards one another. And towards the Lord. A good clue.

Will be whether we're more fixated. On certain rules. Or rituals. Or routines. Than on relationships. With God. And with one another. That's what God's interested in. Our relationship with him. Through faith. And expressed. Through genuine heart love. To Christ. And therefore. In genuine heart love. To one another. And commitment. To peace. And mutual upbuilding. Of one another. Is the spiritual worship. Of our fellowship. Of your own family. Of your own personal life. Is it well pleasing to God? What this passage is telling us friends. Is that God rejoices. Not so much in our hymns. But in our harmony.

[43 : 07] And every time I put. Your needs before mine. When we all put each other's needs. Before our own. In all kinds of practical.

And personal ways. In all kinds of costly. Self-denial. For the sake of. Of peace. And mutual upbuilding. Of the church of God. That. That is what's heard by God. As a sweet hymn of praise. That's what also. Paul says. Will shine before men. As a bright light. That turns. Others eyes. To the savior himself. To seek him. And perhaps to find him. So love one another. Says Paul. Even in the midst. Of your controversies. Because we're united. In one kingdom family. And it's the worship. And the witness. Of that family. That matters more than anything else. In this whole world. For the kingdom of God.

[44 : 04] Is not a matter of eating. And drinking. But of righteousness. And peace. And joy. In the Holy Spirit. And whoever serves Christ. Thus. Is well pleasing to God.

And approved by men. So then. Let us pursue. What makes for peace. And mutual up building. Amen.

Let's pray. God our Father. We acknowledge. That so often. Our hearts. Turn inwards. To ourselves. Instead of upwards.
To you. And outwards. To one another. But you've poured your love. Into our hearts. And we are the people. Who know you. By your spirit. So help us.
We pray. To love one another. And so to please you. And. To make your son known. In this world. For we ask it. In Jesus name.
[45 : 01] Amen.