

I CORINTHIANS

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to I Corinthians chapter 7 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

Last week we began looking at this chapter and we covered the first 16 verses. It is a section that deals with marriage, remarriage, divorce and singleness.

And as we have seen in our study last time, Satan loves to pervert and destroy what God has given to us. Thus, we need to get back to the basics, back to what God has said in His Word about these issues and not let the world influence us.

One more point before we dig into the Scriptures this evening and that is this. Starting in I Corinthians chapter 7 and going on through I Corinthians chapter 15, Paul is answering some questions that they had there in Corinth. Areas of concern they had, and Paul is going to share with them what God has to say about these questions.

As I have said, I Corinthians chapter 7 deals with marriage, remarriage, divorce and singleness.

In I Corinthians chapters 8 through 10 Paul will be dealing with Christian liberty and conduct. Again, a very important issue that we need to understand from a Biblical mindset and not a worldly one! In chapter 11 he deals with prayer and the Lord's supper.

As we move on into I Corinthians chapters 12 through 14 Paul will deal with Spiritual gifts and what they are all about. Again, talk about confusion back then as well as today. I think many get confused because they listen to the arguments of men instead of what the Lord is saying. And in this section on Spiritual gifts, Paul says that he does not want us to be ignorant about them, and neither does the Lord!

And then in I Corinthians chapter 15 Paul is going to deal with the resurrection of the dead and what that is all about.

As Paul concludes this letter, in I Corinthians chapter 16, he will deal with his closing comments and he will exhort them to continue on in the faith!

So with that as our background, let's pick up our study this evening in I Corinthians chapter 7 beginning in verse 17 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word.

I CORINTHIANS 7

VERSE 17

Notice that what Paul is saying here is not just for a select few or this church or that church. Paul tells us that this is for "**all the churches.**"

And Paul's point is pretty simple and yet, we tend to make things so complicated today. He is saying that wherever you are at, be it married, single, divorced, widowed, remarried, or whatever, God can use you – you don't have to wait, you can walk right now!

We make life so complicated and God says, "***Walk with Me!***" May we do that, follow the Lord all the days of our lives no matter what station we have in life!

And please keep in mind that Paul is not saying that we can just ignore our sin and serve Him, not at all.

What he is saying is that we need to repent of our sin and then move on. What happens many times is we become stagnant or we don't move in our service to the Lord, we become paralyzed.

And I guess I do need to say this. If you are divorced and remarried, you don't get divorced from your present wife to get back to your first wife thinking you are following the Lord. Two wrongs don't make a right. Repent and move on, stay with the wife you are married to! It is as simple as that.

And please understand that whatever lot you have in life, be it married, single, divorced, widowed, whatever, don't think that the other person has it better than you. God has put us in these positions and we need to learn to rest in Him and be thankful for what He has given to us!

Paul is going to talk about that next.

VERSES 18-20

Paul is giving us this illustration to prove his point about serving where you are at and to serve with thanksgiving.

To do that he uses circumcision and Paul is saying that if you were circumcised when you became a Christian, fine. If you were not circumcised when you became a Christian, fine also. Those things do not matter. What matters is serving the Lord where we are at right now.

And understand that circumcision was an embarrassment in the Roman world. During the time of the Maccabees, some of the Jewish men "made themselves uncircumcised."

Josephus tells us that during the Greek rule of the eastern Mediterranean several centuries before Christ, some Jewish men who wanted to be accepted into Greek society had surgery performed to make themselves appear uncircumcised when they bathed or exercised at the gymnasiums.

Paul's point, as extreme as the example is, is that it doesn't matter, you serve the Lord where you are at – be it married or unmarried!

And I guess we can put it like this, ***“Married is nothing and unmarried is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters.”***

So, wherever you were at when God called you, you don't have to change, unless you are doing something that was immoral, illegal.

One example I can share with you is from our neighbors in Illinois. Across the street from my mom were a couple several years younger than my mom, and they were in the Mafia and then they got saved.

Obviously, they could not stay in that line of work, so they tried to get out. And it was not easy. Their car was blown up. They lost their home and it was tough. But they knew, as a follower of Jesus, they could not continue with that lifestyle and they didn't!

Most of us don't have to worry about that. For me, I was a nurse when I got saved and that is where God had me for many years before bringing me up to Manitowoc to be the pastor of this church.

VERSES 21-24

This is important for us to understand. Paul is saying that the position you are in now, God did not make a mistake. A slave can please God as a slave. A married couple can please God as a married couple.

And keep in mind slavery was different than what we think of today. Many times it was to pay off a debt or it was better for them to be a slave. And yes, there were those who were nasty and mean, even abusive, but that was not always the case. And Paul wants them to continue serving faithfully!

Let me say this in regard to where we are at. We send our studies to several men who are in prison and I hope this encourages them. God didn't make a mistake, He has you in a place where He can use you. Yes, you did wrong, but the wrong you did God can use for good. He is an amazing God.

Thus, wherever you are at, whatever you are doing, live for God, allow Him to use you and be thankful for where you are at, because, again, God does not make mistakes!

A great example of this is seen in the life of Paul himself, in jail in Rome and yet he writes to the Philippians encouraging them who are free, **“But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.”** Philippians 1:12-18.

Even in prison the Gospel message was going forth and Paul was able to thank God for where he was at because lives were being changed by God!

Now, here in verse 23, where Paul says, **“Do not become slaves of men”** the idea is that we are not to put ourselves under the influence of others who are not following the Lord, that is very dangerous.

Spurgeon put it like this, “Do not follow even good men slavishly. Do not say, ‘I am of Paul; I am of Apollos; I am of Calvin; I am of Wesley.’ Did Calvin redeem you? Did Wesley die for you? Who is Calvin and who is Wesley but ministers by whom ye believed as the Lord gave unto you? Do not so surrender yourself to any leadership that you rather follow the man than his Master. I will follow anybody if he goes Christ’s way, but I will follow nobody, by the grace of God, if he does not go in that direction.” Exactly!

Then Paul concludes this by saying, “**Brethren, let each one remain with God in that calling in which he was called.**” I Corinthians 7:24.

In other words, we can seek God’s best and be used by Him right where we are! Or as Morgan wrote, “Marriage may be a distraction. Sorrow may become a distraction. Joy may become a distraction, or commerce, or the world. Then we are to turn our back upon all these things.” He is not saying get divorced, but put God first in all these things!

As we read on Paul is going to deal with some specific misconceptions that had arisen in the church of Corinth and specifically the unmarried or virgins.

VERSES 25-28

Paul is now speaking to those who have never been married, that they should remain that way.

Why would Paul say that? Possibly because of the persecution against Christians that was growing in Corinth.

You see, it is much easier to see yourself persecuted, beaten, even put to death than your spouse or your children!

Please understand that Paul did not forbid marriage but there was an advantage to being single, you can serve the Lord faithfully without having to care for or worry about your spouse or children. That is the point that Paul is making.

In fact, Paul warned of those who would come against marriage in the last days when he wrote in I Timothy 4:1-3, **“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.”**

And what Paul has here is a very simple statement, *“Even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned.”*

Pretty simple and yet, some have come against Paul and feel that he is just a male chauvinist and is forbidding anyone from marrying. Not at all!

VERSES 29-31

When you read what Paul is saying here, that the time is short, here we are almost 2,000 years past the time of the writing of this letter and the Lord has not returned yet. So, is Paul a false prophet? Some feel he is, but they are wrong.

Even Jesus told us in every age to be ready and anticipate His return! He tells us or admonishes us in Matthew 24:44, **“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”**

And let me say this. When Paul speaks of our time being “**short**” or SUSTELLO in the Greek, it speaks of “contracted and rolled up, as sails used to be by the mariners, when the ship draws nigh to the harbour.” (Trapp).

In other words, Paul was telling the people of Corinth to get their ships ready, we are pulling into harbor, get your houses in order, Jesus is coming!

Thus, we are to live, not neglecting our families but also reaching out for the time is short and let’s use it to the fullest in serving the Lord. Why? Because the things of this world are passing away, they will not last, so why hold on to them?

John put it this way in I John 2:15-17, “**Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.**”

Morris put it like this, “There is nothing solid and lasting in this world system; it is its nature to pass away. It is folly for believers to act as though its values were permanent.”

And I do understand that people have a hard time with Paul as he said, “**. . . so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none.**”

And as some read that they think that Paul is saying that if you are married go and act like you’re not married in the sense that you hang out with your friends and stay out late and run around on your spouse as if you’re still single.

Obviously, that is not what Paul is saying, and I have touched on this a little already. But I want to make sure you understand what Paul is saying here.

All that Paul is doing is showing us that because the time is short, and the Lord's return is getting close, as important as our marriage relationship is, our service to the Lord has to be more important! Again, I am not saying to neglect your spouse, but put the Lord first, share your faith so many can come into the Kingdom before He returns!

I like the way that Ironside put it, "Everyone is to act in view of the fact that the time is indeed fleeting, the Lord's return is nearing, and no consideration of personal comfort is to be allowed to hinder devotion to the will of God."

Also, Vine put it like this, "The meaning is not, of course, that a married man is to refrain from behaving as a husband should, but that his relationship to his wife should be entirely subservient to his higher relationship with the Lord . . . who is to have the first place in the heart; he is not to permit a natural relation to obstruct his obedience to Christ."

Now, as difficult as some make that, then Paul goes on to say, "**those who weep as though they did not weep.**" I Corinthians 7:20. Is Paul saying we are to be stoics and not show any emotion?

Again, that is not what he is saying. His point is simple. Don't let some tragedy, something that has happened in your life, like the death of a loved one, cause you to stop serving God, drop out! I hope that makes sense.

And Paul is not done. He goes on to say, "**Those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice.**" I Corinthians 7:30. So now we are not to rejoice, we are not to be happy?

I think perspective is so important and that is the idea here – *PERSPECTIVE!* Don't let some happiness in your life, like marriage or the birth of a child or a new job or whatever, take the place of your relationship with the Lord. Don't let it cause you to drop out or not serve the Lord! Again, I hope that makes sense to you.

And then, again in I Corinthians 7:30, Paul says, “**those who buy as though they did not possess.**” Is Paul saying that we are not to possess things?

The idea here is not to let possessions possess you. Don’t let materialism fill your life that it pushes God aside. We see that with Demas in the Bible, where we are told, “**for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world . . .**” II Timothy 4:10.

Remember, it took one day to get the children of Israel out of Egypt, but it took forty years to get Egypt out of the children of Israel! Or, it took one day to get them out of the world and forty years to get the world out of them. Be careful because you can let the things of this world push God out of your life!

I think that is the idea of what Paul is saying in I Corinthians 7:31, “**and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away.**”

Let’s face it, we live in the world, we just need to be careful that we don’t let the world live in us.

We need to buy clothes, eat, have a place to live and even some leisure, fun time. In other words, we “**use this world**” but we must be careful not to “**misuse**” it!

VERSES 32-35

Please understand that Paul is not saying that if you are single you are more spiritual but just stating a fact that you are free to serve the Lord.

If you are married, your wife, your children need to be carried for, that doesn’t mean you are less spiritual, it is just a reality!

In Luke 2:36-38 we read of a woman who remained single and was able to devote herself to the Lord. We are told, **“Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.”**

Now, in saying that, there is the other problem where people put so many other things above the Lord and they just don't serve, they are not involved.

“We don't come to church on Thursday's because it is too late for the kids to be up on a school night!” And yet, they will take the family out to do other things on a school night and that is not a problem.

“We don't come to church on Thursday's because the kids have this, and they have that!” I guess you can put in there whatever you want but what you are teaching your children is that these things are more important than coming to worship the Lord!

I wish I would hear more, “We love coming to church as a family on Thursday's because it is a time to come together and worship the Lord!” That would be awesome.

I am not trying to lay some guilt trip on anyone, but it is something that we need to look at and do a heart check on.

Why? Because our children will learn from what we teach them, but they learn even more by what they see us do! In other words, most of what our kids learn about God will be “caught” not taught.

VERSES 36-38

Remember that in this ancient culture, a young person's parents had the primary responsibility for arranging their marriage. So, based on what Paul has already taught, should a Christian father recommend celibacy to his child?

And the idea here is that the Father has dedicated his daughter to the Lord, to remain a virgin and unmarried. But if she does not have the gift of celibacy, Paul says it is okay for the father to change his mind and let her get married.

Now, I Corinthians 7:38 is difficult for some, as Paul wrote, "**So then he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better.**"

Please understand that Paul is not saying that it is wrong to have your daughter get married and it is right for her to remain a virgin, unmarried.

He is saying that it is good that she gets married and even better if she doesn't. Why? Maybe because of the persecution against Christians that was going on in Corinth!

VERSES 39-40

For those of you who think it is okay for a Christian to date or marry a non-believer, Paul once again says it is not. If your spouse dies you can re-marry but only in the Lord, only to another believer!

We have talked of the liberty we have in Christ, the freedom we have. And may we use that liberty we have for edification of not only ourselves but others and to bring glory to God.

Listen to what Paul said in Ephesians 6:5-9 and how we are to serve the Lord. He wrote, **“Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.”**

Serve the Lord, not your flesh, and you will be blessed, and your actions will match up to what you believe!

As we move into I Corinthians chapter 8 this evening, it is another one of those tough portions of Scripture for some because it deals with Christian liberty.

Yes, Paul dealt with the issue of marriage, but now he is going to tackle the issue of eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols, should a Christian eat that meat?

Understand that during that time period there were many, many temples in Corinth that were dedicated to the various idols and animals would be sacrificed to these idols, these gods.

To do this they would take the meat and burn some on the altar and another portion would be given to their priests.

Then, the remainder of the sacrifice would be sold in the markets and it would be sold at a reduced rate. So if you were looking for deals, these meats that were sacrificed to these idols would be the meat to buy, especially if you were poor and didn't get a chance to have much meat in your diet.

In the early church they believed that if you ate these meats that were sacrificed to idols you became one with that idol or god!

And there were many Christians that just could not partake of this meat and they didn't.

But, for the mature Christian, this was not an issue, it was not a problem. The only time it could be a problem was if you invited a young Christian to your home and they did not want to eat meat that was sacrificed to idols. The liberty we have is that we could partake of it, but, because of our love for this person, we would not have that meat for the meal.

And for those who had recently come out of this paganism and had become Christians, their faith was still too young for them to understand that the idol was nothing and that there was only one true God for a person to become one with through Jesus Christ - and so their conscience was greatly troubled by eating meat that had been sacrificed to an idol.

Now some of you may be wondering how that even applies to us today? But think about the divisions, the arguments that Christians get into regarding drinking alcohol, smoking, music, dancing, putting on make-up and you know my feeling on that, if the barn needs to be painted, then paint the barn!

But that list can go on-and-on depending on who you are talking to and where they are coming from.

And Paul is going to show us how far our Christian liberty can go and those gray areas, those things that the Bible does not specifically talk about, those areas that are not black and white, how do we deal with it?

What we see played out in Christian lives are two extremes. There is one extreme that says, “*Thou shall not . . .*” and it is nothing more than legalism dressed up in spirituality! There are all kinds of rules and regulations to follow. And, in their mind it is either good or bad, black or white! Obviously, that is not the correct view to have, it gives no room for the Holy Spirit and the Word of God to work in a believer’s life.

The other view is liberty that gives the person a license to do whatever they want, there are the black areas but for the most part all is white, we can do anything, as long as the Scriptures don’t specifically teach against it.

That too is an extreme and even though it is true, they are missing an important factor in deciding what you should do, and Paul is going to speak of that here in this chapter. So, let’s read on and see what Paul has to say regarding our Christian liberty.

I CORINTHIANS 8

VERSES 1-3

Keep in mind that both the Greeks and the Romans were polytheistic. They worshiped many gods and in their superstitious beliefs, they offered meat as a sacrifice to these gods. They did this partly to ward off evil spirits and partly to appease the good spirits.

Of this sacrifice we see that it was divided up into three portions, as I have said. One portion was burnt as an offering to their god. One portion was given to the priest. And one portion was given to the worshiper to take home and eat.

Because they had so many sacrifices the priests couldn’t eat all that meat, so they sold it in the market place at a reduced cost.

And here is the question that Paul is answering. “Can they eat meat offered to these idols, these god’s even though they were now Christians?”

I find it interesting that Paul doesn’t answer that specific question yet but lays down the principle to follow. And this principle was not only for this issue, but also throughout our Christian life. It is not how much you know, knowledge; but our actions need to flow out of love. Why is that? Because knowledge puffs up, but love builds up!

Paul makes that point in I Corinthians 12:31-13:3 as he says, **“But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way. Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.”**

May we not lose sight of that fact, because we can be so right that we are wrong because we have negated the love factor!

VERSES 4-6

Isn’t it amazing all the different god’s people speak of today? We see god’s like Zeus, Allah, Buddha, and-so-on, but they are not real, they are nothing.

“How can you say that Pastor Joe?”

Because the Bible tells us there is only **ONE** true God!

It is as Deuteronomy tells us, **“To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD Himself is God; there is none other besides Him . . . Therefore know this day, and consider it in your heart, that the LORD Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.”** Deuteronomy 4:35, 39.

On this Clarke tells us, “There are many images that are supposed to be representations of divinities: but these divinities are nothing, the figments of mere fancy; and these images have no corresponding realities.”

And if you are still struggling with this, listen to what the Psalmist tells us regarding our God and the idols, the gods that people worship. He wrote, **“But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, The work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; Eyes they have, but they do not see; They have ears, but they do not hear; Noses they have, but they do not smell; They have hands, but they do not handle; Feet they have, but they do not walk; Nor do they mutter through their throat. Those who make them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them.”** Psalm 115:3-8.

People may say that there are gods out there, but the reality is, there is only *ONE!*

And these idols that people worship are nothing! They can’t talk, walk, smell, they can’t do anything because they are not living, they are not real. And think about these idols, they are carried around to be worshiped and people still do that today! Make no mistake about it, these idols are not real, but our God is!

Thus, the logical conclusion based upon the knowledge we have is that they can eat meat sacrificed to idols; it is no big deal because these gods, these idols are not real!

But, as we will see, there is a better way and Paul is going to show us the principle that will build up and not puff up!

VERSE 7

Here's the thing. There were some Corinthian Christians who knew idols were nothing, the meat sacrificed to these gods meant nothing and they had the knowledge to eat this meat that was sacrificed to these gods, they had that freedom.

On the other side were those who had a hard time with this, they didn't have the correct knowledge on the situation, and they were uncomfortable with this. These were the ones who were young in the faith.

So the big question is, "What should these mature Christians do?" We don't have to guess because Paul tells us here in I Corinthians 8:1, "**Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.**" I Corinthians 8:1.

Don't let your knowledge cause you to become arrogant, puffed up but use the knowledge you have with love to build up the other person.

Again, that principle can be applied in all we do for the Lord!

Why does Paul keep picking on the mature Christian and not the weaker Christian?

Think about that for a minute. The younger Christian, the immature Christian can't instantaneously grow to our level in these things. But we can come down to their level and help them to grow in these areas.

Think about little kids who are crawling on the ground. We can walk, run, jump and yet, what do we do? We get down on the ground and crawl with them, helping them to grow and learn.

We should do no less for young Christians, weaker brothers and sisters!

Paul is going to lay this out for us, what this all means, and it is interesting because people are on both sides of the picture here. And look at what Paul says!

VERSE 8

I find it interesting how Paul answered this question about eating meat that was offered to idols.

First of all, are you more spiritual because you don't eat meat sacrificed to idols? Not at all!

Okay, then you must be more spiritual because you do eat meat sacrificed to idols? Not at all, that is not the issue here.

Then what is the issue? What is the answer? We need to respond in *LOVE!*

I think Jesus summed it up nicely for us in regard to food defiling us. He said in Matthew 15:17-20, **“Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.”**

It is not what goes into your stomach that defiles you but what comes out of your heart! How important that is for us to understand!

But the key to what Paul is speaking of is that we need to respond in love to people.

Now apply that to drinking, smoking, music, make-up, going out to the movies and-so-on.

So what is the answer in regard to doing these things? Wherever you are at, respond in ***LOVE!***

Paul is going to expound on that now as he concludes this chapter.

VERSES 9-13

Paul is now showing us how we need to put this into practice. That we don't use the liberty that we have in Christ to cause another brother to stumble.

Think of it like this. Christ gave up His exalted rights, He became flesh and dwelt among us to go to the cross and pay in full the penalty for our sins, to save us, and thus, can't we do that for others, can't we love them as Christ has loved us?

Interesting perspective!

Poole put it this way, "God hath not given people knowledge that they thereby should be a means to harm and to destroy, but to do good, and to save others; it is a most absurd thing for any to use their knowledge, therefore, to the destruction of others."

And for those who thought it was okay to use their liberty even at the hurt of others, needed to understand they were also offending Christ by their actions.

Let me give you this picture to think about. When your children were young you put outlet covers on your electrical outlets, you put locks on your cabinets so they could not get at things that could hurt them, you may have even had to remove the knobs on the stove so they could not turn them on.

Now, have the electrical outlets without the covers, having no locks on the cabinets, keeping the knobs on the stove is not evil or wrong.

Then why did you do it?

To protect your children from harm. Your love for them made it a little harder for you, but that didn't matter. And Paul is saying that we should do no less for the weaker brother or sister in the Lord!

I like the way one writer put regarding these verses. He said,

A small child is not allowed to play with sharp tools, to go into the street, or to go where there are dangerous machines or electrical appliances. The restrictions are gradually removed as he grows older and learns for himself what is dangerous and what is not. God confines His spiritual children by conscience.

As they grow in knowledge and maturity the limits of conscience are expanded. We should never expand our actions and habits before our conscience permits it. And we should never encourage, either directly or indirectly, anyone else to do that. By sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Causing a brother to stumble is more than an offense against him; it is an offense against our Lord.

That is a strong warning. Surely no believer would desire to sin against Christ. We should be eager to limit our liberty at any time and to any degree in order to help a fellow believer – a brother whom we should love, and a precious soul for whom Christ died.

- John MacArthur

Now let me also say this. Please don't come to the conclusion that we are then to be bound by legalism so that we don't cause our weaker brother to stumble, not at all.

Paul's point is causing a brother to sin, not offending his legalism. In fact, the idea is to help the weaker brother to grow in love and not be kept in bondage over those issues, over legalism.

Paul, in Galatians 5:1 tells us, “**Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.**”

Clarke gives to us this insight, “Many persons cover a spirit of envy and uncharitableness with the name of godly zeal and tender concern for the salvation of others; they find fault with all; their spirit is a spirit of universal censoriousness; none can please them; and everyone suffers by them. These destroy more souls by tithing mint and cummin, than others do by neglecting the weightier matters of the law. Such persons have what is termed, and very properly too, *sour godliness.*”

Thus, our actions should not be based solely on what we know, which is important, but it needs to be based in love, the love of others.

Paul, in I Corinthians 10:23-24 makes that same point as he says, “**All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being.**”

May we not use our liberty to hurt anyone! May we help them to grow in the Lord, to mature in the faith!