

understand and discern what God's Word means. Great freedom comes in finding agreement together – agreeing that this is indeed what God says and what God means on a given question. Then when we exercise our freedom we have the support of the rest of the Body. We know someone “has our back.”

C. Wycliffe Bible Translators translate the Bible into thousands of languages. As a translator/missionary brings God's Word to a new culture many of the old practices of that village or society are still carried over. The missionaries don't confront the people on these practices until the Scripture that teaches about that is available in their language. As more Scripture is available the Word convicts the people and they begin to leave their old habits and practices – based on Scripture rather than on the ideas of missionaries. What if we used that principle? Wouldn't that be freeing? Wouldn't it be a new day in the church?

Application

A. As we watched the Winter Olympics last month some athletes took major headers on the snow and ice. Moving at breakneck speed they hit a little pebble in the snow or a nick in the ice and in an instant a life-time of work ended in a horrible crash. Their dream died when a “stumbling block” rose up in their path.

B. Do you care enough about Christ, Kingdom matters, and relationships to say, “I will not be a stumbling block to a weaker believer? I will rather yield my rights than cause another brother or sister to stumble and perhaps crash spiritually.

Would you give up your glass of wine to keep someone from alcoholism, R rated movies if it caused someone younger to cast off restraint and attend X rated movies? Would you dress more modestly if it helped a brother or sister in their attempt to live in purity? Will let the Word of God speak into lives of students with little or no church background, even if their dress, their music, or their body piercings shock you?

I think the world is looking for a brand of Christianity that is free but real. Where believers care about the details without being legalist: We are honest on our taxes returns, park in designated parking zones, drive decently and safely, and are generally above reproach. Living like that is the path to freedom.

C. If you are a new Christian or a weak Christian, are you willing to be stretched? (A relaxed rubber band is not doing what it was intended to do – stretch and hold). If you are a strong Christian, are you willing to test what you do according to faith (vs. 23) which means according to God's Word? Paul's counsel is:

1. Do not deliberately shock your brothers/sisters in Christ.
2. Give up your right when it threatens the peace
3. Never act from doubt – always from conviction.

“Finding the Freedom to Say No” 3/14/10
Romans 14:12-23

RMBC
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Introduction

A. In our study of Romans I'm amazed at the length to which Paul is willing to go as he extends his argument about doing the hard work of loving one another (47 verses so far). This shows 2 things:

1. It proves how incredibly important unity really is in the Church. Paul knew unity was the life line of the church.
2. It reminds us that Christian unity can be easily faked but not easily achieved. God wants us to experience life that is so real that its counterfeit will immediately be exposed.

B. So it shouldn't surprise us that in vs. 19 of our text Paul writes, “Make every effort to do what leads to peace . . .” This Body Life business is hard work and requires real effort. This morning we are being asked to examine our motives – when we act and when we react, why are we doing what we do, and how deeply do we care?

General William Westmoreland was reviewing a platoon of paratroopers and went down the line asking, “How do you like jumping, son?” “Love it, sir!” was the first answer. “Greatest experience of my life, sir!” said another. “How do you like jumping, son?” he asked the third. “I hate it, sir!” he replied. “Then why do you do it?” asked the General. The soldier shot back, “Because I want to be around guys who love to jump, sir.”

Is the motivation to be around people who love Jesus strong enough to help us do what we would sometimes rather not do? Is the life we have in Christ that powerful and attractive? It can be.

C. Notice the connection between Romans 14:1 and 14:13: “Don't pass judgment.” Now please don't miss this: God rarely gives us only the negative. Instead of stopping with, “Stop that,” or “Don't do that!” God also gives us a positive step to replace the negative. We're not simply told to stop judging. We're also given the replacement action. The Word of God is highly practical.

D. Countless thousands of people have experienced the freedom that comes when God's grace washes over their soul. To live in Christ is to live in freedom (1-12). What we see in vs. 13-23 is that this grace also gives us the freedom to say “no” at the appropriate times. Let's see what those times are.

1. When a Brother or Sister is Shocked or Offended vs. 14-15

A. Paul gets us right into the daily life of believers dealing with freedoms and rights. In vs. 14 he makes a beautiful declaration of our freedom in Christ. Paul isn't saying all food is good for you, but that God created all things good. In the same breath, however, Paul shows us his love and sensitivity for others.

B. Just outside Vancouver, B.C. up the side of Grouse Mountain, which you heard about during the Olympics, is the Lynn Canyon Suspension Bridge. Deep in the woods it spans a stream that, for thousands of years has cut its way into that mountain. It's one of my favorite hikes, following the marked trails and winding paths until you come to the suspension bridge spanning the canyon.

I have almost no fear in walking across that great expanse as the bridge sways beneath me. It feels like an adventure. Connie, on the other hand, crosses oh so reluctantly with white knuckles gripping the hand rails – but she makes it. Her sister is still another story. She refuses to get anywhere near the bridge. She doesn't even want to look at it – it terrifies her.

It would be cruel for me to take either of them by the arm and force them to run across that bridge with me. It could actually be dangerous to put them in a state of panic like that.

C. And this is Paul's point in vs. 15. It is wrong to force people to move at your pace as they grow in Christ. In fact, he is saying that it is an act of Christian love to adjust ourselves to another Christian. In those settings we have the freedom to say no when another brother or sister would be distressed or offended.

Remember: Paul has moral issues in mind here – convictions. He isn't suggesting we have to worry about every time someone doesn't have the same taste or preference. He is thinking of matters of conscience. What a new idea of freedom he introduces; the freedom to put others' concerns ahead of ours! That is a consistent Christian principle – honoring others above yourself – and it is a mark of true freedom. (See Philippians 2:3-4)

2. When the Cause of Christ Would be Hindered Vs. 16-21

A. One of the blessings coming out of the tragedy of officer Bejar's death is that many of us have examined our priorities. When a life is cut so short we begin to ask, "What is most important in my life? What is the center? What am I prepared to give up?" Jesus helped us with that in Matt. 6:31 where he said "Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness. . ."

B. The question from our text is, How committed am I to the Kingdom of God? Are you willing to forego your rights and some privileges for the sake of the Kingdom? Let's take a few moments to consider the three marks of the Kingdom from vs. 17:

Righteousness: This is one of the most important words in the Bible. When Christ gives us his righteousness he doesn't simply give us a new status – it's not that we are simply marked with a stamp: Righteous! He gives us new relationships and a new way of looking at relationships. So one great mark of this new freedom is right relationships with God and with others.

Peace: What a contemporary word in our violent culture! Peace gives us the opportunity to test the limits of our freedom – the freedom to follow our convictions and the freedom to say no to our rights. Biblical peace is not the absence of trouble. It is an inner serenity that is not lost in outer irritation. It is never only private and personal, but always extends to others. Peace is powerful.

Joy: The Kingdom of God is not designed for grumps and grouches. It is not a place for nit-pickers. It is a place for inner joy that wells up into life. And here's the thing that makes joy so fitting for this lesson today: Christian joy is not about making yourself happy; it is about making others happy.

C. Do you see that every mark of the Kingdom of God is relational? Do you see that exercising freedom in Christ is about yielding? Anytime the cause of Christ and the name of Jesus could be hindered, I want to yield. It's like that Manning on-ramp to 99. When you come barreling down that ramp there is a sign that says, "Yield." But if you're flying up from Selma on 99 in the same area there is a sign that says, "Merging Traffic." As a Christian in either lane I have the freedom to yield so that the flow of traffic is never impeded. The Kingdom of God is like a highway right down the middle of life – As people enter from either side we yield so that the Kingdom can move on – so there can be righteousness, peace and joy that comes from the Holy Spirit at work in us.

3. When I Have Personal Doubts vs. 22-23

A. Here's another important piece of Paul's dialogue. At first glance the phrase "keep between yourself and God" sounds like you can do as you please as long as it's a secret. I think a better interpretation is this: What you believe, and therefore what you do, must be based on what you know about God and his Word – faith.

If it's not based on God's Word it will likely be based on your own whim at the moment or even on pride. The motive must never be to show someone how free I am. It's never the right for a Christian to participate in something questionable out of rebellion (No one's going to tell me what to do). That just never has a place in Kingdom relationships.

B. The point of these two verses seems to be setting our actions and our choices in the light of God's Word. And that means we use our freedom to say no when we have personal doubts. The question we always want to be able to answer in our hearts is this, "Have I settled this on the basis of Scripture?" Once I can say "yes" to that question I am set free.

And this is exactly where the Christian community that we call the church is so important. While we are not to judge others where the Bible does not judge, we usually need others to help us

Introduction

Paul’s strong argument for loving one another (47 verses) shows:

1. How incredibly important _____ is to the Body of Christ
2. That Christian unity can be _____ and not easily _____

Body Life is hard _____. “Make every _____ . . .” vs. 19

Two questions from Romans 14:13-23:

1. What are your _____? Why do you do what you do?
2. How much do you _____? How important is the Kingdom?

Romans 14:1-12 – The _____ we have in Christ

Romans 14:13-23 – The freedom to say _____ for Christ’s sake.

We Have Freedom to Say “No” When:

1. A Brother or Sister is Shocked or Offended vs. 14-15

It is wrong to _____ people to move at your _____ as they grow

A consistent Christian principle: Honor others above _____
Philippians 2:3-4

2. The Cause of Christ Would be Hindered vs. 16-21

How committed am I to the _____ of God? Matthew 6:31

Righteousness: More than a _____ -- a new view of _____

Peace: More than absence of _____ -- inner, lasting _____

Joy: More than making me _____ -- making _____ happy

Yield: No matter what “lane” I’m in, as a believer I can _____

3. We Have Personal Doubts vs. 22-23

I am most free when I have _____ a question based on God’s
Word

The greatest freedom is found when we _____ together

Application

How important is the Kingdom of God to me? _____

I will not be a stumbling block to another brother or sister! _____

I am willing to be stretched as I grow in Christ. _____