

# BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

## The Strength to Yield

Romans 14:13-23

2000

### Introduction

Last week we considered the divisive issue of disputable matters in the church:

Should a Christian drink, or dance? Can they smoke? What day should a Christian worship on and what translation of the Bible should he read? Can a person be a true believer without ascribing to the five points of Calvinism? Is it okay for Christians to go to movies and if so, what ratings are acceptable?

Unfortunately, some Christians take such strong positions on issues like these that their motto could be summed up in the following brief poem:

**“Look as I look,  
Do as I do ...  
Then and only then,  
Will I fellowship with you!”**

Instead, in Romans 14:1-12, we concluded that when it comes to disputable matters:

1. The strong should accept those who are weak in the faith
2. No one should pass judgment on someone else over disputable matters
3. We must let God be the ultimate judge of each man's heart

To the contrary, the motto of the church should be:

**“In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”**

In fact, the mark spiritual maturity and godly leadership is a deep love for God and a shepherd's heart for God's people. A true leader is not primarily concerned with filling a position, or exercising his freedoms -- his concern is for the sheep. In fact, he has such a love for God's people that when it comes to disputable matters, he will voluntarily limit his freedoms rather than bring harm to someone for whom Christ died. He has developed the maturity and strength to yield.

### I We Are Not To Pass Judgment Over Disputable Matters

**“Therefore”** refers back to verses 10-12 where Paul reminded us that we are not to judge or condemn others -- God alone is qualified to do that. It is enough that each of us will have to stand before His Bema seat and give an account for our own life.

- A. We must make up our mind not to **stumble** a brother [Verse 9]

**Stumbling block** = Proskomma = “An unintentional offense”

- 1 Corinthians 8:9 “Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block (proskomma) to the weak.”

**Obstacle** = Skandalon = “A trap or snare”

Matt 18:5-6 “But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin (skandalon), it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”

1 John 2:10 “Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble (skandalon).”

1. No food is unclean in itself [Verse 10a]

Paul uses two separate words here to describe the confidence he has in his position:

**“I know”** = Eido = “To understand, consider, or perceive”

**“I am persuaded”** = Peitho = “To be fully convinced and confident”

Mark 7:15, 19 “Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.' ... (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean").

1 Timothy 4:5 “For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.”

2. If someone regards it as unclean, it is unclean for him [Verse 10b]

**Regards** = Logizomai = “To consider or conclude”

In other words, if a Jewish believer really felt that certain foods were unclean for him to eat, then they were unclean for him and would be sinful for him to partake of.

Some believers, because of their past or their upbringing, are particularly sensitive to certain disputable matters and have come to the conclusion that certain activities or practices are not Christian. According to Paul, they should abstain.

1 Corinthians 8:4-7 “So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one ... [but] some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.”

B. We must not **distress** a brother because of what we eat: [Verse 15a]

**Distress** = Lupeo = “To cause anguish or grief”

1. If we do, we are no longer acting in **love** [Verse 15b]

**Love** = Agape = “Divine and sacrificial love”

One of the joys of being a Christian is that we are completely free in Christ. The only limitation to that freedom is our debt of love to our fellow believers.

So, a brother who exercises his freedom without consideration to the sensitivities of a weaker brother, and causes hurt as a result of that freedom, is no longer

walking in love and is actually guilty of a greater offense than the sensitivities of the weaker brother.

1 Corinthians 10:23-32 “Everything is permissible”-but not everything is beneficial. ... Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others ... Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God ...”

2. If we do, we are **destroying** our brother [Verse 15c]

**Destroy** = Apollumi = “To cause catastrophe or calamity”

A weak believer can be easily damaged when another believer participates in a freedom that the weaker brother considers offensive.

1 Corinthians 8:8-12 “But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. ... When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.”

**Illustration:** Naming our dog, “Sandy”

By initially naming her "Sandy", I inadvertently offended our friend, whose name was "Sandy". I ended up naming her “Christy” because I figured God wouldn’t care! ☺

3. If we do, we are **undermining** the work of Christ [Verse 15d]

This is sobering! If I cause a weaker brother to stumble by exercising my freedom, then I am not only violating the command of love, but I am also undermining the purpose for which Christ died on the cross.

**Application:**

Are you causing others to stumble – either through your legalism that causes them to feel condemned, weighed down or beaten up – or through your liberty, which causes them to follow you and thereby to violate their own conscience?

C. We must not allow what we consider good to be spoken of as evil [Verse 16]

**Speak evil** = Blasphemeo = “To blaspheme”

Rom 2:24 “For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

Disunity in the church over disputable matters has left the church and the gospel of Jesus Christ open to ridicule. It has also ripped away our most potent form of evangelism. John 13:34-35 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Paul's message is straightforward:

Enjoy the freedom that Christ has provided! But, be willing at any time to forfeit your freedom if the exercise of it might cause spiritual harm to a fellow believer or if it becomes an unnecessary stumbling block to an unbeliever.

1. The kingdom of God is not a matter of: [Verse 17a]

a. Eating or drinking

The Pharisees and teachers of the Law had reduced faith to a series of rules and regulations that dealt with external appearances. But the Kingdom of God is not primarily a matter of externals but of internals.

2. The kingdom of God is a matter of: [Verse 17b]

a. **Righteousness** in the Holy Spirit

**Righteousness** = Dikaiosisune = "A right standing before God"

It is the product of a reconciled relationship with God through faith in Christ.

Philippians 1:11 "... filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-to the glory and praise of God."

b. Peace in the Holy Spirit

**Peace** = Eirene = "To be free from war, or to be in unity"

Rom 5:1-2 "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Peace is the profound inner tranquility that is fruit of our reconciled relationship with God. That peace with God is also the secret to peace with one another.

c. **Joy** in the Holy Spirit

**Joy** = Chara = "Cheerfulness, calm delight, exceeding gladness"

Each of these qualities represents an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22).

James 1:2-4 "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

**Illustration:** "Maka"

3. The kingdom of God is matter of serving Christ:

**Serving** = Douleuo = "To be a voluntary slave"

a. If I do, I will be **pleasing** to God [Verse 18a]

**Pleasing** = Euarestos = "To be fully acceptable"

John 8:29 "... I [Jesus] always do what pleases him [the Father]."

Ephesians 5:10 "... find out what pleases the Lord."

b. If I do, I will be **approved** by men [Verse 18b]

**Approved** = Dokimos = “Tried and accepted”

It is the word used to describe a diamond buyer who carefully inspects a diamond before making a purchase.

**Application:**

When people closely examine your life, do they discover spiritual Zirconium, or a brilliant gem that reflects the light of Christ?

1 Peter 2:12 “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”

**II We Are To Make Every Effort To Maintain Unity**

A. We need to do what: [Verse 19]

**Leads** = Dioko = “To pursue or press forward”

1. Leads to **peace**

The mark of a mature believer, and one that will act as a powerful witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, is that he “makes every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:3

2. Leads to mutual **edification**

**Edification** = Oikodome = Used of architecture = “To build up”

In other words, enjoy your liberties. But don’t let your liberties undermine God’s building program in the life of your fellow believer.

1 Corinthians 10:23 “Everything is permissible”-but not everything is beneficial.  
“Everything is permissible”-but not everything is constructive (oikodomeo).”

B. We must not destroy God’s work over food [Verse 20]

**Destroy** = Kataluo = “To undermine, demolish or throw down”

The present imperative tense suggests that Paul was commanding certain believers in Rome to “STOP” doing something they were already doing.

What is the work of God?

Ephesians 2:10 “For we [believers] are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

God desires to build up and strengthen every believer. But if we exercise our freedoms at the expense of a weaker brother, then we are tearing down the very thing that God intends to build up!

**Illustration:**

We would consider it appalling for someone to deface a Rembrandt painting, to shatter a sculpture by Michelangelo, or to smash a Stradivarius violin. How infinitely worse it is to tear down a work of God, a man “for whom Christ died?”

1. All food is clean, but ...
2. It is wrong to do **anything** that stumbles a brother

**Illustration:**

Last week I mentioned the story of Charles Spurgeon and Joseph Parker – how they lost a friendship over disputable matters. Well, some time after the breach in their friendship, Spurgeon was reading the *London Times* and saw a full-page cigar ad with the headline, “The Cigar That Charles Spurgeon Smokes.” At that moment, Spurgeon gave up the habit. He came to see that what was for him a freedom might cause others to stumble.

Paul had that same heart. He was prepared to yield his liberty in Christ if claiming it meant that a weaker brother would be harmed by his example.

- 1 Cor 8:12-13 “When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.”

When it came to the fundamentals of the faith, the irreducible essentials of the Bible, Paul was uncompromising. However, when it came to a disputable matter, he was one of the most accommodating of all believers. He had a true shepherd’s heart.

- C. We must not allow our freedom to cause a brother to **fall** [Verse 21]  
**Fall** = Proskopto = “To trip up and stumble”

1. The eating of meat or the drinking of wine

**Illustration:** Alcohol

Although the New Testament does not forbid the drinking of alcohol, there are good reasons to abstain. One of the most important is the detrimental effect it can have on a former alcoholic. Our drinking, even in moderation, can place a stumbling block in our brother’s spiritual path and cause him to fall back into a former addiction.

2. The practicing of any other **disputable** matter

The pleasure of eating food or drinking alcohol, or doing anything else our freedom allows us to do, is absolutely trivial compared to the spiritual welfare of a brother or sister in Christ. It becomes actually sinful if we discover that it is causing one of little ones for whom Christ died to stumble. And it is a travesty if it prevents someone from receiving the free gift of salvation that Jesus Christ offers.

1 Cor 9:19-23 “Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”

**Application:**

Does this mean that I am required to immediately surrender every freedom based on the sensitivities of the weakest brother in the church? Not necessarily!

**Illustration:**

I recall one Christmas a guy in the church took great offense at my abbreviation of Christmas as “X-mas.” He was upset that I was suggesting that Christ was an unknown quantity. It took me quite a while to explain to Him that I wasn’t using the “X” as defined in mathematics, but that the “X”, or Chi as it is pronounced in the Greek, was the first letter in the spelling of Christ’s name and therefore was used as a common abbreviation for Christ.

If I had just ignored him or treated him with contempt, I would have violated the greatest command – to love. And if I had immediately yielded to his misunderstanding without explanation, I would have allowed the church to be held hostage by this brother’s ignorance.

In the end, I explained the Greek background and at the same time made a commitment to never abbreviate Christmas like that again – for the sake of that brother as well as for others who might also be unnecessarily offended.

### **III We Are to be Fully Assured of God’s Will for Our Lives**

A. Whatever you believe about disputable matters: [Verse 22a]

1. Keep between yourself and **God**

Acts 24:16 “So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.”

Notice that Paul was concerned with not only his conscience before God, but also before man. The point is this: We must never violate the Word of God or our conscience. But we must also give consideration to the importance of having a clear conscience before others. When those two conditions are met then we free to exercise our freedoms.

B. How you handle disputable matters will lead to either: [Verse 22b-23a]

1. The **blessing** of God for the man who:

**Blessed** = Makarios = “Supremely fortunate and happy”

You are blessed if you exercise your liberty in a way that doesn't harm your brother. You are blessed if no one is scandalized and led toward sin by you. You are blessed because you are living a life that pleases God.

a. Does not condemn himself by what he approves

If you are participating in something that you know is unscriptural or that your conscience is not freeing you to fully enjoy, you will not experience the blessing of God. Rather you will experience guilt and condemnation instead of the peace and joy that God desires for your life.

2. The **condemnation** of God for the man who:

**Condemned** = Katakrino = "To pronounce judgment"

a. Who has doubts about eating without assurance

Just as the strong believer commits sin by causing a weak brother to go against his own conscience, the weak brother sins when contrary to the convictions of his own faith, he succumbs to that which his conscience condemns.

C. The final litmus test for disputable matters [Verse 23b]

1. Everything that does not come from faith is **sin**

Heb 11:6 "And without faith it is impossible to please God ..."

Faith means believing and acting on what God has said in and through His Word. If you are doing something that is disputable and you don't have a clear conscience both before God and man, you are failing to walk in faith and are therefore in sin. And regardless of whether others in the church or in the kingdom of God can enjoy certain disputable freedoms, never compromise your conscience, the still small voice of God, or the convictions you have. If you do, then you will be sinning against the work of God in your life. Don't do it! The few moments of pleasure will cost you what matters most – your peace with God and the unity of the body of Christ.

## Conclusion

Rom 15:5-6 "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

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