

Christian Liberty, Part 20

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Edited transcript of message preached August 1, 2004

Now may I urge you to turn with me in your own Bibles to Romans, Chapter 15, and follow as I read in your hearing the first three verses. "Now we that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each one of us please his neighbor for that which is good unto edifying, for Christ also pleased not himself, but as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached thee fell upon Me."

Brethren, as we come to this that I have called the capstone directive to the strong, let us pray that God the Holy Spirit will take us in hand and teach us of His ways.

O God the Holy Spirit, we have sung our prayer to You. Come. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Come to open our eyes. Come to cleanse our hearts. Come to do the things that you alone can do, those things that no human teacher or preacher can ever do, no matter how much he may long to do them. Come in mercy and speak to us, teach us, rebuke us, instruct us, admonish us, Lord, whatever we need, come to us in your Word and minister pointedly, personally, and powerfully to every one of our hearts, we pray. Amen.

I think most of us are aware of the fact that a tire on a car out of balance is a relatively harmless thing when your car is sitting in your driveway or safely in your garage. However, when you get out on the road and begin to gather speed, then that tire out of balance can be a very dangerous thing. It can even so shake the front end of a car as to cause the tie rods to drop and to engage someone in a very serious accident. Well, so it is with many of the truths of the Word of God. When they are understood in isolation from the very reality of living, even though they may be understood in some degree of imbalance, they are relatively harmless. But truth has a way of working itself out into the highway of life. And when our understanding of any truth is imbalanced, it can do great harm to us and to others. And perhaps there are few truths concerning which this is more true than the truth of the Word of God that we've been examining in recent weeks, the matter of Christian liberty as it pertains to issues neither forbidden nor commanded in the Word of God. And out of a deep pastoral burden, one shared by my fellow elders, shared by teachers in the Christian school, shared by a number of my brethren in the ministry who have become aware of my preaching on this subject and have affirmed their persuasion with me that in many ways, to change the imagery, this doctrine is the Trojan horse of the rising generation in our churches. And because of that pastoral concern, I have been addressing you under this broad heading, "A Fresh Look at the Doctrine of Christian Liberty".

We began by wrestling with the teaching of the Word of God concerning the nature and extent of our bondage and slavery in Adam, and then the nature of our liberty and freedom in Christ. And then we considered the goal of our liberty from Luke chapter 1, verses 4 and 5, and then the two great threats to our liberty, license on the one hand, legalism on the other. And then we began to zero in upon our liberty in relationship to things neither commanded nor forbidden by the Scriptures, and that brought us to the watershed passage addressing this subject, Romans 14:1-15:7. And as we began to sneak up on the passage, I laid before you four important issues, crucial issues that we must constantly keep in mind if we are rightly to understand and apply this passage of the Word of God.

Then we looked at the two mandates embedded in the passage which make it necessary for us to think biblically. The mandate on the one hand of verse 5 in chapter 14, that there is to be no forced conformity on these issues within the house of God: "Let each one be fully persuaded in his own mind." And the second mandate is the mandate of God-wrought unity, identified in chapter 15, verses 5 and 6.

Then we began to look more in detail at the passage and the apostolic directives, first of all, given to the strong and to the weak together. The one-size-fits-all apostolic directives Paul, assuming that within the church at Rome there were both weak and strong, the weak being those who did not understand nor in faith fully appropriate the extent of their liberty in Christ, liberty from the ceremonial law, liberty from man-made rules and regulations, the strong being those who understand and in faith have appropriated the full extent of their liberty and can work out in practical experience the expressions of that liberty. And some directives are given to both of them. Then we looked at the specific directives to the weak,

Now we come to our third study in the specific apostolic directives to the strong. And I suggested that it's helpful to organize these specific directives to the strong in three categories. The first, the foundational issue for all of these directives to the strong. What is it? It is that which Paul identifies in verse 15b when he says, "You no longer walk in love." The great foundation for all of the specific directives is walking in love. The love that Paul described in chapter 13 and verse 10 that works no ill towards its neighbor. Love that works no ill to the weaker brother. Love that is willing to relinquish the exercise of any and all liberties that would in any way be detrimental to the cause of the gospel and to the spiritual well-being of the weaker brother.

Then we looked at the four specific directives to the strong, and now we come to this third major category that I'm calling the crowning directive to the strong. Chapter 15, verses 1 through 3: the crowning directive to the strong. And as I attempt to open up these verses in your hearing, I shall do so under three major headings. The nature of the crowning directive to the strong. Secondly, the substance of the crowning directive to the strong. And thirdly, the perfect example of the crowning directive to the strong.

First of all, then, the nature of the crowning directive to the strong. Verse 15:1: "Now we that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." The word "ought" comes about middle point in verse one. However, when you pick up the Greek text, and if you were sitting there in Rome at the church or in one of the house churches where this epistle was read, the first word you would have heard when whoever was reading the epistle came to this section of the epistle would have been the word "ought". That's the first word you would have heard, a verb which means to be indebted to another. In its noun form, it's the word Paul used in chapter 1 in verse 14 when he said, "I am debtor both to the Jews and to the Greeks. So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are at Rome." It's the very verb used in verse 8 of chapter 13: "Owe no man anything [have no illicit, illegitimate indebtedness to any person] save to love one another." If I were to give you a rather wooden literal translation to show the emphasis from the original, it would go like this: "We are indebted, we the strong ones, the infirmities of the weak ones to bear." And the infinitive "to bear" comes at the end of the sentence.

But right at the outset, everyone listening to this epistle would have known the moment it was read in their hearing, the Apostle Paul and Jesus Christ through him is laying upon us a solemn spiritual indebtedness, a solemn spiritual obligation. So the nature of this crowning directive is indeed that of a solemn moral obligation, a God-imposed debt upon the strong with respect to their interactions with the weak. Therefore, this is not a matter of liberty as to whether or not we recognize and seek to discharge the debt. It is a God-imposed duty. Failure to discharge the debt and embrace the duty is sin, to state it bluntly.

Now I know we live in a day when, for many, duty is a dirty word. It reeks of the foul smell of legalism and oppression. Don't speak to me about duty. Speak to me only about grace. Speak to me only about being carried along on the crest of the impulses of love. But don't talk to me about duty. Duty reeks of that which is legalistic and oppressive. In the crowning directive to the strong, in the context of this watershed passage, Romans 14 through 15:7, Paul is dealing here with that which is absolutely crucial, and though no epistle oozes more with the doctrines of grace than does the epistle to the Romans, Paul has no scruples of crowning his directive to the strong with a word that is, in its essence, pressing upon us duty and obligation: "We who are strong ought [we have a solemn indebtedness with respect to the weak]." And he is going to spell out what that indebtedness is. So much, then, for the nature of this crowning directive to the strong.

Now we come to that which will be the heart of our message, the substance of the crowning directive to the strong. What is that directive? Well, it may help you to think with me of this directive as a threefold cord, a cord with three strands. The first strand is a positive. The second is a negative, and the third is a positive. So we have this three-stranded cord that forms the substance of the crowning directive to the strong.

The first strand is this (look at the text): "Now we that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." Notice it does not say, "We that are strong ought to put up

with the weak. We that are strong ought to tolerate the weak, though they are a pain in the neck." No, he says, "We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." What is Paul telling us? He is telling us that the weaknesses or the infirmities of the weak are precisely those things which they carry because they are weak: their inability to eat meat with a good conscience, their inability to regard all days alike, their inability to drink wine in moderation. He says these are the infirmities of the weak, and anything that fits into that category. Any area in which Christ has given us liberty in union with Himself as the marvelous fruit of His own redemptive work. And yet Our consciences have not embraced that liberty, and therefore we cannot, with a good conscience, engage in that particular activity, or we are pressed by our conscience to engage in an activity which God does not lay upon us. That is the weakness or the infirmity of the weak. Anything and everything which are part of a Christian's liberty in Christ, which a believer cannot embrace as his liberty in Christ, these are the infirmities of the weak.

Now what is the strong to do when he is aware of a brother afflicted with such weakness? Well, we've already found from the earlier part of the chapter he's not to despise him and look down his nose and say, "Hypersensitive man, get over your hang-ups." No, he is not to despise him. He is not to disregard him. He is not to bully him. He is not to receive him with a view to arguing. We've covered all of that ground. Those are the things he is not to do. But here, in this crowning directive to the strong, the apostle goes even further, and he says the strong are to bear the infirmities of the weak.

Now what does it mean to bear them? Well, this word translated bear is the very word used in Luke 14.27 where our Lord speaks about taking up and carrying a cross, placing a cross upon your shoulders and carrying it to a place of execution. It's the word used in the well-known words of Galatians 6:2: "If anyone be overtaken in a fault, you that are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." You see a brother with a burden, do your best to get your shoulder under it, draw alongside of him, and carry it with him. And so here, as we see the weak carrying this infirmity, living with this infirmity of his weak conscience, we the strong are under a solemn obligation to bear that infirmity with him. That means that where his weakness demands things of us, we are prepared to embrace those demands. As long as he carries that weakness, we are committed to carry it with him. And if we are to do that, then this second strand is inevitable.

The negative. Look at it: "And not to please ourselves." And we could read the text this way" "We that are strong ought not to please ourselves." To know the full extent of our liberties in Christ and to exercise those liberties brings real God-honoring personal pleasure to the strong. You follow what I'm saying? To know one's liberties in Christ and to exercise them as unto the Lord: "He that eats, eats to the Lord [verses 6 to 9], he that disregards the day, disregards it to the Lord." "To know one's liberties in Christ, and to exercise them as unto the Lord with gratitude, brings God-honoring personal pleasure. It pleases ourselves in a non-sinful way.

Paul addresses this in 1 Timothy 4, verses 3-5 with regard to meats. Listen to what he says in 1 Timothy 4, verses 3-5. Speaking of those who heed doctrines of demons, forbidding to marry, who have this asceticism as part of their way of holiness, he says, "No, they forbid to marry, commanding to abstain from meats which God created to be received with thanksgiving by them that believe and know the truth, for every creature of God is good, nothing to be rejected if it be received with thanksgiving, for it sanctified through the word of God in prayer." The strong brother who can eat all meats and drink all beverages, when he gives thanks to God, and he enjoys those meats and beverages and enjoys being free from special religious days that are not touched upon by the law of God, he has an internal personal pleasure that is a legitimate God-given pleasure.

That's why Paul can say later on in 1 Timothy, "With regard to the rich, charge them that are rich in this present world [6:17], that they be not high-minded, nor have their hopes set on the uncertainty of riches, but on God Who gives us richly all things to enjoy. There's the rich man, enjoying things the poor man can't. And in his liberty before Christ, he has personal enjoyment. That's non-sinful enjoyment and pleasure. But having known that legitimate pleasing of yourself, God brings weak brethren into the orbit of your relationships. And now all of the directives concerning what you must do in the presence of the weak, you must never do anything that harms him spiritually.

And we looked at the five-fold harm that can be done, all the way from causing him to stumble, causing an occasion of sin, to grieving him, to destroying the work of God. And you say, "I cannot engage in that particular liberty, which does indeed before God give me great pleasure, not only the pleasure of the thing itself, but the pleasure that in Christ I am free to enjoy it. But now I am in the presence of my weaker brother, and I am now at the crossroads. Shall I please myself with that thing that is not sinful in itself,? It is part of my blood-bought liberty, in which I can enjoy with non-sinful personal pleasure. However, the presence of that weaker brother--and God says, don't do that which will cause him harm. Don't do that which will prejudice people's minds against the doctrine of Christian liberty. Let not your good be evil spoken of. Don't do that which will project a distorted view of what's important in the kingdom. The kingdom is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Don't do that which destroys the work of God in that man. Overthrow not the work of God for meat's sake.

And so the Apostle says to the strong, "We ought not to please ourselves." So our responsibility is to enter into the path of self-denial with respect to things not sinful in themselves, but which we cannot indulge in in the presence of the weaker brother. So the second strand Paul identifies: "We that are strong ought [positive strand] to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

And let me say by way of application, what a travesty on the true biblical doctrine of Christian liberty when Christian liberty is made a justification for unbridled self-indulgence, when the apostle says in this very section on Christian liberty, not to

please yourself. It shows again, my dear brothers and sisters, that when the New Testament lays out the ethical norms for believers, if there is not a substructure of a real, basic, supernatural, transforming work of God the Holy Ghost, you can't cut it. The demands of the Christian life are predicated upon the supernatural work of God in His grace, dethroning the reign of self, dethroning the commitment to live, to please myself, in the language of 2 Corinthians 5:15, bringing me to the place where I no longer live unto myself, but unto Him Who for my sake died and rose again. And when I am passionately committed to live unto Him and not unto myself, and He says to me,

"I've given you all these liberties. I've bought them with My own precious blood. However, in the presence of that weak brother, I call upon you not to exercise your liberty. I do not call upon you to give up the understanding and possession in your conscience of your liberty. No, that's a blood-bought possession. Don't you give up one ten-thousandth of a gram of it. It's given to you by My grace. But I'm calling upon you with a sense of duty. You ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please yourself."

You're able to say, "Lord Jesus, thank you. When You saved me, You dethroned the idols of self. Thank you, Lord Jesus. This is no big deal. It's just another outworking of what was settled when You saved me." But if you can't say that, you'll look at this and say, "Man, oh man, I can't hack that. Why should someone else's hang-ups become mine?" You see, the ethical directives of the New Testament are predicated upon the assumption of a radical, almighty work of saving grace. And without that, you can't cut it. And God doesn't expect you to cut it. "Make the tree good, and it's fruit good", said Jesus.

And that's the problem with some of you young people who bandy about, "Well, it's my liberty to listen to this and to listen to that and see this and see that." Your problem is you're still living to yourself and living to the world. You're a slave of the world's standards, the world's goals, the world's definition of fun and pleasure. And until that is broken by the almighty power of God, you'll never know what it is properly to live in the framework of the biblical doctrine of Christian liberty.

Well, then we come to the third strand. Strand number one is the positive: "Bear the infirmities of the weak." Strand number two, the negative: "...not to please ourselves." Strand number three, second positive: "Let each one of us please his neighbor for that which is good unto edifying." Now immediately, in the minds of many of you, you say, wait a minute. I thought the Bible condemned living to please others. Yes, the Bible does have a clear condemnation of a certain form of a man-pleasing spirit. Paul touches on it in Galatians 1:10. He said, "If I should still be pleasing men, I should not be the servant of Christ." In 1 Thessalonians 2.4, he said, "We preach the gospel not as pleasing men, but God who tries our hearts." And there are other texts in that same ballpark that condemn a man-pleasing spirit. But now hear me carefully. Whenever the Bible condemns a man-pleasing spirit, it is a man-pleasing spirit that is seeking to gain the approval of men at the expense of truth or righteousness, and

always for self-serving ends. You got it? You follow me now? I worked hard to get it all down to that little bit. When the Bible condemns a man-pleasing spirit, it is always condemning a man-pleasing spirit that operates at the expense of truth or righteousness, and always with a self-serving end in view.

But that's not what Paul is talking about here. In this context, he is saying, "Let each one of us please his neighbor [for you Greek students, you have an ice and then you have a cross] for that which is good towards edifying." In other words, I am to be concerned to please my neighbor with respect to the thing that is good, not evil, not compromising truth or righteousness, but relinquishing legitimate liberties under the direction of God that will result in good that will build up my neighbor. That's what he's saying.

The second positive strand is a call that I should be concerned not to please myself, but to please my neighbor with respect to doing the thing that is good. And the thing that is good is the thing that results in his being built up in his faith, while he may still be a weak brother in this, in that, or the other area. And that's what he calls us to, that I am constantly to have as the focus of my concern, my brother's good. That which results in his being built up is more important than that which I may taste, the place I may go, the film I may see, the clothes I may or may not wear. There's something more important. It's my brother's good unto being built up in Jesus Christ. And when the doctrine of Christian liberty is wrenched out of that directive, it is worse than a tire woefully and pathetically and dangerously out of balance. This is the crowning directive. After all of the specific directives to both weak and strong, specific directives to the weak, specific directives to the strong, now the Apostle puts this capstone: "We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves. Let each one of us please his neighbor for that which is good unto edifying."

Having given the sense of the words, I want you to note two things. Number one, the intensely personal nature of this third strand. Look at the text again: "Let each one of us..." It's the effort to translate a Greek word that particularizes the issue. "Let each one of us..." Each one of us must make conscience of these matters. We can't just go with the flow and say, "Well, others are doing this and must be all right, or others are not." No, no, no! You must be fully persuaded in your own mind, not only with respect to the things that you believe come within the orbit of your liberty, but the things that come within the orbit of the relinquishing of your liberty for the sake of your brother, doing the good that will result in his being built up.

And not only note the individual personal nature, but this verb is in the present imperative. It's a divine mandate. Ah, again, one of those duty things. Yes, that's right, one of those duty things. It's hard to translate present imperatives from Greek into English. "Let each one..." That sounds good. No, we could translate "Each one of you must..." It's a divine imperative.

And if you're uncomfortable with imperatives, let me state it bluntly. You're very uncomfortable with loving Jesus. What in the world is a crazy preacher talking about this morning? If you're uncomfortable with imperatives, you're uncomfortable with loving Jesus. For Jesus said, "If you love Me..." "Lord, how can I tell if I love you? What's the flutter meter, Lord? Lord, how many flutters do I get when I sing, 'My Jesus, I love thee, I know thou art my Lord'? Is there a flutter meter?" He says, "Yeah, I'll give you a flutter meter. If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. He that loves Me keeps My commandments. He that loves Me not keeps not my word." Not complicated.

Some say, "Oh, 'If you love Me, keep My commandments', as though the only commandment Jesus gave was to love one another as He loved us. No. "If you love me, you'll keep my commandments." And the Apostle Paul could say in 1 Corinthians 14, "If any man is spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I say unto you are the commandments of the Lord." When the Apostle wrote to the Roman church saying,

"Let each one of us please his neighbor", it was a divine imperative coming from the mind and heart of Jesus himself. And if you love Him, your attitude is, "Lord Jesus, I can never repay You for what You've done. My salvation rests solely upon all the virtue of Your doing and of Your dying, the virtue of the life You lived in perfect obedience to the Father under His law. The death that you died upon that cross when You took into Your own soul all of the forsakenness of hell itself on behalf of those who trust You. Lord Jesus, I can do nothing to add to the virtue and the ground of my salvation, but Lord Jesus, I love You for what You've done for me. Lord Jesus, how can I show my love?"

He says, "Very simple, in My commandments, you keep them, oh yes, in dependence upon Me." For in that very context He said, "I'm the vine, you are the branches, as a branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vines, so neither can you except you abide in Me. Abide in Me, I in you. Without me you can do nothing." But at the end of the day, it's still my obedience, my obedience by His grace, by His strength, by His power, but it never ceases to be psychologically an act of obedience.

That means there's an external command that comes to my ear, that registers on my brain, and I make a moral decision. Will I or will I not be obedient to this command? Yes, as I set myself to obey, if I'm acting consistent with who I am, I say, "Lord Jesus, give me strength to obey." But obedience is still obedience. It's not being floated into the path of conformity to divine precepts. It is choosing. David said, "I have chosen the way of thy commandments." So note, I say, the personal nature of this third strand: "Let each one of you..." And the imperative mood: it is a divinely imposed duty.

I love to think of love as the motor, the engine of our walk before God. But God's precepts are the tracks on which the engine runs. We need the tracks, folks, and the

tracks are the precepts and the commandments. And here is the crowning directive to the strong. In its substance, three strands: a positive, a negative, and a positive.

Well, having looked together at the nature of this crowning directive (it is divine debt; "We ought", the substance), now we come thirdly to consider the perfect example of this crowning directive to the strong. Look at verse 3: "For [the apostle is tying together the previous instruction with what he now is about to write]..." You are to do this "for Christ also pleased not Himself, but as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on Me." All that the Apostle has said to the strong about bearing the infirmities of the weak, not pleasing ourselves, pleasing one's neighbor, for good unto edification, is now clinched.

Now I want you to notice two things in verse 3. The example is located in the person and activity of Christ. And secondly, the example is focused upon the voluntary bearing of reproach by Christ.

First of all, the example is located in the person and activity of Christ: "For Christ also pleased not Himself. [Have I called you Roman Christians not to please yourself? I'm calling you to something perfectly exemplified in your Savior for Christ also. I'm calling you to it. Someone has gone before you and marked out the path:] Christ also pleased not Himself." The example is located in the person and activity of Christ.

Now, we need periodically to underscore this very simple truth. According to the New Testament, Christ, in the perfection of His person and His work, is set before sinners primarily, not as an example to be followed, but as a Savior to be trusted and a Lord to be obeyed. Follow closely. According to the New Testament, the Christ of Holy Scripture, set before us in the perfection of His person as the God-man, sinless Son of God, and the perfection of His work, living the life we should have lived but have not, dying the death we should die but dare not, rising from the dead, ascending to the right hand of the Father, that Christ in the uniqueness of His person and perfection of His work is set before us primarily as an object of faith, a faith that embraces Him for who He is, to be our Savior and our Lord. And we must never move away from that dominant emphasis of the New Testament. Christ is before us that we might embrace Him by faith.

The New Testament also teaches that for those who have embraced Him by faith, this Christ is also set before us in the concreteness of His life as recorded in the Scriptures as an example and pattern to be followed. 1 John 2:6: "He that says he abides in Him ought himself so to walk even as He walked." 1 Peter 2:21: Christ has set an example, Peter says, to these suffering servants who have abusive masters. And He tells them, "You're not to retaliate. You're not to mouth off to them, but bear patiently that abuse and suffering, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving an example that you should follow His steps."

There is a New Testament doctrine of the Christian consciously following Christ as His example. It's not the dominant emphasis. But it is a clear emphasis, and it is as we seek to follow Him and gaze upon Him and feed upon Him, that the blessed

reality of 2 Corinthians 3.18 is realized in us: "But we all, with open face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into that image from one stage of glory to another, even by the Lord, the Spirit." And so this passage picks up that secondary emphasis of the New Testament, that Christ, who is the object of our faith as our sole Savior, is also to be the pattern whom we emulate. The example is located in the person and activity of Christ, because the Apostle says, "For Christ also pleased not Himself."

But then, secondly, the example is focused upon His voluntary bearing reproach and shame. Look at the text: "But as it is written..." And then the Apostle quotes from the third most quoted in the New Testament of all the psalms. Psalm 69:9: "But as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproach Thee fell upon Me." That statement from Psalm 69 comes right after a very significant word. And generally whenever New Testament writers quote Old Testament passages, they are sensitive to context and flow of thought. The first part of Psalm 69 is this: "The zeal of Your house has eaten Me up, and the reproaches of them that reproach Thee are fallen upon Me." And you will remember that after his resurrection the disciples remembered Psalm 69:9a with respect to the incident of Jesus cleansing the temple. They remembered "zeal for Your house has eaten Me up." The house is now being shifted from that temple that He will destroy to His own temple, the church, and His own temple, His own body, and then His church, the place of His special dwelling. And it's in conjunction with Jesus consumed with zeal for God's house that He says, "The reproaches of them that reproach thee are fallen upon Me."

What does that mean? If you'll take the time today to read Matthew 27:27 and following, Matthew 27:39 to 44, you see the reproach that was heaped upon our Lord Jesus. The soldiers mock Him. They taunt Him. They take off His outer garment. They put a mock king's robe upon Him. They put a crown of thorns upon Him. They bow the knee. They go through this mock worship And then when He hangs upon the cross, they walk by and they taunt Him: "You trusted in God? If your God is Who He says He is and You're who You say You are, well then why don't You now ask Him to help You? Come on down from the cross and then we'll believe in You." And then it says the two malefactors crucified with Him cast the same in His teeth. What are all these reproaches being heaped upon Jesus? He went about doing good, healed the sick, raised the dead, straightened out crooked limbs, taught and ministered. Why all this reproach heaped upon Him? Because men couldn't get their hands on God the Father. They couldn't get their hands on God the Father to do it. So the text says, "The reproaches of those that reproach Thee, [referring to God the Father] have fallen upon Me." Jesus voluntarily takes upon Himself all of that reproach. Why? He's consumed with zeal to accomplish the Father's redemptive purposes.

In pursuit of your salvation and mine, He gave up all that He knew in the immediate presence of heaven. With the Father and the Spirit, the object of the breathless, adoring wonder of seraphim and cherubim, the spirits of just men made perfect, nothing, nothing but the most heightened expressions of adoration and praise and worship and appreciation. And now He comes to taunting, to spittle, to mockery, to

jeering. Why? Zeal, for the Father's house consumes. He's passionate to save the likes of you and the likes of me.

Why does He give up? Does He give up a certain beverage? Watching a certain movie? Does He give up wearing a certain garment or not wearing it? Going to a certain place or not going? Why does He give up? My friends, He gave up all the glory of the Father's immediate presence. He thought not the being on inequality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant. Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Stark naked, hanging on the cross, in the welter of His own blood, taunted, mocked and jeered. That is what He gave up. He pleased not Himself. It would have been sinless self-pleasure to have remained in the Father's presence. But He did not please Himself. Christ pleased not Himself. But the reproaches of them that reproach Thee have fallen upon Me.

Now Paul says to the strong, "Are you saved by His bearing such shame and reproach, and yet unwilling to give up this or that liberty for the well-being of your weaker brother? Unwilling to bear with him in his infirmities until he becomes strong in faith?" Shame on you! Shame on you! A thousand measures of shame upon you. And I do believe that that's the heart of what Paul is getting at, and it's not my independent judgment. Listen to the thought of Professor Murray commenting on this passage:

"We may well ask, then, how does this feature of the Lord's humiliation bear upon the duty of pleasing our neighbor in the situation that Paul has in view? It's the apparent dissimilarity that points up the force of Jesus' example. There's a profound discrepancy between what Christ did and what the strong are urged to do. He pleased not Himself to the incomparable extent of bearing the enmity of men against God, and He bore this reproach because He was jealous for God's honor. He did not by flinching evade any of the stroke. Shall we the strong insist on pleasing ourselves in the matter of food and drink to the detriment of God's saints and the edification of Christ's body? It is the complete contrast between Christ's situation and ours that enhances the force of the appeal."

I hope you feel the weight of it. I have felt it in seeking to prepare, and I have been ashamed. You see, we're back again to what I emphasized earlier. You're never, you're never going to be moved by this kind of stuff to change the way you live unless the roots of the matter of deep love for and trust in Christ are the baseline of who you are. Half-converted people banding about their Christian liberty who know nothing of being swallowed up with wonder, love and praise when they look at a taunted, mocked, bruised, immolated, God-forsaken Jesus.

My friend, until you are broken before that Jesus, don't talk about your liberty. You are a slave to yourself, a slave to your sin, a slave to the world. And as I quoted way back at the beginning of this series, none is a greater fool than he who mistakes his gilded chains for his liberty.

This is Christian liberty: so enamored with this Christ that when I hear His servants say to me, "We who are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves." When we gaze upon our Savior, we say, "Oh Lord Jesus, shame on me that I am not willing to give up anything I must give up for the well-being of my brothers and sisters, restrain my legitimate liberties in any area because I claim to be saved by One Who took all the reproaches that men heap upon God, and that I in my unconverted state heaped upon him. He took them upon Himself. He pleased not Himself. So thirsty was He for my salvation.

You see now why I call it the crowning directive to the strong? The Apostle takes us and plunks us right down in front of the cross. And he says, "Look at your Savior. Look at your Savior. And if you can look at Him and still be determined, it's my liberty and I will exercise it no matter what the results may be, then indeed, my dear friend, there's something fundamentally defective in your relationship to God.

But I believe that there are many of you who, upon reflecting on this truth, already have cried out in your hearts, saying, "Oh God, forgive me for my inveterate self-pleasing. Sink more deeply into the fibers of my inner being the spirit of the cross, the self-denying principle of true discipleship, that my great joy will be to manifest my liberties by relinquishing their exercise and show that indeed I am so free in Christ I don't need the trinkets that others need to prove that they're free. That's liberty indeed. Blessed liberty. It's that to which God calls us.

And I say to you, my unconverted friend, as you hear the divine standard for God's people, and you sit there and say, "No way, Jose. If that's what it means to be a Christian, I ain't one." Bless God for that accurate self-knowledge. But you don't need to remain where you're at. That Savior Who bore the reproaches that we heaped upon God by our life of disobedience and willful self-indulgence, that Savior stands before you today in the gospel and He says, "Come to Me, come to Me." Aren't you weary of the tyranny of being run around by the nose of your own lust and your own passions and the world's standards and the world's goals? Aren't you tired of it? Aren't you sick of it? I pray God you are, and if you are, Jesus says, "Come to me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, I'll give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and you will find rest to your soul."

It's wonderful to be free from the world's standards saying you got to be this and got to do this and got to have that to be fulfilled. It's wonderful. How can I forget? When God set me free as a 17-year-old up there in Stamford, Connecticut. How can I forget to be free? I didn't care anymore whether my buddies smiled or frowned, cussed me or mocked me. Free! Free! Free! "Whom the Son sets free is free indeed." Oh, my friend, are you free? If not, go to the Great Liberator Who can set you free.

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