Freedom Is Not A License To Destroy

"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Romans 14:19).

Bulletin VCRM43

28 October 2026

"For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. 12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. 13 Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. 14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 15 But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. **Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.** 16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of: 17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. 18 For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. 19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. 20 **For meat destroy not the work of God.** All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. 21 It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. 22 Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. 23 And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.." (Romans 14:11-23).

Introduction

Christian liberty must be governed by God's judgement, the welfare of fellow believers, and the demands of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. The question is not merely, "Am I free to do this?" but, "Will this honour God, build up my brother, and preserve the work of Christ?" It is possible to be right about a matter and still be wrong in the way we exercise that right. A Christian may possess genuine liberty yet use it without love. He may win an argument but wound a brother; defend his freedom but damage the fellowship; insist on his rights but obstruct the spiritual progress of another.

Our text (Romans 14:11-23) addresses disagreements among believers over matters of conscience, particularly food and the observance of days. In verses 1–10, Paul has already established that Christians must not despise or judge one another over such differences, because each servant stands before his own Master and we all belong to the Lord. In verses 11–23, Paul moves the argument forward. He now confronts us with three searching questions:

- Am I ready to give an account to God?
- Is my liberty helping or harming another believer?
- Am I pursuing what builds God's people up, or merely what pleases me?

The passage is not a licence to compromise biblical truth or excuse sin. It concerns disputable matters where Scripture permits liberty, and it teaches us how to exercise that liberty under the lordship of Christ with a view to eliminating or at least minimising the possibility for damaging, harming, hurting, destroying, hindering offending or bringing other negative consequences to another person's faith and relationship with Jesus. The topic for this study is "Freedom Is Not A License To

Destroy"; and we will examine three solemn principles that would facilitate its realisation:

1. Live in the Light of God's Judgement (Romans 14:11–13).
2. Never let your liberty destroy (Romans 14:14–18).
3. Pursue peace, not personal pleasure (Romans 14:19–23).

POINT 1: LIVE IN THE LIGHT OF GOD'S JUDGEMENT

Romans 14:11–12 "For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." Paul begins with a sobering statement of reality that every believer will ultimately answer to God. Our opinions may differ, our consciences may vary in matters of liberty, but none of us will escape divine accountability. Consider the following sub-points:

A. God's authority is final, and every knee shall bow to Him

Paul draws from Isaiah 45:23, where God declares that every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear. The same universal submission is affirmed in Philippians 2:10–11 concerning Jesus Christ. One day, human arguments will end. Every excuse will fall silent. Every person will acknowledge the authority of God. Our culture may celebrate personal autonomy with statements such as: "It is my life; I will do as I please." But the Christian confession is different: "I am not my own; I belong to the Lord" as confirmed in these scriptures:

- 2 Corinthians 5:10: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."
- Ecclesiastes 12:14: "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

So, the issue is not whether God will examine our lives, but whether we are living in readiness for that examination.

B. Examine yourself first because every person shall give account

Romans 14:12 declares that every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Notice what Paul does not say: he does not say that every one of us shall give account of his brother. The responsibility is personal. It is easy to become an expert in identifying another person's shortcomings while remaining blind to our own. We scrutinise another believer's conduct, dress, diet, worship style or personal convictions, yet neglect our own pride, bitterness, dishonesty and lack of love.

Jesus said in Matthew 7:3: "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" This is not a prohibition against discerning right and wrong. Scripture commands us to judge righteous judgement (John 7:24). It is a warning against assuming God's place as judge over another person's conscience in matters of Christian liberty. For example, a person preparing for an examination does not improve his own performance by constantly criticising the other candidates. On examination day, he must answer for his own work. Likewise, another believer's failure will not excuse our disobedience before God.

C. Judge this rather that you do not become another believer's stumbling-block
Romans 14:13 moves from accountability to practical responsibility: “Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.” Paul redirects our judgement. Instead of sitting in judgement over our brother, we must examine our own conduct to ensure that we are not leading him into spiritual danger. The expression stumbling-block suggests an obstacle placed in another person's path. Our behaviour can become such an obstacle when we pressure someone to act against a legitimate conviction of conscience. So, before insisting on a personal preference, ask:

- Is this matter clearly commanded or forbidden by Scripture, or is it an area of legitimate liberty?
- Am I acting in a way that could lead another believer to violate his conscience?
- Am I seeking God's glory or merely defending my own position?

So, before you criticise another believer, remember the judgement seat of Christ. Before you demand your rights, examine your responsibilities. We are not appointed to be one another's final judge; we are commanded to live faithfully before the Judge of all.

POINT 2: NEVER LET YOUR LIBERTY DESTROY
Paul now addresses the relationship between Christian freedom and Christian love. It is possible for an action to be permissible in itself but harmful in the way it is exercised. Putting love before personal rights prevents this from becoming a reality.

A. A thing may be clean in itself but harmful in its use
Romans 14:14 says “I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.” Paul is persuaded that food is not inherently spiritually defiling simply because a believer regards it as forbidden. Yet he recognises the importance of conscience. **The principle is that Christian liberty does not abolish Christian responsibility**. We must distinguish between these two categories:

1. **What God forbids:** We have no liberty to practise sin. No appeal to personal preference can make disobedience acceptable.
2. **What God permits:** Where Scripture allows freedom, we must exercise that freedom with wisdom, love and consideration for others.

For example, the New Testament does not require every Christian to follow the same dietary preferences. But if a believer has a serious conscience objection to a particular food, we should not pressure him to eat it merely to prove our own freedom. Paul's teaching does not make every personal opinion a universal law. Nor does it require the whole Church to adopt every individual's scruple. It calls for patient love rather than coercion. 1 Corinthians 10:23 says “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.” Something may be lawful without being helpful.

B. Love must govern liberty since Christ died for that brother
Romans 14:15 says, “But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.” This is the heart of Paul's warning. The issue is no longer merely what we may eat; it is what our conduct does to someone for whom Christ died. Consider these three contrasts:

- You value your freedom; Christ valued your brother enough to die for him.
- You want to insist on your right; Christ calls you to walk in love.
- You want to win an argument; Christ wants His people strengthened in faith.

How can we claim to love Christ while carelessly damaging someone whom Christ loved unto death? In 1 Corinthians 8:9–11, Paul warns believers to take heed lest their liberty become a stumbling-block to those who are weak, and that a brother may perish through the misuse of knowledge.

Consider Jesus and the temple tribute. In Matthew 17:24–27, Jesus explains that the children of the king are free, yet He instructs Peter to pay the tribute so that they would not give offence. Jesus did not surrender His identity or deny the truth. He chose not to make an unnecessary dispute an obstacle. That is mature liberty: knowing what you may claim, but discerning when love calls you to forgo it. Today:

- A mature Christian avoids flaunting a freedom that could tempt a recovering alcoholic to return to destructive drinking.
- A believer who understands Christian liberty does not ridicule another Christian's sincere, biblically informed conscience over a disputable practice.
- A church leader refuses to turn a personal preference into a test of spirituality when Scripture has not done so.

These examples do not mean that we must surrender to every demand or allow another person's preferences to control the Church. They mean **that love should govern how we exercise freedom.**

C. The Kingdom of God is greater than food, drink and personal preferences
Romans 14:17–18 says: “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.” Here Paul lifts the discussion to a higher level. The Kingdom of God is not defined by secondary disputes. Its essential character is expressed in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. What do these mean?

- **Righteousness** means living rightly before God and dealing justly with others.
- **Peace** means pursuing reconciliation & harmony rather than needless contention.
- **Joy in the Holy Ghost** means experiencing the spiritual joy that comes from life under God's gracious rule.

A church may be meticulous about external practices and yet be deficient in righteousness. It may defend correct positions and yet be full of hostility. It may insist on its liberty and yet lack the joy of the Holy Ghost. That is a serious contradiction. Galatians 5:22–23 says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” The evidence of spiritual maturity is not merely how much biblical knowledge we possess, but how faithfully that knowledge produces Christlike character. Therefore,

Do not sacrifice a soul on the altar of personal preference. Do not destroy fellowship to defend a right that love could willingly surrender. Christian liberty is not the freedom to please ourselves at all costs; it is the freedom to serve Christ through love.

POINT 3: PURSUE PEACE, NOT PERSONAL PLEASURE

Paul concludes this section by showing us how Christian liberty should operate in everyday life. We must pursue peace, protect the spiritual welfare of others, act from a conscience governed by faith and build others up, through these 3 steps:

A. Pursue peace deliberately, do not merely wish for it

Romans 14:19 says "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." The expression follow after conveys active pursuit. Peace does not always happen automatically. It requires humility, restraint, patience and deliberate effort, as per these two objectives:

1. **Things which make for peace** means conduct that reduces unnecessary conflict and promotes fellowship.
2. **Things which edify another** means conduct that strengthens another believer's faith, understanding and spiritual maturity.

Paul is not calling for peace at any price. We must never abandon the truth of God's Word merely to avoid disagreement. Biblical peace is not a compromise with sin; it is harmony pursued within the boundaries of truth, as highlighted in these scriptures:

- Hebrews 12:14: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:"
- Ephesians 4:29: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."
- 1 Corinthians 14:26: "Let all things be done unto edifying."

A builder does not strengthen a house by knocking down its supporting walls. In the same way, Christians should not weaken the spiritual lives of fellow believers through careless words, needless provocations or the flaunting of personal freedoms. Before speaking or acting, ask: Will this build up or break down? Will this help my brother grow in Christ, or will it make his walk more difficult? A church should be a construction site for spiritual growth, not a demolition ground for other people's faith.

B. Never destroy God's work for the sake of a secondary matter

Romans 14:20–21 says: "For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." Paul returns to food and drink, but his argument reaches far beyond the dinner table. We need to understand that a human soul is of immeasurably greater value than the exercise of a personal preference. Something permitted in itself can become wrong when it is used in a way that causes another believer to stumble. The word stumbleth is important. Paul is not merely saying that another person might dislike our behaviour or disagree with our choices. He is concerned about conduct that places a genuine spiritual obstacle in another person's way.

1 Corinthians 10:24 says “Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.” Here, wealth carries the sense of another person's good or welfare. The mature Christian therefore asks not only, “What benefits me?” but also, “What serves the spiritual good of my brother?” Consider Paul's willingness to limit his freedom. In 1 Corinthians 8:13, Paul declares: “Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.” Paul does not suggest that meat is sinful. He demonstrates that love can voluntarily surrender a legitimate liberty for the spiritual welfare of another. There is a profound difference between being forced to surrender a right and willingly laying it aside because you love someone. Therefore, in the Church, do not:

- turn non-essential practices into unnecessary tests of spirituality.
- use Christian liberty to entice another person into conduct that violates conscience.
- allow arguments over secondary issues to consume the time, unity and energy that should be devoted to prayer, evangelism, discipleship and service.

However, this principle must be applied carefully. We are not required to abandon biblical truth because someone objects to it. Nor should the sincere conscience of one believer become a universal command for everyone else. The aim is to protect others from spiritual harm while remaining faithful to Scripture. The challenge is “What are you prepared to lay aside so that another person can grow in Christ?”

C. Exercise your freedom before God, but never violate your conscience
Romans 14:22–23 admonishes: “Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” Paul concludes with two complementary responsibilities:

- First, the believer who enjoys liberty must exercise it responsibly before God. He said “Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God.” The person who understands that a particular practice is permissible should not feel compelled to display that freedom publicly or use it to provoke others. He can enjoy his liberty with gratitude and humility before God. Christian maturity does not need constant demonstration. You do not have to prove your freedom by exercising every right you possess.
- Second, the believer must not act against conscience. Paul warns that the person who eats while doubting is condemned because he does not eat “of faith”. The point is not that every feeling of uncertainty is automatically God's verdict. Nor does it mean that a sincere but mistaken conscience can never be corrected through Scripture. Rather, a person should not deliberately proceed with an action he believes may be wrong before God. Conscience must be educated by God's Word, not ignored whenever it becomes inconvenient; as per these scriptures:
    - 1 Timothy 1:5: “Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned:”
    - Colossians 3:17: “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

A useful test for a disputed practice is therefore:

1. Does Scripture clearly forbid it?
2. If Scripture permits it, can I undertake it with a clear conscience before God?

3. Can I do it in a way that honours Christ and does not needlessly damage another believer's spiritual welfare?

If you cannot act in faith before God, do not force yourself to proceed merely to impress others or to prove that you are mature. Equally, do not use conscience as an excuse to condemn everyone who reaches a different conclusion in a genuine matter of liberty. Let your liberty be guided by love, your conscience be instructed by Scripture, and your conduct be directed towards the glory of God.

In Conclusion Romans 14:11–23 confronts us with three enduring truths captured in these Three questions that every Christian must answer

1. Am I ready to give an account to God? Every knee shall bow. Every tongue shall confess. Every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore, live with eternity in view.
2. Am I putting love before my personal rights? Christ died for the brother whom you may be hurting. Never elevate a secondary preference above the spiritual welfare of a soul for whom Christ died.
3. Am I building others up in faith? Pursue peace, edification, righteousness and joy in the Holy Ghost. Let your presence strengthen the Church rather than weaken it.

Finally, we must stop measuring Christian maturity merely by what a person knows, what freedoms he claims or what arguments he wins. The real test is whether his knowledge produces love, whether his freedom is governed by responsibility, and whether his life helps others follow Christ. Never forget these three commands:

- Live accountably because you will answer to God.
- Walk charitably because Christ died for your brother.
- Build constructively to pursue peace and edification.

Remember, do not sacrifice righteousness for peace, but neither sacrifice peace over matters that do not compromise righteousness. Do not violate your conscience, but do not impose your personal convictions as universal laws where Scripture has granted liberty. Above all, let Christ be Lord of both your convictions and your conduct. The ultimate question is not simply, “Am I free to do this?” It is, “Can I do this in faith before God, in love towards my brother, and to the glory of Jesus Christ?” May the Lord make us Christians who are strong in conviction, tender in conscience, mature in love, and committed to building up His Church.

Closing prayer

Heavenly Father, grant us the wisdom to distinguish between the things Thou hast commanded and the matters in which Thou hast granted liberty. Deliver us from pride, needless contention and the misuse of our freedom. Teach us to live in readiness for Thy judgement, to walk in love towards our brethren, and to pursue righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Help us never to become stumbling-blocks to others, but instruments of their spiritual growth. May our words, our choices and our conduct glorify Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.