

# BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR KEY SOCIAL ISSUES

## Christian Liberties

### Lesson #5

---

If you have been a Christian for any length of time, you have discovered that some Christians believe they have the liberty to do certain things that other Christians believe are sinful. The reason why this happens are many. Some misinterpret the Scriptures, others confuse tradition with the Bible, others are influenced by the media which portrays Christians as needing to live a certain way. Still others grew up in families that held to man-made standards and taught that they were biblical. Still others fall into one of three different kinds of legalism. Because many Christians have latched onto traditions, others' personal convictions, and man-made traditions, they are often confused about what the Bible forbids and allows. They are not quite sure how to exercise their Christian liberties and don't really understand when they shouldn't exercise their liberties. It is important that we know how to deal with issues not specifically addressed in the Bible. In this study we will look at the Scriptures to see what the Bible says about exercising our liberties in Christ.

#### I. DEFINITION OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

- A. **Webster defines liberty as:** the quality or state of being free; the power to do as one pleases; freedom from physical restraint; freedom from arbitrary or despotic control; the positive enjoyment of various social, political, or economic rights and privileges; the power of choice.<sup>1</sup>
- B. **John Feinberg defines Christian liberty with these words:** Christian liberty involves practices not covered in Scripture by a moral absolute that either commands or forbids them. Such activities, scripturally speaking, are morally indifferent. Still, because of social and cultural background, individuals may find such practices offensive.<sup>2</sup>

#### II. KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MANDATES, PRINCIPLES, PERSONAL CONVICTIONS, AND CULTURAL PREROGATIVES

- A. **Biblical Mandates** are specific commands or prohibitions given in Scripture, addressed to believers of any age, which tell us to do or not do certain things. Examples would be **don't murder, turn your eyes away from looking at vanity, flee immorality, be anxious for nothing, do not get drunk, etc.** If you fail to obey a biblical mandate you are sinning.
- B. **Biblical Principles** are timeless truths derived from the Word of God. They are implicit truths found in the text of Scripture which God expects us to apply to our

---

<sup>1</sup> Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Feinberg, J. S., Feinberg, P. D., & Huxley, A. (1996, c1993). Ethics for a Brave new world (Page 43). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.

life. For example, much of the Old Testament does not apply specifically to us but all of the Old Testament contains **timeless truths or principles** which apply to every believer in every age (**Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 10:6, 11; II Tim. 3:15-17**). The Bible does not say, “*thou shall not look upon internet pornography*” but it does tell us to guard our heart, turn our eyes away from vanity, flee from fleshly indulgence, and not to lust in our hearts after what is evil. The principles from various texts implicitly forbid looking at internet pornography. Even though there is no specific verse addressing the internet or its content. We cannot indulge in internet pornography without sinning against the principles derived from the Word of God.

- C. **Convictions** are personal regulations which we make for ourselves based on biblical mandates, scriptural principles, personal weaknesses, or spiritual goals. For instance some prefer to read the King James Version of the Bible. Others prefer not to eat meat. Still others have convictions not to drink any alcoholic beverages. These are not biblical mandates or binding principles, but personal convictions which are often, but not always based on the Scriptures. Personal convictions are good because they are custom-fit, self-imposed regulations which remind us to exercise self-control in areas where we are weak or easily tempted. Breaking your own conviction may be a sin, because you might defile your conscience or not act in faith which is sin (**see Rom. ch. 14, esp. vs. 23**).
- D. **Legalism** comes in several forms.
1. Legalism can take the form of thinking you can be saved by works.
  2. A second form of legalism is committed when a person diligently tries to keep all of God’s commandments, but not out of love and devotion to God. Instead a false motive is substituted for the biblical motive of love. Thus you may have godly actions but have an ungodly heart motive.
  3. A third kind of legalism is when you try to force your personal convictions on someone else or if you act as if your personal convictions and opinions have the same or greater authority than the Word of God. This kind of legalist creates personal convictions for themselves and then tells others they must obey their personal convictions or they are sinning.
- E. **Cultural Prerogatives** are those things that individual cultures give their people the freedom to do. They may or may not be acts of sin depending on what the Bible says. For instance, our culture allows for abortion, allows us to get drunk, allows us to swear, allows us to engage in sexual immorality, etc. These actions are sin and forbidden by the Word of God. We cannot do these things even though the culture allows it. We can engage in cultural activities as long as they are not forbidden by the Word of God.

### III. Some Key Scriptures Related to Exercising Your Liberties as a Christian

- A. **Prov. 4:23** Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it *flow* the springs of life.<sup>3</sup>
- B. **Prov. 27:12** A prudent man sees evil *and* hides himself, The naive proceed *and* pay the penalty.
- C. **Mt. 18:5-7** “And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; 6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe to the world because of *its* stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!”
- D. **Rom. 14:1-23** Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. 2 One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. 3 The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. 4 Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.
- 5 One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.
- 7 For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; 8 for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. 9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. 10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11 For it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall give praise to God.”
- 12 So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. 13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. 14 I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 15 For if because of food your brother is hurt, you

---

<sup>3</sup> The context of Prov. 4:23 i.e., vss. 10-19 describes those who stumble because they are led into sin by others i.e., “bad company corrupts good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33). Prov. 4:23 is the solution to the problem of being led astray by others – guard your heart!

are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.

16Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; 17for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. 19So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. 20Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. 21It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. 22The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

What principle is found in

1. What principle is found in vss. 1-4?
2. What principle is found in vss. 5, 14, 23?
3. What principle is found in vss. 6-8?
4. What principle is found in vss. 13, 15, 20-21?
5. What principle is found in vss. 17-18?
6. What principle is found in vs. 19?
7. What principle is found in vs. 22?

- E. **I Cor. 6:12, 20** All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. . . 20For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

What principles might we extract about exercising our Christian liberties from the text above?

1. What principle is found in vs. 12?
2. What principle is found in vs. 12?
3. What principle is found in vs. 20?

F. **I Cor. 8:1-13** Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. 2 If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; 3but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him. 4 Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. 5 For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, 6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.

7 However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. 8 But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.

9 But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? 11 For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. 12 And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.

1. What principle is found in vs. 1, 8?
2. What principle is found in vss. 7, 9-13?

G. **I Cor. 10:31** Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

What principle is found in this text?

H. **Gal. 2:4** But *it* was because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage.

What principle is found in this text?

I. **Phil. 2:3-4** Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

What principle is found in **Phil. 2:3-4**?

#### IV. Christian Liberty Principles Summarized<sup>4</sup>

Before exercising your liberty, you should be sure that:

- A. You are convinced that the activity is biblically acceptable (**Rom. 14:5, 14, 23; I Cor. 8:1, 8**).
- B. You can engage in this activity and still guard your heart and keep it pure (**Prov. 4:23**).
- C. You are exercising your liberty for the Lord and His glory (**Rom. 14:6-8; I Cor. 6:20; 10:31**).
- D. You will not purposefully exercise your liberty in the presence of someone who thinks it is forbidden in Scripture (**Rom. 14:14**).
- E. You will be exercising your liberty in love, considering others before yourself (**Rom. 15:1-3; 14:15; I Cor. 8:1; Phil. 2:3-4**).
- F. You are not aware that exercising your liberty will harm, destroy, or put a stumbling block before someone else's faith (**Mt. 18:4-7; Rom. 14:13, 15, 20-22; I Cor. 8:7, 9-13**).
- G. You are confident that by exercising your liberty, what is a good thing for you will not be spoken of as evil (**Rom. 14:16**).
- H. You believe exercising your liberty will edify and build others up (**Rom. 15:1-3; 14:19; I Cor. 8:1**).
- I. You are confident exercising your liberty will not hinder you from winning others to Christ (**I Cor. 9:19-22**).
- J. You can exercise your liberty and not be tempted to sin (**Prov. 27:12; Gal. 5:13; I Pet. 2:16**).
- K. You can exercise your liberty and still maintain peace (**Rom. 14:17-19**).
- L. You have considered if it is wise for you to exercise this liberty if you are or have been enslaved or mastered by it (**I Cor. 6:12; Gal. 5:13; I Pet. 2:16**).
- M. You have taken into consideration your position and influence in the body of Christ (**Lev. 10:8-9; Prov. 31:4-5; Eccl. 10:16-17; I Tim. 3:3-7; Tit. 1:5-9**).

---

<sup>4</sup> This list was taken from the Calvary Bible Church sermon series, "Your Liberties in Christ" pt. 4. [www.calvarybiblechurch.org](http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org)

## V. **PUTTING YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTIES INTO PRACTICE**

Below are listed some common areas related to Christian liberty. Apply the biblical principles you have learned above to each liberty. Answer the three questions below each to evaluate each liberty. Keep in mind that context often radically changes how you might answer the questions below. You might be able to exercise your Christian liberties in certain contexts and not others. As you ponder each issue and evaluate it by the Scriptures and principles above, make sure you consider the various contexts.

### A. **Smoking**

1. Sin?
2. Principles?
3. Cautions?

### B. **Drinking Alcohol**

1. Sin?
2. Principles?
3. Cautions?

### C. **Watching Movies, Plays, or Television**

1. Sin?
2. Principles?
3. Cautions?

### D. **Going into a Bar or Nightclub**

1. Sin?
2. Principles?
3. Cautions?

**E. Going to a Cigar Shop**

1. Sin?
2. Principles?
3. Cautions?

**F. Dancing**

1. Sin?
2. Principles?
3. Cautions?

**G. Swimming in Mixed Groups**

1. Sin?
2. Principles?
3. Cautions?

**H. Gambling**

1. Sin?
2. Principles?
3. Cautions?

**I. Playing Cards**

1. Sin?
2. Principles?
3. Cautions?

- J. **Being involved in a Club or Association e.g., Masons, Elks, Good Sam Club**
  - 1. Sin?
  - 2. Principles?
  - 3. Cautions?
  
- K. **Being Involved with a Political Party, Lobbyist Group, Activist Group, Etc.**
  - 1. Sin?
  - 2. Principles?
  - 3. Cautions?
  
- L. **Purchasing Items from Businesses That Sell Things Which Encourage and Promote Evil**
  - 1. Sin?
  - 2. Principles?
  - 3. Cautions?
  
- M. **Participating in Body Piercing, Tattoos, Wild Hair Styles**
  - 1. Sin?
  - 2. Principles?
  - 3. Cautions?
  
- N. **Clothing**
  - 1. Sin?
  - 2. Principles?
  - 3. Cautions?

O. **Listening to Secular Music**

1. Sin?
2. Principles?
3. Cautions?

VI. **HOMEWORK TO MEDITATE ON**

- A. Are there liberties in your life that you exercise which are not edifying you, which are not edifying others, and which tempt you to sin?
- B. Are there liberties in your life that have mastered you that you need to repent of and give up for Christ?
- C. Have you practiced legalism on one of the forms above, especially looking down on others and judging them as less spiritual because they do not hold to your same convictions?
- D. Ask God to show you those areas in your life that you need to give up because of your brother or sister in Christ, because of your weakness, because you are enslaved to them, because they tempt you to sin and do not edify you or anyone else.
- E. If you have hurt someone else by the exercise of your liberties and you know you have hurt them, go to that person and ask for forgiveness. Remember, we must not destroy those who are weak in faith by exercising our liberties in Christ with what is a good thing for us.