



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume XI
Issue 254

The Believer's Liberty and a Look at Romans 14 Part 2

by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage (Galatians 5:1).

When Paul entreats the strong concerning the weak, he does not instruct them to avoid agitating, perturbing or annoying the weak. The actual words that he used here are *much too strong* for such a *light meaning*.



Christ. He derived it directly from the Lord Himself, *not* from social considerations, *not* from popular viewpoints, *not* from religious teaching, *not* from moral or pious standards. Paul allows NO debate on this; it's not some culturally relative ethical standard. He is convinced "by the Lord Jesus."

In fact, the weak who criticize and pass judgment on the strong will NEVER fall over them. If the weak are firm enough in their misunderstanding of the truth to actually challenge and condemn the strong, they will NEVER be led to follow them in actions against their weak consciences, thus causing them to stumble to destruction. Their very actions are but displays of their ardent law-based self-righteousness.

Paul unapologetically declares that "there is nothing unclean of itself." In the clearest possible words Paul strongly rejects Pharisaical, Platonic and Gnostic concepts of sin. His is a refutation of all religiously based prohibition – "touch not; taste not; handle not" (Colossians 2:21).

CONDUCT OF LIBERTY

I know, and am convinced by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him who esteems anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean (Romans 14:14).

Paul now zeros in on the actual issue of liberty. Paul emphatically sides with the strong over the weak. Proclaiming, "I know and am convinced," he is speaking with clear, absolute, apostolic conviction – a direct revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ. He was not saying, "It is my personal opinion, that probably ..."

Paul is convinced. He is convinced by revelation. He is convinced by revelation from the Lord Jesus

DESTRUCTION OF THE WEAK

But if your brother is grieved with your meat, now you're not walking in love. Don't destroy him with your meat, for whom Christ died (Romans 14:15).

How is it even possible for the strong to "destroy" the weak by eating meat?

(see LIBERTY, page 2375)

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Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

ISSN: 1936-9360

Volume XI, No. 254 – August 17, 2010

This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

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LIBERTY (continued from front page)

What is it against which Paul is actually warning the *strong* here?

Appollumi, the Greek word used to translate “destroy” in :15, is a very strong word that means to “ruin, destroy,”¹ “to put out of the way entirely, abolish, put an end to, ruin ... render useless.”² “Destruction” is not even an issue of being “hurt” – it is one of being “destroyed!”

The issue is one of actually DESTROYING the *weak*. Paul emphasizes the issue again in :20. The injury being dealt with here is not merely some annoyance, displeasure, discomfort or disappointment. No: what is *caused* here is **destruction**. How is this destruction caused? It is caused when the *weak* actually have their conscience condemned to the point of destruction. Just *how* does this occur? By the *weak* FOLLOWING (not criticizing, or judging) the *strong* into PERSONAL ACTIONS that are a violation of their OWN *unresolved scruples*.

The “destruction” originates in the *guilty conscience of the weak*, when they PRACTICE activities that appear to *them* to be sinful behavior. The *strong* in such a situation *cause* the *weak* to sin against their own conscience. In such circumstances, the *strong* are NOT walking in love.

In simple words, Paul here is warning the *strong* concerning the result of *enticing* the *weak* into sinning against their consciences. Clearly, it is a very serious matter that the *strong* seek not to encourage the *weak* to take personal actions that would cause them to sin against their consciences.

RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS OF “OFFENSE”

The modern religious concept of “offense” can be heard in a statement such as “I find that offensive!” The fuller context of such a statement might be, “I found the language in that movie offensive,” or “The open bar at the wedding was offensive.”

In a scriptural sense, neither of these are an “offense” to the one making such statements. They are merely saying that they “object” to these things; that they are “above” them and that they don’t want to have anything to do with them. Neither of these examples are about to lead anyone to “destruction.” This is all

1. Arndt and Gingrich, *Ibid.*, p. 94.
2. Thayer, *Ibid.*, p. 64.

merely religion’s redefinition of “offense” to bring the *strong* into the yoke of bondage.

If the *strong* allow themselves to be brought under the subjection of the *weak*’s “standards” of acceptable conduct so as not to “offend anyone,” then the *strong* will have lost all of their freedom.

DON’T ABUSE LIBERTY

Let not then your good be evil spoken of: for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:16-17).

The “good” refers to the liberty of the *strong*; because it is the *weak* who have scruples. The *weak* see it as wrong to eat or drink certain things, and it is the *strong* who can encourage them to sin against their *weak* consciences. Paul emphasizes that the *strong* must not abuse their strength by actually leading the *weak* to sin against their consciences by eating that which condemns them. If the *strong* do so, then their liberty will be the subject of ridicule and scorn.

For he who in these things serves Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men (Romans 14:18).

The abuser of liberty does *not* do so merely by practicing his liberty. Liberty’s abuser has a calloused heart that seeks to force his libertarian actions on the *weak*, instead of seeking to lead the *weak* to “*the faith*” in gentleness and meekness, where they will find strength. Such disregard brings shame upon the truth because it entices the *weak* into actions that sin against their own consciences. The careless abuser of liberty receives ridicule; the wise user of liberty is approved.

FOLLOW PEACE AND EDIFICATION

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

The bottom line is that the *strong* (“*Let us*”) must actively seek peace and edification in the use of their liberty.

For meat destroys not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eats with offence (Romans 14:20).

The *strong* should be careful not to assault the *weak* with their liberty. If their actions result in the true “destruction” of the *weak* then the *strong* are tearing down the “work of God,” (i.e., the *weak*).

Paul’s statement that “it is evil for that man who **EATS** with offence” is crucially important. It shows that, when the *weak* are finally lured into **actions** against their consciences, there is an “offence” (*proskomma*). It is THEN that the *weak* sin against their own consciences, seeing themselves as being in sin.

It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby your brother stumbles, or is offended, or is made weak (Romans 14:21).

Paul’s admonition here is in a very specific social and religious context. In certain circumstances where it would draw the *weak* into a place of stumbling (i.e., actually committing acts of sin against their own consciences), out of love the *strong* must abstain from the practice of their liberty in their presence.

Paul used the aorist infinitive when he says it is good not “to eat.” In Blass and De Brunner’s classic work, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, they comment on the aorist infinitive as it relates to this specific instance.

The aorist is to be taken strictly: “it is good not to eat meat *for once* (in a specific instance) if it might cause offense”; it is not a question of continuous abstention.³

Richard Lenski writes,

The aorists are to be understood exactly: eating at one time ... in a given case, where offense would be caused; permanent abstinence is not discussed.⁴

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown note:

[Paul’s] directions are to be considered not as prescriptions for one’s entire lifetime, even to promote the good of men on a large scale, but simply as cautions against the too free use of Christian liberty.⁵

I Corinthians 8:13 must also be understood in this light.

Wherefore, if meat makes my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world stands, lest I make my brother to offend.

PAUL’S “IF” IN I CORINTHIANS 8:13

Here Paul states that he would “eat no flesh while the world stands.” Is Paul telling us that he did **in fact** abstain from meat, and that he would do so for the rest of his life? No, he speaks in a hypothetical sense: “if.” Paul tells us, hypothetically, what he would do. He does not tell us that he actually did abstain, neither does he bind others to this hypothetical practice.

There is no imperative exhortation here; but instead a strongly personal reference: “I will eat no flesh while the world stands.” Thus, this is clearly Paul’s personal testimony to his own love as to how he would choose to handle such a hypothetical situation.

Of course, Paul conditions this hypothetical situation: he would never eat meat again *IF* in so doing he would cause a brother to “offend” (i.e., to sin against his own conscience and be destroyed). We would certainly not assume that everywhere Paul went and at every juncture of his life the *weak* were all about him on the verge of stumbling over his eating of meat at any moment. Paul simply uses this hypothetical situation to make a point about the extent of love’s nature, as well as the rarity of such genuine circumstances which could cause destruction.

In the broader context of Paul’s teaching here, we learn from I Corinthians 9:20-23 that he would actually adopt the position of the *weak* in order to establish a point of relationship with him. Paul’s goal here was not to confirm religious scruples, but to ultimately rescue them *out of weakness*.

We should make special note here that the *strong* do the *weak* no favors by confirming their *weakness*. With a loving, gentle and patient teaching, the *weak* have the opportunity to become *strong*.

(see **LIBERTY**, last page)

3. Blass, F. and DeBrunner, A., *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 174.

4. Lenski, R.C.H., *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), p. 849.

5. Jamieson, Robert A., Fausset, R. and Brown, David, A

Commentary, Critical and Explanatory on the Old and New Testaments, Volume 2, p. 256.

The Problem of Evil

by – Vladimir Gelesnoff (1877-1921)

There is probably no subject that confronts mortals which is more perplexing than the problem of evil. It looms up as a dark mystery, and deep, with absolutely no clue to guide us through the tangled maze and riddle of the universe. This is really the idea entertained by Christians generally. Yet, all down the centuries the Scriptures have supplied a thread of exodus from the labyrinth of this great cosmic problem that presses upon the human mind for solution.

The question of the origin of evil has been the one that has mostly engrossed the thought of thinkers – to contrive some way whereby evil might have first come into existence, and at the same time, clear God from all responsibility in the matter, has been the chief endeavor of those who have written on the subject. Yet it seems evident that the fact of the existence of evil, quintessential from its origin, is the real crux, after all. It is self-evident that an absolutely supreme deity must be a universally responsible deity. God must be responsible for whatever state of things obtains, or, what is tantamount to it, responsible for that chain of causes that lead to this state of things. If God cannot alter this evil state of things, then He is not omnipotent; if He will not, then He is not all-loving – unless He has a purpose to accomplish which justifies the employment of evil.

Did not God suffer evil to enter the universe in the first place when He might have prevented it? We certainly must answer affirmatively, for the negation of this statement deprives Him of supremacy. The negation of the statement that He could have prevented evil from making an entrance deprives the universe of a supreme head, and sets it aimlessly whirling in space – a sport of blind, impersonal forces, with no governing hand above and beyond it. If, then, God allowed evil when He was able to avert it, there is no evading the issue that He is responsible for all of the consequences that have followed in its trail, and the only way to vindicate Him is to take the ground that God has a purpose in evil which, while augmenting His glory, secures a higher degree of blessedness for the creature.

When we think of it seriously it seems as if, in their treatment of the question of evil, the sacred writers

were rather unguarded and careless in their expressions. Some of their assertions seem to border on irreverence, and to some, even a positive offense to moral sensibility. How much so may be inferred from the painful assiduity with which expositors have labored to tone down their language.

As an example of the boldness of sacred writers, we will instance the oft-repeated statement – “*all things are of God*” (Romans 11:36; II Corinthians 8:6; 11:12; Ephesians 1:11; Hebrews 2:10). The majority of Christians profess to believe it, but their actual views qualify the apostle’s statement.

It is impossible to believe this statement in total.

Had the phrase been used of things Paul heard when wrapped into the third heaven, or of the things John beheld when soaring in spirit over the new earth, we would have no difficulty in taking it literally; but surely we cannot be expected to take the phrase absolutely when it is used of a world groaning in pain and wreaking in crime. Paul did not mean that absolutely all things are of God – the bad things as well as the good – all of the crime and wickedness. What he really wished to say is that all good things are of God.

Yet the apostle knew what he said! His purpose was to reveal and enlighten, not to confuse and mystify. He was fully aware that his teaching was open to objections, criticism and misrepresentation. Having those possibilities in mind, as a man of mature experience, trained in rhetoric and philosophy, writing on so momentous a theme, he would be very cautious in his language and state his thoughts with sufficient clearness to be understood. We must accept his declaration as it stands and not import into it conclusions which were handed down to us.

Nor is Paul alone in teaching that “*all things are of God*.” The same truth, in the plainest terms and in the most positive manner, all of the sacred writers affirm, and no Christian would think of doubting it were it not for the fact that it is at variance with received ideas. An absolutely supreme God is necessarily a universally responsible God, and such is, as we shall see, the clear, positive, unmistakable teaching of Scripture. ►

To this universal responsibility evil is no exception, but rather a specially designated feature, inasmuch as God declares Himself to be its Creator.

*I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and **create evil**: I the LORD do all these things (Isiah.45:7).*

It is evident that in explaining this passage away, the only alternative is to fall back on the dualism of the Zoroastrian system and divide the universe into two opposite realms, with a rival god over each. However, whereas Zoroastrianism teaches that evil will eventually cease to exist, according to the belief of Christendom, the devil emerges from the conflict with a larger following than God, and devildom secures for itself a permanent place in God's universe. Is it any wonder that thinking men and women turn away from a theology which is a tissue of glaring and palpable contradictions?

God rules over all. He does whatsoever is done, in heaven or in earth. He assumes full responsibility.

Hence, the same act, such as inciting David to number the people, which in one place is attributed to the Adversary, is in another place ascribed directly to God (I Chronicles 21:1, c.f. II Samuel 24:1). In like manner Job's afflictions, represented as inflicted by the Adversary in one place, are spoken of as due to the hand of God. The Adversary smote Job with the botch of Egypt (Job 2:7) just as his acquaintances came to condole over all of the evil which Jehovah had brought on him (42:11). On the forefront of revelation, the story of Joseph eloquently proclaims the truth that evil things are of God just as much as good things. His brothers had made up their mind to destroy him. Then, dissuaded from their murderous intent, they sell him into slavery, and in order to cover up their crime, shamefully deceive their aged father. The sin of Joseph's brothers was dark-dyed, and yet in the course of years, when Joseph became ruler of Egypt and is at last made known to his brothers, he comforts them by saying,

Now, therefore, be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither, for God did send me before you to preserve life ... So now, it was not you that sent me hither, but God (Genesis 45:5, 8).

It is thus evident that God had willed to bless the world through the sufferings of Joseph, so that in selling their brother, Jacob's sons carried out the will of God. It is

equally evident that in carrying out the will of God, their hearts were not right towards Him, and the calamities of God's trying providence which came upon them were designed as a corrective. Does not this prove to demonstrate that all things are of God?

I will now advert to an example all the more powerful, because it seems trite and commonplace – I mean the case of Samson. While in Timnath he became infatuated with a Phillistine damsel, and was determined to marry her. To the arguments of his parents, who tried to persuade him against a marriage condemned by Moses' law, Samson replies, "*Get her for me, for she pleaseth me well.*"

None would even dream that God had anything to do with this foolish love affair, and yet, the record reads, "*His father and his mother wist not that it was of the Lord, for He sought an occasion against the Philistines*" (Judges 14:4).

The extermination of the royal house of Ahab is another illustration of how evil things are of God (I King 21:19-29). The accomplishment of it is detailed in II Kings chapters 9 and 10. It is a sickening tale of cunning, truce-breaking, treachery, cruelty, barbarous butchery; yet it was the carrying out of Jehovah's purpose. In I Kings 21:21 God says, "*I will cut off from Ahab every man child, and him that is shut up, and him that is left at large in Israel.*"

He is in the crimes and wickedness of men in such sense that He makes them subservient to His Own wishes and brings good out of them in the end, having contrived them in the first place.

For all is contrived by Yahweh, for His response, and even the wicked one is being kept for the day of evil (Proverbs 16:4).

I will contrive, and who will reverse it? (Isaiah 43:13).

Abridged
The Problem of Evil
Unsearchable Riches
October 1913–August 1915

Is It God? or Is It Fate?

by – Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921)

This is a sad state of mind that people fall into sometimes, in which they do not know the difference between God and Fate.

Many have been vigorously declaring that we teach "fatalism." What they mean is that we teach that it is God Who determines all that shall happen in His universe; that God has not given it either to necessity, or to chance, or to the caprice of man, or to the malice of Satan, to control the sequence of events and all of their issues, but has kept the reins of government in His Own hands. This, they say, is "Fate."

Now, is it not remarkable that men should not know God from Fate? Of course, the reason is not far to seek. Like other men they have a natural objection to being "controlled." They wish to be the architects of their own fortunes, the determiners of their own destinies; though why they should fancy they could do that better for themselves than God can be trusted to do it for them, it puzzles one to understand.

There is a story of a little Dutch boy, which embodies very fairly the difference between God and Fate. This little boy's home was on a dyke in Holland, near a great wind-mill, whose long arms swept so close to the ground as to endanger those who carelessly strayed under them; but he was very fond of playing precisely under this mill. His anxious parents had forbidden him to go near it; and, when his stubborn will did not give way, had sought to frighten him away from it by arousing his imagination to the terror of being struck by the arms and carried up into the air to have life

beaten out of him by their ceaseless strokes. One day, heedless of their warning, he strayed again under the dangerous arms, and was soon absorbed in his play there forgetful of everything but his present pleasures. Perhaps, he was half conscious of a breeze springing up; and somewhere in the depth of his soul, he may have been obscurely aware of the danger with which he had been threatened. At any rate, suddenly, as he played, he was violently smitten from behind, and found himself swung all at once, with his head downward, up into the air; and then the blows came, swift and hard! O what a sinking of the heart! O what a horror of great darkness! It had come then! And he was gone! In his terrified writhing, he twisted himself about, and looking up, saw not the immeasurable expanse of the brazen heavens above him, but his father's face. At once, he realized, with a great revulsion, that he was not caught in the mill, but was only receiving the threatened punishment of his disobedience. He melted into tears, not of pain, but of relief and joy. In that moment, he understood the difference between falling into the grinding power of a machine (Fate) and into the loving hands of a father (God).

That is the difference between Fate and God, and all the language of men cannot tell the immensity of the difference.

Abridged

Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield, Vol. 1

Edited by John E. Meeter

The Ministry of Encouragement

by – J. R. Miller (1840-1912)

Therefore encourage one another (I Thessalonians 5:11).

No mission is more divine than the encourager's.

In Westmeal, near Antwerp, there is a convent of Catholic Trappist monks who represent a strangely perverted conception of Christianity. There are thirty-six monks who live there together, under the "vow of perpetual silence." They dress in rough sackcloth, with ropes about their waists, their heads shaven, and their beards uncut. They live on bread, sour milk, and vegetables. They sleep on hard boards, and spend their days in frigid and solemn silence. If a visitor speaks to one of these monks, the monk draws his hood closer about his head, and moves away. Each day they walk in the garden and look into an opened grave that stands ready for the one of their company who is next to die. This, it

is claimed, is a "high ideal of Christian living." This order of monks suppose that they are illustrating in a lofty way the holiness and beauty of Christianity.

The Scriptures teach no such *living* as that! Yet there always have been those who *pervert* its teachings, in this matter of cheerful living, and make their religious life dreary and disheartening. Instead of being helpers of the faith and joy of others, they are hinderers! Instead of making others stronger for struggle, for burden-bearing, and for duty, they make it harder for them to do their part!

The truest helpers of others are those who always have words of *exhortation* to speak, who always are *encouragers*.

1902

LIBERTY (continued from page 2376)

LIBERTY'S PERSONAL NATURE

Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who condemns not himself in that thing which he allows. And he who doubts is damned if he eats, because he eats not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin (Romans 14:22-23).

Paul clearly does not instruct the *strong* to surrender their faith nor their liberty. Paul would *never* do so. Instead he encourages them to avoid *flaunting* their great liberty in an unloving and reckless way so as to lead the weak toward taking actions in violation of their consciences. Grace doesn't flaunt the privileges of personal freedom. Enjoy them? Yes! Grace leads to the their full enjoyment, in a quiet, respectful, private way – with others who enjoy such freedom. Grace doesn't rub the nose of others in its freedom.

Liberty is a gift from God, and it pleases Him for the *strong* to enjoy it. The *strong* can happily enjoy his liberty because his conscience does not condemn him.

However, when the *weak* walk contrary to what they

THINK is God's will, then they are condemning themselves – for "*whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*"

SUMMARY OF PAUL'S PRINCIPLES OF LIBERTY IN ROMANS 14

1. Some are weak in the faith, some are strong (:1-2, 13, 22-23; c.f. 15:1).
2. The weak and strong should love and accept each other (:1, 3-4, 10; c.f. 15:1).
3. Jesus Christ alone is Lord of the weak and the strong (:3-4, 7-9, 12-13, 22).
4. Each should live according to their own faith (:5, 12, 22-23).
5. We should not be judgmental toward each other (:10, 13, 19).
6. Nothing is intrinsically unclean (:14, 20).
7. Love, grace and peace should distinguish our relationships (:15, 17-19, 22; c.f. 15:1).
8. On occasion the strong may need to deny themselves for the good of the weak (:21).

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, **there is liberty** (II Corinthians 3:17).