

3.11.19 - Liberty and Stumbling-block

The following definitions are from Webster's 1812 Dictionary:

Liberty: 5. Religious liberty is the free right of adopting and enjoying opinions on religious subjects, and of worshipping the Supreme Being according to the dictates of conscience, without external control.

Freedom: Any exemption from constraint or control.

License: Excess of liberty; exorbitant freedom; freedom abused, or used in contempt of law or decorum.

Stumbling-Block, Stumbling-Stone: [stumble and block or stone.] Any cause of stumbling; that which causes to err.

We want to consider the following verses: **Romans 14:1-4 Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.** The issue at hand is eating vegetarian versus eating meat. After the flood God gave Noah and his family permission to eat animals. **Gen 9:3, Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.** Apparently the weak did not know this scripture or they were told that they would be better if they followed the pre-flood diet. We are interested in how the issue was handled more than the issue itself. Paul, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit told both sides to not criticize the other group.

We are going to apply this solution to social nakedness. We do not have a statement that God allows nakedness, although we do have multiple examples of public nakedness without condemnation in Scripture. The fact is that it was just not an issue in Bible times. Ways to make cheaper clothing makes it possible to be clothed easier today and the advent of washing machines and driers has certainly added ease. Bathing suits are a recent invention and no one today would buy them if they had to pay Bible time prices for clothing (see the earlier article on clothing for details). We do have statements about nakedness as it relates to extra-marital sex, but the opposition does not have a statement that all nakedness outside the marriage bed is sin. That said, we still believe that Paul's solution to meat vs vegetarian applies here as well. Neither side should despise or judge the

other. Which means that neither side has the higher moral ground. We should both recognize when the dispute is not helpful (doubtful disputation) and stop disputing. When we are repeating the same positions over and over hoping thereby to win the argument or we attack the character of those on the other side of the issue in hopes of adding credibility to either position it becomes doubtful disputation.

Rom 14:5-6 - One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks. This is another issue that Paul is using as an example with about the same solution. The difference is that we are to be "fully persuaded" about our position. It is not something we go along with to get along, it needs to be settled between the individual and God. However, we do not take the place of the Pharisees and refuse to associate with people we do not agree with on social nakedness. This position is easier for textile people because of the popularity of their position...they would lose very few associates. Those who believe that social nakedness is biblically acceptable will still be more inclined to say that social nakedness is wrong just to keep their friends. If you know that you are right (fully persuaded) you do not need to impose your beliefs on others and they do not need to be your associate if that is the price for your position.

Rom 14:14-17, 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. Paul has returned to the meat issue. The word "charitably" is translated from the Greek word "agape" which is the highest form of love in the three Greek words translated "love". When our behavior grieves someone, we could be acting unlovingly. It does not take much thought to see that there must be some limits on the last statement. In Christian discussion God is often referred to as Love. He is the only one that can love in the agape way. If you read the scriptures much you will find times when God grieved His followers. Able was murdered because he

followed God's instructions for offerings. Joseph was sold into slavery and put in prison unjustly. The gourd that shaded Jonah died and left him in the hot sun. David spent years fleeing for his life before becoming king. There are many more examples, but Jesus is the most outstanding. He led a sinless life and God allowed Him to go to the cross.

It seems in today's society that the way to control someone is to be offended (grieved) at what the person is doing. If that works, then the offended person is controlling the offender. If the offender believes he is in God's will, but changes his behavior anyway, then the offended person becomes his god. I think there is a commandment against that. **Exo 20:3 - Thou shalt have no other gods before me.** Also **Pro 29:25 - The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.** applies to this case. The Apostle Paul was aware of both verses and probably others. The offender has given up his God given liberty to win the approval of the offended. In many cases this works like blackmail, more will soon be asked to keep the offended pacified.

The verses do say that what we do should be done in love or in the best interests of the other person, not the greatest gain for self. If the person is unsaved, we should try to keep the door to heaven open without going against what the scriptures command. We are not commanded to be vegetarians or flesh eaters, just as we are not commanded to be naked or clothed in various situations. So, if my nakedness closes the door to heaven for an unsaved person than I have acted in an unloving way towards him. If some Christian is offended because he learns that I work naked in my enclosed back yard out of view of my neighbors, then I do not need to change to please him. This is obviously an area where you need Holy Spirit guidance to know which approach is best.

Almost the same thing can be said about verse 16. There is no way to keep your good from being "evil spoken of". Jesus was "evil spoken of" **Luke 7:34 - The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!** Maybe it is implied in the Greek that truthfully should be included with "evil spoken of". Critics will always find something to "evil speak of", but we should not make it easy for them to find something.

Another verse that is used in this line of argument is **1Co 8:9 - But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to**

them that are weak. Textile people confuse "liberty" with "freedom" or if they are losing the argument with "license". Liberty has rules. Freedom and license are closer to anarchy. This verse is taken out of context for our application since Paul goes on to argue that both the weak and the strong are not justified in their positions. It still applies to the argument in Romans about meat. We will try to give some extreme examples and it will be up to you and the Holy Spirit to find the best course for your particular case.

You could be a stumblingblock to whoever knocks if you answer your front door in your one-of-a-kind suit from God. If you have textile guests who would be offended then if possible, you should not be naked in front of them. Conversely, if your church learns that you believe what the Bible says about nakedness, you should not need to find another church to attend.

If you have a gathering in your home or somewhere where it is legal to be naked with people who believe that social nakedness is not a sin, you may all be naked and it will not be a stumbling block. If you were not a naturist when your children were very young then they should be giving a Bible lesson on what the Bible says about nakedness before you have a clothing optional house. With that condition, you would not be a stumbling block to your family if you were all naked together. Even though the husband is the head of the house, it still should be clothing optional. If your child has textile guests, then clothing would be appropriate while the guests were there or it could be a stumbling block for them.

In conclusion, you need to be sure what you are doing is in agreement with the Bible on social nakedness or any other position for that matter. We can help you with what the Bible says about social nakedness, but you also need to consider what effect your behavior will have on your associate's spiritual life. If your activity will advance the spiritual life of another, then it is good. If your actions are a setback for another's spiritual life then you might be a stumblingblock. "Might be" because God's salvation message softened the heart of those who get saved, but hardened the heart of those who believe they can get there on their own. The same sun that softens the soil as it warms it above freezing in the springtime also hardens it once there is no moisture left in the heat of the summer. We are not responsible for the condition of someone else's soil, but we should certainly take care that our actions are not the cause of someone else's hardened heart.