

Chapters 8-10 have one general theme. We discovered it last week. **We are to be like Christ in our readiness to sacrifice our rightful privileges and liberties for the sake of the benefit of others.** In chapter 8 we benefit others by avoiding doing something that would stumble them. We are indeed to be our brother's keepers despite Cain's pitiful attempt to evade God's searching question about his brother. And the more so among believers. We are brothers and sisters not only as fellow human beings but as brothers and sisters in Christ. Since we have been born again into the family of God we are responsible for both the spiritual and physical well being of our fellow believers. (In chapter 9 we will see this self-sacrificing attitude extends outward to reach unbelievers of every nationality.)

The danger of stumbling another by our conduct is real. We each are to personally cultivate a tender conscience based upon the truth of scripture. And we should do nothing to discourage a tender conscience in our brothers and sisters in Christ. Love will respect them even though they may be "weak" in some regard. On the other hand, we can lovingly seek to strengthen others who have unnecessarily restricted themselves and gently lead them out into the liberty of Christ. **But be sure the liberties you may think you have are really scriptural!** Some things scripture seems to permit, it advises strongly against. For instance, intoxicating drinks are apparently not prohibited (short of drunkenness) but beginning with Noah both Old and New Testament scriptures present strong reasons for refusing to indulge. Some things we are at liberty to refuse.

Back to the meat of the chapter. The first part of chapter 8 has to do with eating meat which had been sacrificed to an idol but was later bought by the believer at a meat market. The idol it was sacrificed to was nothing, and the meat is simply meat at this point.

But what about **entering an idol temple** and eating meat that had been sacrificed to an idol. First, participation in an idolatrous pagan religious service is not what is in view here. That is specifically forbidden in chapter 10 and again in 2Corinthians 6. Rather it may refer to a non-religious event or social occasion, such as a wedding, being held in the idol temple. The believer was invited. Apparently meat sacrificed to an idol might be served there. Showing up at such a place and partaking of this meat in this place could stumble one with a "weak" conscience and was to be avoided. Avoided, but not because it was in itself defiling. The issue is whether one with a conscience against it might be tempted to go somewhere or do something which he genuinely thinks is sin. But, but, but...you say if that is the standard we have to know what our brother or sister's conscience is about every thing! If I have to limit myself for everyone else's

conscience I won't be able to do ANYTHIN-N-NG! Yep! And, if it is so hard for me to do this, where is my heart? For the Lord, and His own, and their interests or on myself and my self interests?

An illustration of this principle might be the "Don't try this at home" warnings included in some TV commercials nowadays. Youngsters are simple-hearted and gullible. At some ages children will attempt to copy things they see others do. Parents and siblings need to be aware of this and avoid doing things in children's presence that would be dangerous for a youngster to try. Likewise we are to watch out for one another that our fancied sophistication regarding things we feel free to do does not lead another "less sophisticated" believer to violate his conscience. Doing so causes them to stumble them. The term "stumbling block" in vers 9 means a block put in the way that stumbles someone. We aren't in the business of tripping people so they fall. (In vers 13 the word "offend," used twice, comes from a Greek term for what triggers a snare or fall trap. We are not in the business of ensnaring one another either.)

Another example, although somewhat different in concept, is serving alcohol to an alcoholic. There it is not so much a matter of violating a tender conscience but of temptation. However, drinking and serving alcohol to a person their first time might introduce a latent alcoholic to drink thereby leading to a devastating awakening to a besetting sin which need not have occurred otherwise.

Sometimes well meaning believers **try to regulate the behavior of other believers** by stating their behavior offends them. Indeed it may offend their sensibilities as to what dishonors the Lord and admonishment of the "offenders" may be in order. But for one to claim the behavior should cease because they are offended by it is not an appropriate application of these scriptures or those in Romans 14. The person objecting is in little danger of being tempted to copy the "offender." Indeed the "offender" is very well established in their position on the matter in question and is simply **seeking to impose their conscience upon others.** Nevertheless, we are to listen and be sensitive to the consciences of others, weak or strong, for after all, we are brethren in Christ. We may consider ourselves strong, not realizing we have somehow missed the mind of the Lord regarding a certain practice of ours. Remember:

1 Knowledge puffeth up, but charity [love] edifieth.
Now to the crowning statements of this chapter.

11 And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?

Perish? None can be eternally lost who has personally trusted upon Christ's death for them. What does he mean?

He means that I, by flaunting my liberty, can trash one of my brethren, Christ's own. The word perish means to render useless for the purpose intended. Like the old wine bottles that perish when filled with new wine. Our thoughtless, selfish conduct can cause a precious soul to stumble and become, at least temporarily, useless to the Lord. This scripture doesn't teach the saved can be lost. Not lost, but only because the Lord will not allow him to be lost. He is the safety net if we fail Him and stumble one of His beloved. He will restore us. But, obviously, we should not count on that, and be carelessly or irresponsible in our behavior before others unable to cope with it. If we do that, we are just as guilty as if we had sent someone to eternal damnation.

12 But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.

To sin against the brethren is no less than a sin against

Christ Himself, our Lord and Savior. Like the Lord asking Saul, "Why persecutest thou me?" Isn't it p r e c i o u s that He feels every attack against one of us as being against Him? So this is serious business, if we are the stumbler! And the drastic conclusion is just as striking:

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

Are we ready to take such a drastic, u n c o n d i t i o n a l sacrifice for a brother's safety? For the Lord? Paul was and did. He relates his own example in the next chapter.

By Ron Canner, April 30, 2003

Appendix

Here is a quote that may be helpful.

"The liberty of God's children is absolute, but they are expected to use it as imitators of God. We have to consider not ourselves only, but both our brethren and the world. A saint may be walking without circumspection, and yet with an unruffled conscience. But this is dangerous. Heed must be taken lest, while enjoying, in one sense blamelessly, our liberty, we become unwittingly a stumbling block to others. An ostentatious use of liberty rarely fails to injure the boaster and those who may observe his ways. True grace, because it is free and knows its happiness in fellowship with God, makes no effort to seem free. Rather it will seek to use its liberty in love, considering the weak, and neither despising them, nor tempting them by wrong example to act in anything beyond their faith." Pridham.