

Using and not Abusing Your Liberty Part 2

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[0 : 00] This message was recorded at Vision Baptist Church in Alfred, Georgia. It is our prayer that you will be blessed by the preaching of God's Word. What a wonderful God we serve. Amen? Take your Bibles, if you would, and open them to the book of Romans, chapter 14.

Romans, chapter 14. In 1975, our first son was born, and Betty and I actually became independent Baptists in March of 1977.

I had been raised in the Southern Baptist Convention, and I had gone off to a pastor's school in a far northern city, and I had become an independent Baptist. Chris was born in 1975. In 1979, Chris was ready to go to kindergarten, and there was a strong prevailing teaching that we should never, ever have our children in public school, and it would be wicked to have our children in public school, and so I started a Christian school at our church, and none of my kids, my kids always went to either Christian school that we started, one in Peru and one in America, or home school, and went through that.

That's one of those issues, by the way, that every one of you are going to have to be fully convinced in your own mind. Do you want your children, is it okay for your children to go to a public school? Is it okay for your kids to go to a Christian school?

It should always be home school. What's the answer in Romans 14? The answer in Romans 14 is, everyone should be fully convinced where? In his own mind. You need to think about it, you need to pray about it, and you need to decide.

[1 : 31] It's not for you to judge others. You say, well, that guy's got his kids in public school. A brother's sitting in this room. His children went to public school. And he said to me one time, he said, you can say anything you want about my kids going to public school, but my kids didn't watch TV 40 hours a week.

They came home, and they had other things to do. The other guy put his kids in Christian school. They went to Christian school, came home and watched TV. He said, I don't get the difference. And that's the whole point of Romans 14. Every one of us will decide how we'll raise our children as long as we do it within biblical guidelines.

Are we together? Amen? So this is like one of those hot potatoes. This is a chapter I would have never chosen to preach. I would have jumped over this chapter because it opens me up for you to shoot at me. So that's why I want to stay as close as I can just to Bible.

Read with me, if you would, Romans chapter 14 and verse 5. Romans 14, verse 5. The Bible said, One man esteemeth one day above another, and another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

I hope you've underlined that in your Bible. Let every man be fully esteemed, fully persuaded in his own mind. Verse 13 says, Let us not therefore judge one another anymore.

[2 : 36] So if you're going to do judging, quit judging each other, but rather judge this. Judge that you not put a stumbling block or an occasion of fall in your brother's way.

Judge that you not put a stumbling block in your brother's way. Lord willing, we'll finish chapter 14. And next week is question and answer Sunday night. And so you have plenty of, you've got all week long to get a whole bunch of questions ready for me.

And you can ask practical questions. You can ask nitpicking questions. You can ask questions about where the ministry is going, about the land, about construction, about anything you want to ask. You can do that next week. And so I'm setting you up this week for you to really let me have it with the questions next week.

Let's have a word of prayer. Father, I thank you for the opportunity and the privilege of studying your word. I thank you for the Bible. I thank you for the chance to have a church that loves your book, loves to get together, loves to study it, loves to talk about it, loves to share it with it.

And we want to live out what you teach. I thank you for a church where peace has reigned for eight years and where there's been a gentle kindness among the brothers and where I really don't believe, where there's been judging and despising and counting our brothers nothing.

[3 : 42] And I thank you for that. And I'll give you praise for it all. In Jesus' precious name, amen. I have two points for tonight. And I will be finished with this chapter. The first thing I want you to say, which will be number three if you're taking notes this morning, many things fall under what we call freedom of conscience.

Many things fall under freedom of conscience. You might write down the words freedom of conscience. Baptists historically have been very famous for believing that every person has a right to decide.

Individual soul liberty. That you choose. You learn. You decide what you believe. And you stand by what you believe. For me, an example, actually I think almost cost me a friend.

There was a mosque being put in. And the question was, would I write a letter? Would I sign a petition? Would I get involved in not allowing the mosque to be put there? And I just ignored the question and ignored the letter and didn't do anything because I would never, if they want to build a mosque next door to us, I'd not say a word.

I figure if anybody wants to be wrong and believe like that, that's their business. And I'll be right and believe what I believe and they can be wrong and believe what they believe. It's a liberty of conscience, an individual soul liberty thing.

[4 : 52] I might not agree with them, but I believe that they have a right to do it. I don't picket them, fight them, except by sharing my faith with them. Again, pastors and preachers and teachers often try to force their personal preferences on others.

Churches are famous for that. Pastors are famous for it. They preach on things that fall under the Romans 14 heading, but they decide which ones are the right ones and they have a right to say that.

They expect everybody to do what they say. They become overbearing and try to force all. I have been super guilty of that personally. So I'm not condemning anybody else.

I have been guilty that I've been preaching long enough that I've made more mistakes than any other human being I've ever met in my life at being a pastor, at preaching the Bible and making so many mistakes. I hope I'm growing and I hope I'm learning.

There's often division over these things. People try to force everyone to do what they believe is right. They treat their brothers like he is less. They love to argue. They love to despise each other.

[5 : 51] We have driven many people away from God and church by getting hung up on lesser issues. Romans 14 is talking more about externals than internals. And I would like to call your attention to a little thing that hangs on the wall over there and you could easily forget, but I'd like to call your attention to it.

That's the ministry model I started following while I was in Prue as these things started to become clear to me and I grew and learned. And I will say to you, I've made more mistakes about this than anybody I could ever talk to you about.

But we focus too much on the do level or the serve level. And almost every church you're ever in is what are you doing? Do this, do this, do this. Don't do this, don't do this, don't do this.

You ought to serve or whatever. And we're talking about those things. But the basic thing that I would like to get across to everybody is be. And we are because the Lord did a work in us.

We do not do to be. We do because we are. There's a major difference there. We are not doing to be. You don't act like a Christian to be a Christian. And you don't do Christian stuff to be a Christian.

[6 : 53] If you do any of those things, it's because of who you are. You can't help but live out who you are. We have spent many years in our ministries all across America teaching pigs how to live like sheep.

And you can put a bow on them and you can put talcum powder on them and you can scream at them every week and tell them they ought to cut their hair, quit wearing britches and come to church and you can give them all the rules you want.

But as soon as you turn your back, the pig goes right back to the mire. The pig goes right back to the pig pen. The pig goes right back to doing what pigs do because he is what he is. So the B level is the important one.

And that is if a person becomes a sheep, they will want to do sheep stuff. You don't really have to tell a sheep, sheep, be a sheep. The sheep will look at you and say, I am what you want me to be. I mean, if you looked at a sheep and said, you need to be a sheep and grow wool.

He'd be like, buddy, what do you think I'm doing? I am a sheep. I don't need to be told to be a sheep. And so, so much of what goes on in our church is Romans 14 stuff. Romans 14 stuff where we're trying to tell people, we really think Christians look like this.

[8 : 02] Buddy, when you travel around the world, sometimes things are so different. When I became an independent Baptist missionary and traveled into independent Baptist churches, I knew that if you had drums in a church and I knew that if you had a bass guitar in a church that was wicked.

I knew if you had a guitar in the church, that was wicked. Then I would go to this great missions church and they would have a bass guitar and they would be playing the bass guitar and they would say, but we don't have a drum, bless God. Because if you have a drum, you're wicked.

The very next service I'd be in a church and had a drum. And they'd say, we got a drum, but we won't want some bass guitars, bless God. We don't do that. We do not do that. No bass guitars in this church, but we got a drum. And I go to the next church that have a bass guitar and a drum.

And I'd be like, boy, you guys are really mixed up. And they'd say, you know, we're just not hung up in that legalism except we like this bass guitar. There's another church that's supporting me. I promise you, this church had more fiddlers, guitarists, every kind of instrument.

When you got there 30 minutes before church, they were having a regular country hoedown at the front of the church. And they were all Christian songs, more or less, but I'm just telling you, they was up there. It wasn't a violin either, buddy. It was a fiddle.

[9 : 03] I mean, that guy was up there going to it, and they were all singing. And when church started, man, everybody's coming in there. You could just see them, everybody walking in there ready. They knew that's what goes on there. What in the world's right and what's wrong?

You go to this church, and buddy, if you don't have your kids in a Christian school, you're wrong. If you send them to home school, you're wicked. You're wrong. If you send them to public school, you are really wrong. You're really going to hell. I mean, just all these fights.

And so here's what Romans 14 says to us. Don't get involved in that junk. Don't be judging. So I'm going to give you the last point and the main thing I think that Romans 14 is showing.

I was asked two weeks ago or a week ago, whatever it was I was asked, what's the Bible say about alcohol? That's a big, hot topic. Now, let me just say up front, I hate alcohol with every fiber in my being.

My dad was a drunkard before he got saved, so I have not had anything to drink. The only time I've had anything to drink in my entire life, I don't even use Nyquil. Amen.

[10:01] I don't even use Nyquil. The only time I had anything to drink, we were in a church in Sand Mountain, Alabama. Betty and I had just been married a few months, and they needed a pastor.

They needed a fill-in preacher, and I was like 19 years old. And so we didn't have a church to work in yet. It was going to be within the first two months of our marriage, I suppose, because I didn't have a church yet.

And I got a church within two months of us getting married in October of 1973 is when we started working in our first church. And so we drove over to this church, and we got there, and one of the men came out and said, do you mind officiating the Lord's Supper this morning?

Well, you got to understand, I'm a country boy. Never had any alcohol in my life. Never saw alcohol in my home. My daddy hated alcohol. So I'm standing in the pulpit, and I'm going to do the Lord's Supper. I am so excited. I am pumped.

I'm thinking to myself, now, I'm not ordained, and I'm not licensed, and I don't know if I'm supposed to do the Lord's Supper, but they don't know the difference, and I don't know the difference, and we ain't even talking about it. I'm doing the Lord's Supper. This is my first chance to do the Lord's Supper.

[10:57] And I was looking down at the Lord's Supper thing, and I noticed that the grape juice did not look very healthy. It did not look like Welch's grape juice. It had little stuff floating in it. And I thought to myself, these poor country mountain people, they're so dumb, they don't know their grape juice is spoiled.

So I served the Lord's Supper. I said, that don't hurt. I'm so excited to do the Lord's Supper. And we served the Lord's Supper, and I took my drink, and I set my cup down, and I thought, that stuff is rotted. Them people do not know. That stuff is rotted.

So we got out in the car. We started driving home, and I said, honey, I just feel so sorry for poor country people. Now, you've got to understand, I is a poor country people. And Betty knows I is a poor country people.

And we're riding down the road, and Betty said, honey, they're not poor country people. You're a dumb country person. That was wine. That was homebrew. And I said, oh, no, I have ruined my testimony.

I have never had a drink in my life. And she said, now you have. So I had my taste of alcohol. So somebody asked me, what do we say about alcohol? You know, the Bible's not extremely clear.

[12:00] It says this, don't you get drunk. But then you might be saying, well, is it okay to drink? Well, you know, you're going to have to be fully convinced of your own mind. And watch this next part of the Bible about everything. About homeschool.

About a Christmas tree or not having a Christmas tree. About, you know, does your family have an Easter bunny at the house? You know, that could be demonic.

Somebody came up to me afterwards and said, not just the cabbage patch dolls. What about the Pokemon? And all the other things that were demon-possessed when we were kids. So watch with me, if you would, what it says in Romans chapter 14. Just read with me in the Bible.

So here's how you handle your liberty. This is how you handle your liberty. Chapter 14 and verse 13. We decide not to do anything that might cause a weaker brother to stumble.

That's our decision. We won't make weaker brothers stumble. Verse 13. Let us not therefore judge one another anymore. Let's quit judging each other. But judge this.

[12 : 56] Make this decision that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. Underline that. Do not put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

Don't put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall. Since our brother is weaker, we know that our eating meat might offend him or hurt him spiritually. This guy, it's not the meat that's really causing the guy the problem.

It could be the meat if it were pork. If you've got a Jewish guy who got saved and he's accepted Christ as his Savior and he's a new creature. Maybe you serve bacon. And he may honestly be looking at it and saying, God says don't eat bacon.

And I just don't understand how you're eating bacon. But it could have easily been somebody whose meat had been offered to an idol. And they were looking at it and they were saying to themselves, how can you eat that meat? That meat was offered to an idol.

And idols are real. And we know they're real because we used to worship them and we used to serve them and we believe in that. And it's something we can't do. When we arrived in Arequipa, they have what they call carnival.

[14 : 02] And carnival is like Mardi Gras. It's all over the world in the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church has a type of Mardi Gras, which is Fat Tuesday, which is basically they have this several week period that means you're going to have to do right.

In just a few days, you have to really get strict. So just let your flesh do anything it wants to do for the next number of days. And then you'll come in, you'll have ash winds and you'll put the ashes on your forehead and you'll get real strict real quick.

And so we got to Peru and it was hot. And our kids were outside and they were throwing water. All the kids in the neighborhood were throwing water on each other. And all I knew was they were throwing water on each other.

And up pulls a Peruvian missionary pastor who is now in heaven. And he came in the house and he said, I just cannot believe that you're allowing your children to play carnival.

And I said, what is carnival? And he said, and then he explained what carnival was. And he said, that's a Catholic thing. And it's a let your flesh go wild. And they're throwing water on each other.

[15 : 01] And it's an ungodly thing to do. So I called my kids in. I said, stop it with the carnival. And they were like, well, what's the carnival? And I said, we'll talk about carnival later. But don't do it anymore because it's really bothering Brother Julio here.

He's torn up about it. The first Christmas you get out and you set out your nativity scene. But a nativity scene is a very offensive thing to have in your home. Because they grew up with nativity scenes which were altars.

They were altars all their lives for them. And so the fact is, you put out your nativity scene sometime in December. And you put out and you never put Jesus out. And if you do, you cover him with a little blanket. And every year you buy him a new gift.

You buy him a little sheep to go in there. Another shepherd to go in there. Or whatever. And you put it in there every year. And then at the 24th at midnight, you uncover Jesus. Or you put Jesus in there. And you start clapping and singing.

And you dance. And you pray. And you sing before him. And that goes on until like January the 8th. And kids come by from the neighborhood and knock on your door. And they say, we'd like to sing and dance for the baby.

[16:03] And they come in and they sing and dance for the baby. And you're supposed to give them some chocolate milk. And some pine and toen. So these are issues. Is there anything wrong with the nativity scene? Well, there wasn't anything wrong with the nativity scene where I came from.

We never worshiped the nativity scene. But we got rid of our nativity scene. We moved our nativity scene upstairs so as not to offend our brothers. Anybody that would come in might see it. So my first thing in my mind is this.

Not is it right. Not is it okay. But does it hurt my brother? Not is it right. Not is it okay. But does it hurt my brother? Is it offensive to him? And I know you're sitting there thinking, well, there ain't nobody going to make me take my nativity scene down.

Then you got the wrong attitude. There ain't nobody going to make me quit throwing water on the kids. The kids are out throwing water. Now, I got where I hated Carnaval as bad as anybody. Because you could be dressed in a suit and tie on your way to church and some teenager would come running up with a five-gallon bucket of water and just throw it on you in the suit and everything.

Or they'd throw paint on you. Drunks would be walking around out of Kipa and their whole face is painted black. Sometimes you'd catch them. They wouldn't have their shoes. Sometimes they wouldn't have their pants. Because when they got drunk, the kids, they'd just take their clothes off of them or whatever.

[17:12] They threw them in ditches. They couldn't get out of you. Drive by and be a drunk. And he's slobbering. He's trying to climb back out of the hole. And his face is painted black. And you're like, what's going on? And everybody would say, Carnaval!

Carnaval! They just mistreated the poor drunk. So what are you going to do? The first thing is I don't put a stumbling block in my brother's way. We know there's nothing wrong with it. But somehow we think of how it might affect our brother.

Look if you would at verse 15. The second thing is we don't want to hurt him or grieve him. Look at verse 15. If thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably.

Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died. You need to circle the word grieved. It's hurting him. It is breaking his heart. He can't believe you have that nativity scene.

Because that nativity scene for him represents idol worship. That nativity scene for him represents idol worship. Now he may grow past that. If you were to go to Adikipa today, I think you might find several pastors who grew up hating the nativity scene.

[18:17] Once they got right, they may now have nativity scenes. There's nothing actually wrong with the nativity scene. There's nothing actually wrong with the nativity scene. But in their newness, in their recently accepting Christ, it was a big deal.

And it grieved them. And when they saw a missionary come in and set up a nativity scene, they thought, he's bringing in idol worship. The guy that's come here to teach the Bible is going to tell our people to worship idols.

And I would have said, no, I'm not here to teach idol worship. I don't believe in idol worship. It's a decoration. I know people, man, they're against Christmas trees. I know people. There's somebody against everything you can possibly imagine.

They're against Christmas trees. They're against, you know, what do we do at churches? We have harvest festivals. We're definitely not going to do Halloween because if you was to have a Halloween thing, you'd be worshipping the devil.

I mean, there's just a gazillion things that are going on. My concern is I don't want to cause you to stumble. My concern is I don't want to hurt you. I may have liberty. I may fully understand there's nothing wrong with this.

[19 : 21] I may fully understand there's nothing wrong with this. But I will limit myself because I love my brother. I love my sister. I would not grieve them. That's the word the Bible uses.

Grieve them, hurt them, cause them to be in tears, break their heart because of what they might see. There's another word in the verse. Look at it. Would you circle it? Destroy. He says, destroy not him with thy meat.

The wrong words, the wrong actions, the wrong saying or doing could wound them. They really seem that something is bad. They do not understand.

Can you show enough love to not do what might hurt them, might destroy them, might devastate them? For meat, destroy not the work.

Verse 20. Look at verse 20 also. For meat, destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure. But it is evil for that man who eateth with offense. Now, I grew up on a farm.

[20 : 20] And my daddy, for some reason, and I'm not really sure what the root of it was, we were never allowed to call our bull a bull. The word bull, in my daddy's vocabulary, was considered to be a very offensive word.

So we had a male cow, which there's no such thing. That's like having a male girl. It just don't happen. We had a male cow. Or, daddy said, so people won't laugh at us, we always call bulls major.

So, you know, you go over to somebody's farm, daddy would be wanting to buy a major. You go over and say, I'm here to look at your majors. And everybody, every farmer over is like, okay, exactly what are you talking about? But daddy had a real problem with the word bull.

Some people have a real problem with the word pregnant. So you might be with child, or you might be expecting, or whatever. And that word could be offensive. Don't hurt.

Don't destroy. Don't devastate. Don't knock your brother down with your freedom. You say, I understand that there's nothing wrong with the word bull. You can say the word bull.

[21 : 25] It's okay. Okay, so you might can say that, but, well, you're going to hurt my dad. My dad could not stand if anybody said that Jesus' blood was spilt. If you said spilt.

If a song said spilt, my dad would meet me, and I was his pastor. He would meet, if somebody sang a song that said, and they spilt his blood. He would meet me in the office. He'd say, they did not spill it.

Spilling is an accident. It was not spilt. It was shed, boy. And I'd say, yes, sir, daddy, I know. I'd say, that's called poetic license. Well, that's sinful poetic license, boy.

And yes, sir, daddy. I'm going to tell him from now on, we sing that shed. And so we would change songs. The blood that was shed, not spilled. I don't care if it doesn't rhyme. It doesn't matter. My daddy hates that word.

Spilt. And so that's what he's saying. Be careful. It doesn't destroy. It doesn't devastate. Verse 20. For meat. Don't mess up, defraud, devastate, destroy the work of God.

[22 : 22] For a piece of meat. So you could eat a steak. You would hurt the things of God. All things indeed are pure. But it is evil for that man who eateth with offense. We'll go to another verse in just a second.

But let me, can I tell you something? Did you know that although we only have one building, we had a family here who hated any meal in the auditorium. And we don't, where does the auditorium exactly stop?

They believed with all their heart that you couldn't bring a drink in here. You couldn't bring a cup of coffee in here. You couldn't bring anything to drink in here. And did you know what I would tell the whole staff every time?

We will not do anything in the auditorium. You sit it up over there. And if they say anything, tell them, we on purpose keep an eye of the auditorium. Now they still had a problem with it because there wasn't a wall here.

And that's why if you go to a country church, there's often a pavilion out back. That's where they do their eating so that it didn't offend people. So the whole deal is as a Christian, you say, well, what's the difference?

[23 : 19] I'd like to say to them, this isn't a church. It's a stinking warehouse. And the truth is, I'm the temple of God, and we can eat anywhere we want. I eat in this body all the time. How many of y'all eat in your bodies? And I want to say that to them, but it's not right.

There's no need to hurt them over something. If you can avoid that, no need to hurt them. Go with me if you were to verse 16. Romans 14, 16. By the way, your liberty is good.

But if you do not handle it correctly, you'll hurt the cause of Christ. Your liberty is good, but if you do not handle it correctly, you'll hurt the cause of Christ. Look at verse 16. Let not then your good be evil spoken of.

Listen to this. Now look this way. I want you to listen to something. Listen. Look here. I need you to listen to this. It's good to eat meat. Paul said he knew there was nothing wrong with eating anything. He knew that you had freedom to eat anything you wanted to eat.

It's not against the rules. God's not upset when you're eating meat. And so when you eat meat, that's a good thing. But then he said, but don't let your good be evil spoken of.

[24 : 23] So if you're with a person who feels like it's wrong to eat meat, then just don't eat meat. You don't have to eat meat in front of them. You don't need to eat meat in front of them. You don't need to look at them and say, well, you need to grow up, bless God.

You need to grow up. We'll be sitting at a restaurant. You know, I take people out to eat quite often, and we'll be sitting at the restaurant. And, you know, I eat at Mexican restaurants a lot. And our joke is, are you pre-chip or mid-trip or post-chip on the prayer?

And that's a joke based on the millennium. Are you pre-millennial, mid-millennial, or pre-trib? Yeah, pre-trib, mid-trib, or post-trib. But we'll be sitting there, and sometimes Betty will poke me on the table, because I'm sitting there just digging away at the chips, you know.

I'm post-chip. Hey, I'm free. I can eat the chips without it. I don't pray over popcorn. When Betty brings me popcorn to eat, and I'm sitting on the bed eating popcorn, watching TV, I never pray. God, thank you for this popcorn.

I just eat the popcorn. You say, what made you have a right to decide you shouldn't pray over popcorn? I don't know. I just decided that. Should you pray over popcorn? I don't know. You know, I know some people say, I prayed when I bought the groceries.

[25 : 22] That's enough. But anyway, joke, joke. But anyway, we're sitting there, and Betty's poking me under the table. You all have a wife that does that with you, poking you under the table.

And if you don't notice the first poke, she starts kicking. And so finally, you know, after my leg is black and blue and blood's dripping off, I say, I believe we might want to pray so you all can eat those chips. Rhonda does that too, doesn't she?

Wicked women. These wicked women. And so we go ahead and we pray before we eat because we don't want to offend them. We don't want to offend them. I remember I took one missionary family out, and you know, they were uptight.

I mean, you could tell. And we got to the restaurant, and I said, look, guys, you can relax. I've been a missionary. I've traveled all over America. Let your kids relax. They can all have a Coke. They don't have to drink water tonight. They can have a Coke. We'll buy them a Coke.

And it was coming out of my pocket anyway. I said, I'll buy anything you want. Don't worry about it. And he said, no, they'll have water. I said, okay. Sprite? Sprite? You know, because maybe they don't want the cabin. Nope, they'll drink water.

[26 : 18] Okay. No water. Then all the chips came out, and I reached out and grabbed a chip, and I noticed not one person's mood, but they were sitting there, wooden Indian style. And Betty goes, pray. And I'm like, thank you, Holy Spirit.

Would you all like to pray before we have a chip? And so we pray. Don't defraud. Don't do that. Don't let your liberty cause damage. Look at verse 21, if you would.

Romans 14, 21. It's good, neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbles, or is offended, or is made weak.

So find out. Find out what might make them weak, what might make them stumble, what might offend them, and stay away from it.

What are we trying to accomplish in the kingdom of God? Look at verse 17. What are we trying to accomplish? The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

[27 : 20] Get this. Some of the Christians were so excited about their liberty. They didn't have any rules anymore. They didn't have the Ten Commandments hanging heavy, heavy over their head.

They didn't have a hundred list of rules because they were saved by grace, and they were excited about it. And he said, but guys, the kingdom isn't about your freedoms. Your kingdom's not about your freedoms.

It's not about I got saved so I can live any way I want. It's not about I got saved so I can do what feels good to me. He said it's still about something else. And read the verse, would you? It says, excuse me, I need you to get verse 17.

The kingdom of God is not meat or drink, but righteousness and peace and joy. And so when people get together with me and when they get together with you, what do we want to have happen?

We want them to feel the holiness, the rightness, the walking with God. We want them to have peace. We want them to have joy. We want them to relax. We want them to enjoy their Christianity.

[28 : 25] And it could be something as little as a nativity scene in the living room if you were not at Kipa Peru in 1988. It could be as little as a nativity scene in the living room. It could be as little as we're going to have Christmas and you make a joke about Santa.

You know, some people, man, they are so afraid of Santa. They're like, Santa is Satan misspelled. Don't use Santa. And they've got a lot of rules.

Now, I never taught my kids anything about the other Santa Claus. I wasn't about to give credit to anybody for any gift I bought. If I bought it, I'm Santa. And so I used to tell them, look what Santa bought you, and Santa looks just like this.

And so, you know, there was no question. There was no question. The fact is, we had the tooth fairy at my house when my kids were growing up. And the kids would come to me and they said, Dad, the tooth fairy needs to visit me tonight.

And I said, well, what are you looking at me for? Daddy, we know you're the tooth fairy. Sometimes I'd actually write them a check. I'd write a check. Chris Gardner, 50 cents. He said, Daddy, it's worthless to write a check for 50 cents.

[29 : 28] Could you make it for a dollar on the next tooth? At least make a dollar. But the point is, where's the line? I want joy and peace and righteousness. I want sweet stuff to abound.

I don't want to offend my brother. There are words that are really, the word in itself is not wrong. Boy, you ought to travel. You ought to become a traveler. You ought to travel around the world. You ought to go from one country to the next country in South America.

In South America, they use words in one country, and it is a very dirty, filthy word. You drive six hours across the border, and it's a common, everyday word that the pastor would use in a pulpit.

And you're sitting there, and he says that word, and you're like, I can't believe a man of God said that. And so then you slip up and say something from your country, and they're like, I can't believe you'd say that. Well, which one of us is right? Who determines?

You know, a bloody something or other in Britain is totally different than a bloody something or other in America. America. So learn, I want peace and righteousness and joy. We're a family in Jesus Christ.

[30 : 28] No need to flaunt your liberty. No need to stir up stuff. The work God did in your life was not to get you liberty to do what you want, to live like you want. He did a work, and he saved you for purposes, but you are still a servant.

Our goal is to build up others. Our goal is to bring peace in hearts and lives. We never want to use our liberty for ourselves to cause trouble or to make a scandal. Look at Romans 14, 19.

Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace. Underline that. Make for peace. Let's do what makes for peace. And then look at the other word it says there.

That we might edify one another. That we might edify one another. And so we want to do things that make for peace. We want to do things that build up our brother.

And so I would limit my liberty. I would limit my liberty so as not to hurt my brother. I would limit my liberty to build my brother up. I would limit my liberty to help him grow.

[31 : 26] And I've been guilty of doing two things. I'm just going to tell you because these are both sins that I confess to you. One, I've been guilty of trying to impose what I think on other people. Well, pastors are so very guilty of that.

This pastor is extremely guilty. But the other thing is once I figure out something's okay, sometimes I try to move people too quickly. And I'm like, it's okay. You know, I used to be hung up on that myself. Just like you are. That's ridiculous. Don't be hung up.

Both of those are wrong. I'm supposed to be building my brother up. I'm supposed to be surrendering my things if I need to to help them. Go with me if you would to Romans 14, 18. When you treat your brother right with the right attitude, you're actually serving Christ.

In verse 18, he said, For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men. So when I don't have a meal in the auditorium because it might offend that family, I'm serving Christ.

And I'm serving my brother. When I put the nativity scene upstairs and not downstairs, I'm serving Christ. You might want to say, I put my stinking nativity scene where I want to.

[32 : 31] It ain't nobody's business but mine. But the truth of the matter is, if I want to serve Christ, I say, not what I want. Not what makes me feel good. Not what I get off on, but what I can do for my brother.

Did you know when you give up some of your rights, when you give up some of the things that you would think are important, some of the things you want for your brother, you're actually helping him and you're serving Christ.

I want to give you the last set of verses that we'll read. Romans 15 and 1. And we read them this morning. And let me remind you. Do like Jesus did and please not yourself but others.

Life is about pleasing others. The Bible says in Romans 15 and 1, We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities, the sicknesses, the weaknesses of the weak.

The idea there is that you ought to pick up their weaknesses. You ought to carry their weaknesses. That word bear is the same word for bear a cross. It's the idea that I would pick up your weaknesses.

[33 : 29] And look what it says. I will bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves. And not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor.

Let's please our neighbor. For his good. For his good. To edification. So not about what I want, but what about what my neighbor wants.

Pleasing my neighbor for his good. To edification. Verse 3. Even Christ. Please not himself. But as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproach thee fell on me.

So here's what Jesus did. Jesus said, Jesus said, This is what they need. This is what they want.

I'm thinking about them and what would please them. And that's how I'm doing things. That's it. I'm going to give you some follow-up questions for you to think about. But I just want you to realize, Romans 14.

[34 : 25] You are free. This is a wild one for you. For 18 years in South America, I preached just exactly like this. I never wore a coat.

I'm fat. I don't like coats. I wore my shirt. My sleeves were always rolled up. My tie was unbuttoned. I did not wear a polo shirt. I wore a tie. Unbuttoned, collared, just like this right here.

When I came back to America, I put on a coat. I did not put on a coat for me. I can promise you, I did not put on a coat for me. In fact, as I was preaching in Venezuela, in Venezuela, in Caracas, Venezuela, a friend of mine's church there, ran about 500 people in his church, and it was extremely hot.

In Caracas, inside the building, it was probably 95 degrees. They had no air conditioning. The windows were open. And it was extremely hot. And every preacher in that church wore a suit. They had their coat on, their tie buttoned up, and everything.

And I came walking in, and the pastor, I wore my coat in. And the preacher said, well, Brother Gardner's wearing a coat. I said, not long, buddy. I pulled it. I mean, I was sweating with my shirt. It was just like this.

[35 : 29] I was soaking wet with sweat. And he said, you know, you're the most relaxed guy in a pulpit I've ever seen. You don't really care, do you? I said, I knew, man. I crossed the line. This is a big deal to him.

I should have worn my coat. I should have worn my coat. But I never did, because I was just a pig about it. I just didn't want to wear my coat. I'm just telling you, I'm just telling you, Romans 14 is about this.

It's not necessarily right or wrong. People ask me, do I have to wear a suit and tie to church? No, you don't. How do I have to dress? Well, won't you get fully convinced about that in your own mind?

And won't you get fully convinced about that in your own mind? Sometimes I've got to think of this. Well, what do they expect me to do? But you really don't have so much of that. So I would challenge you, though, to remember this.

There are people in our church that would be homeschoolers, and homeschoolers can be death on non-homeschoolers. Can we be honest about that? I mean, a homeschooler can walk around like, if you don't homeschool your kids, it's because you hate them.

[36 : 31] You send them to the devil! You are nothing! I judge you, and I despise you! Maybe we ought to back off on that one. That's what Romans 14 is saying.

And then the guy who's got his kids in public schools walking around saying, at least my teacher can read! And they're judging each other. Maybe we ought to back off on that one. Come on! I mean, this really is where the rubber hits the road.

It's where the rubber hits the road. You've got this one person, man, they are so big on homeschooling. You've got this other, they're so big about, they hate homeschooling. Then you've got this other person. The fact is, many preachers have been famous for starting a school and then cussing everybody out that doesn't pay to go to their school.

It's going all the way. It runs the gamut, doesn't it really? It really runs the gamut. And here's what he said in Romans 14. The Bible never says you've got to put your kid in homeschool, public school, or private school.

That's kind of a doubtful disputation. So what do you need to do? Be fully convinced in your own mind, do it for yourself, and have the right attitude towards somebody else. There's a gazillion other things that it applies to, but let's just leave it at this.

[37 : 41] If you eat meat, don't pick on vegetarians. That's what the passage is actually saying. And if you are a vegetarian, don't pick on meat eaters.

Because if you eat meat, you eat it for Jesus. And if you don't eat meat, you don't eat it for Jesus. But whatever you do, you're to love your brother in Christ. Can a lady, a Christian lady wear pants?

Or should she always wear a skirt? I'm just getting right down where we live. Well, here's a good answer for that. Let every man, really, every woman, be fully convinced in her own mind.

And the preacher doesn't really need to be the one trying to make that decision for you. Because the Bible never says. I was with a missionary recently, and I was kidding him because he's with a mission agency and his wife's not supposed to wear pants.

And he said, that's not what the rule says. I read the rule. The rule says, you can't wear the attire of a man. He said, if any pastor on the board of our mission wants to wear my wife's pants, I'll quit letting my wife wear them. He said, they're women's pants, and it would be very obvious if he put them on.

[38 : 50] So all I'm saying to you is this. Romans 14, what's our attitude? Let's don't ever be a church that's divided over little things. Now, what do we fight about? We ought to be fighting fundamentalists.

Jesus is the Son of God. Virgin born, sent from God, died on a cross. We ought to stand and fight. We ought to stand and fight for salvation by grace.

We ought to stand and fight for baptism by mercy in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Hey, by the way, we ought to stand and fight about adultery. It's wrong. The Bible says it's wrong. There's no question about if it's adultery wrong.

There's not one doubtful disputation there. That's a stand we take. Are you with me? So as a church, I challenge you. You already do it, but we're in Romans 14, and we've already been through 1 Corinthians chapter 8, and this will be the last time, probably in my lifetime, that I come across these scriptures while I'm pastor of this church because we keep preaching.

Next book, I think, will be Matthew, and that's 28 chapters in at least a year in that. If the Lord lets me live all the way to finish that, at least a year in the book of Matthew, and then we'll go to another book, and there's not a lot of books about this, but you learned this lesson.

[39 : 58] We don't pick on each other about little things. We love each other. We don't have to agree, but we can agree and not agree and be sweet about it, and if you don't like Christmas trees, don't get upset when God has one, and don't bring, if you don't like, if you don't like Christmas trees, if you don't like Christmas trees, don't go to their house and tear theirs down while they're not watching.

I can see you, I hate Christmas trees, I'm going to burn his house and he's got a Christmas tree. No, no, take care of your house. That's what Rowan's 14 is about. Father in heaven, I love you, I thank you, and I praise you for the chance to serve you, and I thank you for all you're doing.

I pray that your name would be wonderfully glorified and magnified here, and I pray your people would learn to trust you and look to you and believe in you, and I'll give you praise for it all. In Jesus' precious name, Amen.

This message was recorded at Vision Baptist Church in Alfred, Georgia. For more information, log on to www.visionbaptist.com where you can find our service times, location, contact information, and more audio and video recordings.