

## Lovingly Limiting Liberty

Last week in Romans 14:1-12 Paul helped us to understand that we must not judge or despise a fellow believer regarding his or her views of non-essentials of the Christian faith. As he moves forward in his discussion, he now wants those who are “strong” (i.e. those who better understand what it means to live freely in Christ) to understand how they should live and relate to someone who is “weak” (i.e. those who are still working on a fuller understanding of their freedom in Christ). In a sense Paul is answering the question, “Why can’t I, understanding my freedom in Christ, act on that freedom even if a fellow believer is bothered by it? Wouldn’t it be better for me to show them what they are missing? Wouldn’t it be better if they believed like me?” Let’s see what Paul says about lovingly limiting our liberty.

### Read Romans 14:13-23

1. What does it mean to put a stumbling block in a fellow believer’s way (v. 13)? And in the context of this passage, what kind of stumbling blocks is Paul talking about?
2. What is the principle that Paul is articulating in verses 14 and 23?
3. What bad things does Paul say can happen when we force our freedom upon “weaker” believers?
4. How do you understand verses 17-19 in the context of what Paul is saying in this passage?

Sam said:

I think the danger that Paul is trying to warn us about when we insist that others share our same level of faith, our same convictions regarding non-essentials, our same understanding of freedom in Christ is that we may lead them to make a decision based off what they think of us and not what they think of Jesus.

5. In what way would this kind of thing be a stumbling block to a weaker believer?

Sam said:

Take a moment and think of every non-essential to the Christian faith in which you feel a great deal of freedom. Eating, drinking, smoking, tattoos, entertainment, education, the right kind of worship songs to sing, the right way to practice communion, the right way to collect offerings...the list could go on, and your list might be quite different than the list of the people sitting around you. Think about your list...is there a single issue on that list in which exercising your freedom is more valuable to you than the spiritual well being and relationship with Christ of your fellow believer? Is there any freedom you feel granted in Christ that is more precious to you than the faith of a weaker brother or sister?

6. How might Sam's questions be helpful guides to determine how you should behave around a weaker brother or sister?

Sam said:

When you find yourself disagreeing with another believer over convictions that don't have a clear biblical answer, try this: take a deep breath...and commit to loving them well. Whether you believe you're the stronger or weaker in faith...take a deep breath...and commit to loving them well.

7. How is loving well a good guiding principle in situations where your convictions differ from a fellow believer?
8. Is there any specific situation in your life that this passage seems to be addressing?