



# Message **Transcript**

## Understanding Christian Liberty

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And as we get ready to hear the word of the Lord preach, let's prepare our hearts so that whatever the Lord would have for us that we can put into practice and apply this very day, let's pray before the Lord. Lord Jesus. We just celebrate you, Lord. That's why we're here, to bring you glory and to honor you and to praise you and to love you. And, Lord, we thank you for your living and active word, that every time it's open and faithfully and accurately preached that you have a word for us.

And so, Lord, speak to us clearly this very day that you may have your way with us. Lord, we desire to hear you and be transformed into the image of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ. And so, Lord, for what you're gonna accomplish in advance, we give you all the glory, all the honor and all the praise, and all of God's people who are ready to receive and put his word into practice very loudly. Agreed. By saying with me, amen.

I wanna encourage you to open your bibles to first corinthians, chapter eight. First corinthians, chapter eight. And as we're turning there, I want to tell you what we're talking about today. What we're going to talk about is christian liberty. Christian liberty.

In other words, christian freedom. What do Christians have the freedom to do and what do Christians not have the freedom to do? Now, in this section, what you're going to see is the apostle Paul talking about a specific thing, which is things sacrificed to idols, which may or may not be something that you struggle with. Most likely that you don't. But really, what we're going to be talking about in the context is disputable matters.

Those things in scripture which are not explicit. There are many things in scripture which are explicit. Don't lie, don't cheat, don't steal, don't have sex outside of marriage. All those things are black and white. And many things in the scriptures are black and white.

But there are some things in the scriptures that are not black and white. There are some things in the scriptures which are gray. There are some things that the scriptures do not specifically address. And what we wanna learn is when scripture doesn't specifically address something, how is it that I can make an informed decision to honor the Lord Jesus Christ in that? Now you wanna know about some of the gray areas.

This is not an exhaustive list. These are just some that I wrote down. And just so you know, when I preach this message and when I prepare this message, it has the ability for all of us to stretch us in a huge way. Let me tell you why. Because let me tell you about some of the things that aren't specifically addressed in scripture.

Like how about drinking alcohol? How about smoking? How about playing cards? How about wearing makeup? How about dancing?

How about playing sports on Sunday? How about going to see the movies or going to theater? How about appropriate dress for church? What about Halloween? Can we celebrate that or not?

Right? I mean, and that's not an exhaustive list. Those are just a few. And you get really two groups of people that come into play when you start talking about these issues. On one side, you have what are called legalists.

Legalists would say this, there are no gray areas in the Bible. Everything's black and white, every single issue. I just said they will give you scripture for and tell you why every single one of those things is wrong and why you can't participate if you're a Christian, right? That's called legalism. Legalism shuts the spirit of God off, because what legalism does is it takes things that are not clear in scripture and makes a mandated rule for all christians at all times to participate in a certain way.

On the opposite extreme, we have what's called libertarianism, which means christian freedom, which means this. Christ died for my sins according to the scriptures. I believe that Jesus paid for all of my sins, not only my past sins, but my present sins today, all my future ones. So here's my position. I don't really care.

I have the liberty to do whatever I want, whenever I want. Everything that you just listed, I can do all those things. And it's not that big of a deal. Here's the problem with libertarianism. It shuts off the spirit of God, too, by making the decision to say, I can do whatever I want, whenever I want without regard for anybody else.

Right? And this is what Paul is going to address. So if you're ever wondering, as a Christian, am I allowed to participate in this? Should I participate in this? How do I handle this in this situation?

Paul's going to list out some guidelines for us so that we can make an informed decision about how it is we're supposed to live. Those three major things we're going to highlight, and I hope by the end of this that God stretches each one of us, because this sermon, just so you know, this, has the potential to divide our church, okay? Because if you come from a legalistic background, you're gonna wanna say, Pastor Jeff, you better be real hard on some of those issues that you were squishy on at the beginning of this message, and I better hear that all those things are sin. And libertarians are sitting there saying, hey, wait, wait, wait. If you start giving me rules about those things, which I'm free to do, I'm out of here.

That's exactly why Paul's addressing this, because he's talking to a group of legalists and he's talking to a group of libertarians, and they're all under one body in Christ. And how are we to function in the body of Christ with these things? And by the way, this is a very applicational sermon because it's going to affect each and every

one of you in your christian walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. So open up to one corinthians chapter eight with that as background. And let's just take a look at what the apostle Paul says.

He says this now concerning things sacrificed to idols. We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant. But love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know.

But if anyone loves God, he is known by him. Now, there's three major things that we're gonna point out as we look in this chapter today. And the first is this. Three things you need to know to make an informed decision to love the Lord. Let me tell you this.

Number one is this. Your knowledge of an issue of any of these things, your knowledge of an issue remains incomplete when not coupled with a love for God and a love for others. Okay? Your knowledge of an issue remains incomplete when not coupled with a love for God and a love for others. Now, he says, now, concerning things sacrificed to idols, that's one word in the original language, things sacrificed to

idols.

He says, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant. But love edifies. Now, just so you know, because majority of us, if not all of us, are like, what's the big deal about food sacrifice to idols? Here was the big deal in the first century.

Many people that were coming to Christ were coming out of a pagan background where things, specifically food, was being sacrificed to an idol. And they were wanting to know from the apostle Paul, hey, when I go to the marketplace and I buy my groceries and I buy my meat, or I get invited over to a friend's house who's serving me dinner, perhaps that food has been sacrificed to an idol. If it's been sacrificed to an idol and I eat that food, am I participating with demons? Am I inviting something bad into my life? Am I marring the name of Christ?

If I participate in that? I mean, what am I supposed to do? And Paul's gonna tell them, hey, we all have knowledge about this, and he's gonna explain what our knowledge about idols is in just a second, he said. But this, just because we have



knowledge about a situation does not mean we have the whole picture. Why?

Because knowledge by itself makes us arrogant. But love edifies. I believe the niv reads. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. In other words, when it comes to making an informed decision about whether I should participate in something, it needs to first and foremost involve this my love for God and my love for other people.

It's not enough to come listen to a message or to study the word and just say, what's it saying and how does it apply to me? That's where it begins. We should be asking, what is God's word saying? How does this apply to me in the way that it will impact my love for God and my love for others? The problem with legalism and the problem with libertarianism is it takes love out.

It has nothing to do with my love for God. It has everything to do with what I believe the scriptures just teach me. Many well meaning legalists are people who have walked with God for a number of years, who God has spoken to about a specific issue, and then they legislate that for everybody in hopes that they'll live more christlike. But when you start legislating what the Bible says, without a love for God

and a love for others, it quenches the spirit of God. And some of you come out of legalistic backgrounds, some of you come out of legalistic backgrounds where your pastor loved the Lord and your elders love the Lord, and good people love the Lord.

But there were also sorts of rules that you had to follow in being a Christian or you were going to be shamed. There was a certain way you had to cut your hair, and a certain way you had to dress, and certain rules you had to do. And did you share the gospel this week, and did you? Not all could be seemingly good things. But problem of that is, we've made rules around the heart of a love for God, and it quenches the spirit of God.

On the other side, libertarians, we tend to think this, hey, Christ died for our sins. I am free to serve God. I have liberty in my conscience to do it. I've made the decision to do whatever I want, whenever I want, so help me God. And what libertarianism quenches the spirit of God by is, by saying this.

It doesn't matter what the circumstance or situation I'm in. I've already made the decision to operate in a certain way. No matter what my surroundings are. And we

miss the mark. Here's the point.

In any given situation in your life, presently, you should be asking the question, how does this honor the Lord? And how does this build up other people? Like, that's what Paul's telling them. If you get around people that just have knowledge, but have no love for God and others, you'll miss the mark. You get around legalists that have all the answers, but don't have a love for God, what do you have?

You have Pharisees. I mean, Jesus had a field day with these guys, right? Because they had taken God's law, which was intended to love him and love others. And they had put 613 other laws around it. To make sure that they never messed it up, right?

Like, for instance, did you ever notice that you were not allowed to work on the Sabbath? And yet almost all of Jesus healings took place when on the Sabbath. Why? Just to show them that the Sabbath was made to honor God. But it's always honorable to do good things to other people on the Sabbath.

I mean, you were called not to work on the Sabbath. And so the Pharisees had made a rule. You couldn't make mud. Remember when Jesus healed that blind guy on the Sabbath? What did he do?

He spit on the ground and made mud. And put it on the guy's eyes. Why did Jesus do that? I mean, he didn't have to do that. I mean, Jesus could have said, see?

And he would have seen. Why did he take the time to spit on the ground and make mud pies and put it on the guy's eyes? He was telling them that your legalism is missing out on the heart of God. To love somebody that's in need. And the Pharisees hated Jesus.

Because he didn't go along with all their legalistic rituals. Because what they were saying is, you're only spiritual if you follow all of our rules. That's legalism. Libertarianism on the other side is just, I can do whatever I want, whenever I want to do it without care for God and others. Because I know that Christ forgave me and I'm going to heaven anyway.

And this is what Paul's saying. Knowledge puffs up. Knowledge will make you arrogant. You can come to a Bible church like ours. You can study the Bible like ours.

And if it doesn't result in a love for God and a love for other people. And if you're not listening to the word. And how does this translate into love for God and a love for other people? You can become arrogant hearing the very word that God is trying to give you, to be spirit filled, to love him and to love others. Right?

Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Notice what he says. If anyone supposes that he knows anything he has not yet known as he ought to know. In other words, none of us have full knowledge. When we get to first Corinthians 13, we'll see that knowledge is all partial.

Right now we know in part there's nobody that's cornered the market on all knowledge except for the almighty God. None of us know everything. When you get to

a place that you say, I know it all, I know it all, what are you? You're arrogant. That's what Paul's saying.

He's telling the corinthian church, you don't have all the answers. You need God for the answers in any given moment. This is why he says, but if someone, anyone, loves God, he is known by God. It means when you have a love for God, you are actually known by him. Right?

Like, I've introduced my parents to you before when they've been here, and I love my parents, and I'm sure if my parents met you, they would love you, too. But I'm known by my parents. I mean, they know me. They love me. They know more about me than I probably even know about myself, because they've been with me for a long time.

Right? When you love God and you have a love for the things of God, you're known by God. You receive blessing and favor from God in your relationship, in abiding with God. This is what he's saying. He's saying in all of our knowledge, it all goes back to a love for God.

Now, you might say, well, where do you get this love for other people? This is what the whole heart of the matter is, isn't it? I mean, if you think about our mission and what we're all about, it's to glorify God in every single way. I mean, one corinthians 10:31 says, whether then you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. I mean, that's the purpose of every single thing.

Thing that we do. It's to glorify God. For the purpose of what? For the purpose of making disciples. Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus says, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Therefore, go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, son, and holy spirit and teaching them to obey all that I've commanded you, and I'll be with you always till the end of the age. That's exactly what we're called to do. So all this teaching that God's giving us goes vertical to honor the Lord and then goes horizontal to make disciples. And then we're called, like, how do we do that? What's the spirit behind it?

Well, it's the spirit of love. Matthew 22 37. And following says, we're to love the Lord our God, with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and we're to love our neighbor as ourselves. So when you sum up the entire Bible, we're glorifying God by making disciples in a spirit of love. That's the mission for every church everywhere.

No matter how it's worded, no matter how the mission statement's crafted, that's what it is. So when I hear the word, I'm not just hearing it to say, God, what do you want me to do? I'm hearing it to ask the question, God, how do I best glorify you? How do I best make disciples of others? And how do I do that?

In a spirit of love that honors you. Why? Because Jesus says in his word through the apostle John, in one John, chapter four, verses 19, and following it, says, we love because he first loved us. Notice what he says. If someone says, I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar for the one whom he.

For the one who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And this is the commandment we have from him, that the one



who loves God should love his brother also. Here's the deal. If you say you love God, it's going to be translated by how you love other people. If you say, well, I don't love them, then you don't have the love of God in your heart.

You're actually a liar, because to know God and to really love God is to be translated by how you personally love other people. And this is exactly what Paul is saying. To have just knowledge and say, I'm just gonna learn as much as I can and have it all in my head. If it doesn't translate in a love for God and a heart for other people, you've missed the whole point of whatever teaching you think that you know. That's what he's saying to the corinthian church.

Cause the corinthian church was arrogant. Cause they were just coming to church saying, what's in it for me. What do I need to learn from this? What do I need to do? What am I supposed to do?

And Paul's like, hey, before you make any decision, it needs to be informed on the fact that it needs to be about God and a love for him and a love for other people. Right? Now, libertarians like all these verses like this, I mean, this is where libertarians

go. How about Galatians five one, it's for freedom that Christ Jesus set us free. Or second, corinthians 317, where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

Or John eight, where Jesus says, if you know the truth, the truth will set you free. In other words, libertarians are sitting here listening to this message saying, I don't even need this one because I'm free to do whatever I want whenever I want to do it. Legalists are sitting over there saying, no, no, no. The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two edged sword. And all scripture is given by God for teaching correction, reproof, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be equipped for every good work, and the scripture is sufficient.

And the grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our Lord stands forever. We gotta go to the word. And here's what Paul is saying. We're going to the word. The word of God is true.

The word of God is tested. But there's more than just having knowledge about the word. There's having a heart for God and a heart for other people in what we hear. And when you're making a decision about whether you're going to drink alcohol, or

whether you're going to smoke, or whether you're going to celebrate Halloween, or whether there should be dancing in church or any of these other disputable matters, you better make sure that first and foremost, you're hearing the word of God through a lens of love for him and a love for other people. That's number one.

Number two, is this very similar to the first one, but it bears repeating, and that's this. Your life was created by the one and only true God for the purpose of glorifying him. I mean, keep in mind, when you're making an informed decision about what you're gonna do, that your life was created by God, the one and only true God, God for the purpose of glorifying him. Therefore, he says in verse four concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols. We know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one for even if there are so called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the father, from whom are all things, and we exist for him.

And one lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through him. In other words, we exist for God because we were created by him, and we exist through him because he holds all things together. This is what he's saying, that your life, when you're making a decision about what you're going to do, has nothing to do with your

liberty and has nothing to do with what your legalism would say. It all has to do with this. How can I bring the most glory to God in this specific situation?

How do I do that? What does that presently look like for me? Why? Because there's only one true God. Notice what he says.

He goes, things, you know, there is no such thing as an idol. Now, clearly there were idols because they sacrificed food to idols. What was he saying? He was saying there's no God behind the idols that are created. When idols are made out of brass, wood or stone, that's all they are, is brass, wood and stone.

There's no God behind these idols. There's only one true God. There's only one God that the Bible reveals. It's the Lord Jesus Christ, whom the Father sent to this world to save the world from their sins. The Bible reveals a trinity God.

One God in three distinct persons, Father, son and holy spirit. There are no other gods. There are no other gods. Yeah, well, Islam says that there's Allah. Let me tell

you something.

There is no Allah. There's no such thing according to the Bible. Yeah, but Jeff, you're talking about millions of people around the world that believe that. And I'm telling you there's millions of people around the world that are believing falsely, which is why we need to get the gospel out. Paul's saying there is no idol.

When you're sacrificing food to idols, there's no idol to be sacrificed to later in the chapter or in the book. He's going to talk about there can be demons behind the idols. There can be all sorts of spiritual, demonic activity. But let me tell you what there's not. Behind the idols.

There are no gods. Now, he says that yet for us, okay, verse five. For even if there are so called gods, whether in heaven and in earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, a lot of people have so called gods. But we know Paul says there's only one right the book of acts says in him, we live and move and have our being. Whether you believe it or not, you were created by God.

You are sustained by God for the purpose of glorifying God. And since he's the one who created you, all your decisions need to go through a grid of, in this moment, making the choice that I'm making. Does this bring the most honor and glory to God? Now you might say, jeff, you're belaboring the point. Why make this point?

Because it's really, really important. Parents, you understand as you're raising your kids as they age that you give them a little more liberty and a little more freedom. And I'm sure when you get to a certain age, it's like, scary to kind of let them out and try new things. And each age group has different things, right? This is what's happening in the church.

As we grow as spiritual christians, we need to let people grow and need to let people move. And here's how we do it. By teaching people here, if you're going to have a love for God and a love for other people, and here, if you're gonna make every decision to best glorify God, we don't worry about you. That's what Paul's saying. You have the christian liberty to honor the Lord Jesus Christ and to glorify God in all that you do.

In Colossians chapter one, we really see the same teaching. In Colossians chapter one, starting in verses 15 and following, we see who the creator is of all things. We see, it's Jesus. It says in Colossians 1:15, he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created both in heaven and on the earth, visible and invisible.

Whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things. And in him all things hold together. In other words, everything created. The things we see, the things we don't see, all powers in the world, they're all under his lordship.

Jesus Christ is the Lord. Why is that important? Because when you're making a decision about what you're going to participate in or what you're not going to participate in, make the decision this way. I'm honoring Jesus Christ as Lord in this decision. This decision that I'm making, I believe is going to bring the most honor and glory to Christ.

And if you can say that, probably a pretty good decision, right? But this is background. These two things are vital. Cause sometimes when people get into church, they want to get to. They want to get to point number three, like, well, tell us what we can do and tell us what we can't do, and then I'll see if I agree with you or not.

Right? That's not the point. The point is, how does God's teaching give you a greater love for him and a greater love for others? How does God's teaching train you how to give him the most glory? And if you get those two things as bedrocks to what God's going to do, you can then understand the third point.

And the third point is this. In your christian liberty, let me tell you this. You always, 100% of the time, have the freedom to honor the Lord by helping other believers grow in Christ. You always, 100% of the time, have the freedom to honor the Lord by helping other believers grow in Christ. I mean, that's the whole point of this teaching.



The whole point of this teaching is that we would take what we know from God so that we would best honor him and best help other people grow in Christ. So if I have a love for God and love for other people, and I want to best glorify him, then my decision should be this Lord, in this specific, at this time, in this situation, I believe this best honors you and helps the people that I'm around grow the most in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those are our parameters to our christian liberties. That's what it looks like. And notice how Paul spells that out in verse seven after he got done telling us there are no idols, there's no gods behind those idols.

Here's what he says. However, not all men have this knowledge. In other words, there were some believers in Corinth who had come out of pagan backgrounds who still did not understand because they were brand new to the faith that these idols that the food was being sacrificed to were really nothing at all. They had the understanding that those idols were real and they were trying to get away from them. And Paul was saying, that's what they believed.

He said, you, as church people may understand that the idol's nothing, but not everybody understood that. So what does he say? But some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol, and their conscience, being

weak, is defiled. But God will not commend us. But food will not commend us to God.

We are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor are we the better if we do eat. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. Notice what he says? He says, listen, we know we have knowledge. We know that there are no idols, because what were the people thinking?

Here's what some of the people were thinking. Hey, if this food is sacrificed to an idol, what if a demon from the idol jumps in the meat and I eat the meat? Am I going to be polluted by that demon in the meat? And Paul is saying, hey, listen, as christians, we know there's no demon jumping in the meat. You have the Holy Spirit inside of you.

It's just meat. And if the meat was sacrificed to an idol and you get invited to their house, probably not a big deal that you eat it, okay? If you buy food in the marketplace and it was sacrificed to an idol, it's not a big deal that you eat it. But not everybody knows this because they're young in their faith and they have a weak conscience. And so when they eat it, they're still believing that they're eating something and doing something wrong.

Do you realize that when God gave us his holy spirit inside of you, that it's more than just your conscience, it's the holy spirit inside of you teaching you what you can and cannot do. I mean, that's what he's talking about here. He's saying, listen, as a mature believer, if you eat the meat, it doesn't make you more spiritual. It doesn't prove that you're more godly, because you can eat the meat that was sacrificed to an idol. And if you choose not to eat it, it doesn't make you any less spiritual.

I mean, the food doesn't mean anything. The rule that because people are looking for the rule, what's the rule? Do we eat it or not? We want to know. He's like, it doesn't matter whether you eat it or not.

That's not the point of this. What's he going to say? He says, take care that your liberty does not become a stumbling block to the weak. You say, well, what would that be? It means that a young believer would trip over something, and because of their conscience, they would do something that for them would go against God.

That for you was okay. Notice what he says. For if someone sees you who have knowledge dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through your knowledge, he who is weak is ruined. The brother for whose sake Christ died.

And so by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience, when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Here's what he's saying. If you have knowledge like I do. Paul says that eating the meat means nothing and that it's okay. But a younger believer, one who's weaker in his conscience, one who doesn't realize there's nothing wrong with it, happens to go by, watches you in an idol's temple eating food sacrificed to idols, and they say, well, Paul can do that.

Then I guess I can do it, too. But in their conscience, they know that when they eat it, they don't feel right about it. It feels sinful to them. Here's what Paul says. You ruin that person, you sear their conscience.

And guess what? Here's what he says. And so by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it was weak, you sin against Christ. So here's

what he's saying. In your christian liberty, where you would have the right to eat the meat sacrificed to idols, if by eating the meat sacrificed to idols, you caused one of your brothers or sisters in Christ, who's weaker in their own conscience, to participate the way you do, and it sears their conscience, guess what Jesus says.

Double sin. You sin against your brother, and you sin against Christ because your knowledge of your christian liberty caused them to be ruined in their conscience. Now, how does that play out? Let me tell you how it plays out. It plays out like this.

The more mature you are in your faith and the more you grow in your faith, here's what you'll learn. You have a lot more liberty than you thought you did that. There's a lot more freedom in Christ to do a lot of things that you probably growing up said, no, you can't do that. You can't do that. You can't do that.

As you grow in your faith, you'll realize, oh, sure, I can. But as you grow in your faith and as you grow in your christian liberty, there may be times where you have liberty to do something, where you choose not to do something, because by actually participating in it, you would cause a weaker brother or sister to stumble. And so even

though you have liberty to do it, you're choosing not to do it because you want to benefit the body of Christ and build others up. So the question becomes this for you libertarians, I can do whatever I want. When is it that God speaks to you about something he tells you not to do?

Is it right or wrong to have cable television in your house? Hey, I don't know. What's God tell you? See, the problem is when our christian liberty, God speaks to us about our christian liberty and says, for you, that's not good. But for somebody else, it be okay.

We get bothered by that. Well, God, how come they don't have to do that? How come they don't have to say no to that? How come I can't do that? Right.

Here's the thing. As you grow in your faith, you're going to grow in your christian liberty. I have a right to do this, man. I'm not bound by this thing anymore. But because of my love for Christ, I'm thinking about my love for God and my love for other people and how I glorify him by building others up.

So there's going to be some things that I personally have liberty to do, I'm going to choose not to do because I want to see other people built up in the body of Christ. Does that make sense? And so it's not about legalism and it's not about libertarianism. It's about how do I allow the holy spirit of God to work in my life to the glory of Jesus Christ by building other people up. And what happens is we want to know the rule.

I mean, a lot of people probably listen to this message that would have been read in Corinth and like, just get to the point, can we eat the meat or not? Right? And Paul's saying, I'm not answering whether you can eat the meat or not. I just answered it. If you're honoring the Lord and you're loving him and you're loving others and you're glorifying Christ, then do what is best for building up the body of Christ.

Why? Because all the teaching that God gives us happens in community. It's not just about you and Jesus. That's not how we make disciples. It's about me and Jesus for the purpose of the people that I'm trying to build up.

And let me tell you something else. Notice what Paul says at the end of this. He

says, therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble. In other words, Paul says, while it's fine for me to eat meat, and I have totally liberty to eat meat, and I have all knowledge that Jesus says if I eat the meat, it's not a big deal. If eating the meat would cause one of my brothers or sisters in Christ to have their conscience seared and wouldn't help them grow in Christ, I'll become a vegetarian.

Now, that's a big statement, but he's talking about a specific time. See, what we want to know is, okay, so I'm going to make this rule then that all the time, in every place, I'm going to act a certain way. And that's just not how it works with the Holy Spirit. I mean, if you study the apostle Paul, you'll say, man, he's kind of bipolar because sometimes he acts like that and he's saying he'll never eat meat again. But if you read in Galatians two, what did he do when he went to Galatia?

Peter, who had been a Jew, who was told by God to arise. Peter, kill and eat, who was called against his own conscience to eat meat. And Peter's like, I can't do that. He says, you need to do that. And now was having fellowship with gentiles, and it was all going really well until what happened?



A bunch of Jews showed up, and guess what Peter did? He stopped eating with the Gentiles. And he even dragged Barnabas along in that. And Paul said, I oppose him to their face, because what they were doing was they were having fellowship with gentiles, but because of pressure from the Jews that were saying, oh, you can't do that. Then they stopped doing it because of the legalistic Jews.

And Paul said it was wrong. Eat the meat. Here's the point. In any given situation, at any given time, God can instruct you differently in that moment. That's what it means to listen to the Holy Spirit of God and not make a mandated rule.

Can you drink alcohol? Hey, the Bible doesn't say that you can't. There's nowhere in the Bible that says don't drink alcohol. The Bible's clear on drunkenness. Don't get drunk.

There's nowhere in the Bible that says you can't drink alcohol. So how do I make my informed decision? Is my informed decision about a love for Christ and a love for one another? Can I do it to the glory of God? Can I drink it to the glory of God in a

way that builds other people up?

If the answer is yes, go ahead. If the answer is no, not. Give you an example. A number of years ago, I was in the Czech Republic visiting a missionary friend of mine. First thing we did when we got off the plane, we went to a restaurant.

Everybody orders a beer. Do you know why? Because in that culture, beer is the drink that everybody drinks. Now, they only had one, but in that culture, everybody based upon their city, that was their beer. Every city had their own beer, and they took a lot of pride in it.

As a matter of fact, when I went to the school, the grade school, which in post communist Czech Republic. I was able to preach the fullness of the gospel there, which is crazy. Kids asked me first question out of the chute. Ask the american anything. You know what the first question was?

What's your favorite beer? You know why they were asking? Because they wanted to know whether dad worked. Did I take pride in what their dad did for a living? And that was their question.

So there was one day where I was in Czech Republic, and I was by myself all day, and the neighbors above knew my missionary friend was gone. And czech language is very hard to learn. It's up there with Mandarin, so it's hard to even say hello or goodbye or do anything. And I got a knock on the door, and I opened it up, and it was two of the middle school kids that were there. And they look at me like, eat, eat.

Like, do you want to come up and eat? And I said, sure. So I followed them upstairs, and we couldn't really even talk. We were trying to play games and just kind of hang out. And the one kid comes back after coming to the kitchen, and he's like, egg, egg.

Like egg. Great. We'll eat the egg. About ten minutes later, I was ushered into the kitchen. They had already eaten, and I was presented with this kind of omelet thing that had pickles and ketchup and all sorts of stuff on it.

And I was looking at it, and they were so cheerful in bringing me that right? And then I was sitting next to their three year old and thinking, okay, I gotta stomach this egg. I gotta eat the whole thing, and I gotta do it with great delight. To add insult to injury, they went over to the shelf, got a warm beer off, opened it up, poured one in my glass, and poured one in the three year old's glass and said, enjoy. What were they doing?

They were extending Christ like hospitality. They were non believers, showing me what it meant to feel loved in another country. And so you know what I did? I ate the worst omelette of my life with warm beer. And it was awful, with a huge smile on my face and incredible gratitude.

And I believe that that glorified God and that extended love, and it was the right thing. But do you know, when I got back to the United States, I was working with an agency about getting ordained in ministry who had a policy that you can never drink under any circumstances, no matter what. And I shared that story with them. And you know what their response was from the president of that organization. Here's what he

said to me.

He's like, well, if you took Jesus more seriously than you're drinking. Perhaps God could use you someday. What's that called? Legalism. So when you're ready to get serious about Jesus, come back.

And I said, I know everything I need to know about your organization. Thank you very much. Right. See, that's what happens. We want to make rules for everything, and every time, and then we have everybody believe the same rules we believe, and we're uncomfortable if people don't believe the rules that we believe.

Can we celebrate Halloween? Is that real or not? I mean, every time I'm on the radio talking about Halloween, I get more letters than anything. People will write me and say, do you not realize that's a demon holiday? It's totally pagan.

It's celebrating the dead. It's releasing demon spirits. It's totally wrong. My responses and my liberty. Hey, listen, for my kids and my family, it ain't about demons.

It's about one word, candy. Candy. And it's about meeting my neighbors, and it's about giving things away, and it's about being social, and it's about being christians that can engage with other people and not leaving my neighborhood because I'm so hyper spiritual. I got to go to church on that night. That's not what I do.

But if you have a belief in your heart that says, I can't celebrate Halloween, here's what I would say to you, then. Don't celebrate it, but don't make it a mandate for everybody else. And if you have the liberty to celebrate Halloween, then celebrate to the glory of God. But don't expect everybody else to have to celebrate it to the glory of God. And see, what happens in church is we want to make mandates for every single person to do everything the same, and it just doesn't work like that.

So I thought I'd use a visual aid today, in case you're not getting my point. I thought I'd bring something on the platform that you probably haven't seen in a church service before. I thought this would be helpful to us. You ever seen one of these things before? This is a Coors light can.

We're talking about our local economy. Like, we all have knowledge about this, right? It's a beer that has alcohol in it, right? We all have knowledge about this that if you're not 21 years old, it's illegal, so you can't have it. We all have knowledge about this that if you're over 21 years old, you can.

We all have knowledge that we have complete liberty in Christ to drink to the glory of God. If it would be honoring to him. We all have that knowledge. So what do I do? I mean, you libertarians, I know what you're thinking right now.

I mean, Jeff. Pastor Jeff, you chugged that beer. I'll bring all my friends next week, right? That's what you're thinking. Because we have freedom in Christ to drink, and it's no big deal.

And pastor, if you'll do that, man, I'll know I'm free. And this is my church. Let me tell you something else about this bottle. See, there's some people here where this bottle doesn't represent a celebration or glory of God. Here's what this bottle

represents to them.

A parent that drank this and beat them. A parent that drank this and abused them. A situation where they were shamed because of what this bottle cost. There's some sitting here that have abused what's inside of this that would say, if you open that up and drink it, I am out of here so fast because I don't feel comfortable here anymore. And so for the sake of the weaker brother whose conscience can't do this, I never drink this.

See, this is why in our church, while you have the liberty to drink alcohol to the glory of God, if that's what you would do for the sake of the body of Christ, when it comes to leading small groups and doing other things, we say, hey, don't serve it at your small group. Because if for one person that came, they felt uncomfortable about experiencing Christ in your group, it would be wrong. And I want to let you know as your pastor, that while I have the liberty to open this up and drink it, I wouldn't open it up and drink it. You know why? Cause I care about you too much.

Now, this was more for an emotive response. I just want to tell you, there's water



in here. Just so you know, I was gonna drink it and then I. You know. But do you get the point?

Do you feel the emotions coming out in your heart? Do you feel it on both sides? Do you see why? It's not about what's in the can. It's about what we feel.

And then we want everybody to agree with us. See, that's not the whole point. The point is not, hey, go out and do whatever you want. The point is you can never do this. Here's the point.

The point is, in any given moment, you have the freedom to honor God and love others. The point is, in any given moment, you have the opportunity to glorify Jesus Christ for the purpose of building up other people in the body of Christ. And we don't legislate rules that Jesus never put there. And we don't tell people you can't just because of somebody else, right? I mean, when I went to Dallas seminary, and I've been in seminary, I mean, you sign a covenant that says you will not drink for the glory of God.

So I signed it. And then at Dallas seminary, when I was there, they made a little change in the rule because men and women were getting married, and they wanted to toast champagne at their wedding. And they were coming and saying, if we toast champagne, are we getting kicked out of the school? And so they made a clause in there. They said, no drinking of alcohol except for celebratory purposes.

So although I didn't get married, when I was at Dallas seminary, I may or may not have celebrated a couple times.

Do you see what I'm saying? Sometimes we try to legislate things that are good for the whole, but we do it for the glory of God. It's not a mandate. You are free in Christ to honor him and serve him any way the Lord would have you honor and serve him. I mean, I was at a school this week where kids were reciting creeds like the apostles Creed or scriptures, long scriptures that they did as a class.

I was invited by a couple parents to come see their kids. And the first group went was one of our ten year old kids, and she got up there with her class and recited the

scripture. And I was getting fired up on the inside because I love God's word being proclaimed. I love it when it's memorized in the heart. I love it when it's passionate and they're doing all this.

And at the end, I was ready to go, you know, start cheering. And nobody clapped. And I looked at the dad who goes to our church. He's like, yeah, we don't. They don't do that here because they don't want to rob God of his glory.

I was like, okay, well, when you go home tonight, clap really, really loud and really, really hard and tell them, that's from Pastor Jeff, right? I mean, that's what it's about. And we all have differences of opinion, and it doesn't make our opinion right. What is right is every time we love God and love others. When I was a youth pastor in Dallas, I'll tell you a couple different stories.

Our youth group was designed to bring kids to the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what it was designed for. And so everything we did was to bring unchurched kids into our church. And what started happening as our youth group grew. There was this group of students that stood outside our church, and they would smoke cigarettes before they

came in.

And so me, other, our leaders, we go out and hang out with them. You know, they extinguish their cigarette, and then they come into youth group, many of whom got saved and are walking with Jesus to this day. But I had one mother that was really upset with that, and she sat down with me and she said, that's against the law. If you're under 18, you can't smoke. It's against the law, and you're promoting something that goes against Christ.

I said, I'm not promoting anything. She was so mad with me. She went to our pastor. I told her, pastor, I said, I'll do whatever you want me to do. You're in charge.

He said, no, I want to see you reach people for Christ. And so we sat down, and she kept going after this thing. It's against the law. It's against the law. You shouldn't allow them in your youth group.

And I said, well, if it's not too much to tell you, I remember a month ago, your daughter got a speeding ticket, and we still let her come to our youth group, and that was against the law. And that didn't go over very well.

But the point was, she ended up leaving our church. And many people came to Jesus Christ, because my problem with them was not that they smoked cigarettes. My problem with them was that they had a sin condition, and they didn't know the Lord Jesus Christ. And I wanted to share the love of God with them because I believed once they got the Holy Spirit in their heart, they would live differently. Do you see the difference?

And I remember this church was part of a denomination where I had to go every year to get credentialed and do all that stuff. And it was one of those, like, don't drink, don't smoke, don't chew, don't watch movies, don't do all this stuff. And I was being interviewed by them, and they're like, hey, can you sign off on this? And I'm like, no, I can't. I'm like, and the guy ran the biggest church in the denomination.

I'm like, you're telling me there's not one person in your church that watches

movies? He's like, well, no, that's not it. He goes, but we're careful about what we look at. I'm like, well, that's scriptural. I said, but not watching movies is not scriptural.

And I said, you can't dance. I said, did you know at our youth group we had to dance and that many people came to Christ? One of the girls that came to Christ at our dance that we did in our youth group married a guy who became a pastor, and they're both serving the Lord together right now. I mean, do you see where all this stuff goes? And when we try to legislate what's right and wrong based upon our personal preferences and experiences, we shut off the work of the spirit.

And when we do it in church and we say, yes, I can or no, I can't, and you better agree with me on everything. We miss the entire point. The point of this message is not that we all agree on everything. What we're agreeing on as a church is that we want to honor the Lord Jesus Christ in everything, serve him and glorify him with our whole hearts, and make decisions that build people to the glory of God. And if we'll agree on that, we may all act differently at different times in different places, all for the glory of God, celebrating who he is and who the Lord Jesus Christ is in our life.

And that's what this message is about. So if you're a libertarian, there may be times God tells you in your life, yeah, you have freedom to do that. It's not a big deal for you, and it's no big deal. But I'm just asking you not to do that at this time or for this period of time or forever or whatever. And that's what God says.

And if you're a legalist, let me just tell you something. There's more to life than just making up a bunch of manmade rules, because it doesn't help anybody. All it does is quench the spirit of God in their life. And what do we want to be? We want to be a church filled with the spirit of God, with a group of people that love God, with a group of people that are liberated to serve God, that are not wondering, hey, what's everybody else think?

And I'll tell you this, libertarians, for some of you that are like, I'm totally free. I can do whatever I want. Some of the most legalistic people are libertarians. When it comes to pastors, I can do whatever I want. But pastor, you better not.

I can do whatever I want. But, you know, I hope that my church workers don't do that. I mean, we set up different standards for different people. There's the same

standard for everybody. It's glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ in all that we do for the purpose of building other people up.

Amen. God wants you built up. If you're choosing not to do something, choose not to do something for the glory of God. If you're choosing to do something, do it for the glory of God. And, oh, by the way, in this process that we do, we may make some mistakes sometimes.

And then what do we do? We ask for forgiveness and we give each other grace. And we continue glorifying God as we move forward. Amen. That's our church.

That's what God's church needs to be, people that are completely freed up to serve his glorious son, Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Would you stand with me as we pray? Lord Jesus, we give you all the glory, honor and praise.

Lord, help us to be men and women and boys and girls that clearly honor you in all that we do. Lord, may we be people that give you praise. May be people that are



not worried about all these different things, about what everybody else is going to think. But we're very concerned about our audience of one. And maybe you be glorified in all that we do.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.