

Religion's Increase Of Sin and Our Freeman Status in Christ

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"For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face." ~ II Corinthians 11:20

Over the centuries, religion, to keep its hold on the masses, has made many more things "sinful" than they really are. By doing so, religion keeps increasing the "need" of itself. In fact, if we have had religious influence pressed upon us in our lives, many things that we have known as "sin" may indeed not be so.

Sin, in a biblical sense is that which is an assault against God (e.g. worship of other gods, the exaltation of one's self or others equal to or above God), or against man (i.e., that which is harmful or hurtful to others).

Religion always seeks to make new lists of "sins."¹ It keeps adding to the "sin catalog." How many things do we regard as "sin," that in all actuality are only the chains of religion? If something is said to be a "sin" long and hard enough, does that make it a sin?

THE USE OF OUR LIBERTY

Under grace we are free to apply the things that we learn, and walk in them, so long as we do not hurt, or become a stumbling block to others. This is the principle of love – because ...

"Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10).

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1. I have heard strange lists of "sins" over the years, such as: window shopping, reading the newspaper, men shaking hands with women, playing cards, playing billiards, going swimming, wearing wire-rim glasses, men parting their hair down the middle, buying gas on Sunday, wearing shorts, chewing gum, and wearing cowboy boots; but even some of the more popularly accepted lists of "sins" are to be made subject to the scrutiny of the Word of God.

Here enters the context and principles of Romans chapter 14, and the importance of a walk of *personal* faith and *clear* conscience.

We are free to exercise our liberty in Christ insofar as it does not offend the weaker brother's conscience and destroy him.

Principles that we could use and apply in specific circumstances:

- Scriptural Understanding

We should seek a scriptural understanding regarding any particular issue. The intent would be to provide clarity of conscience and a true act of personal faith.

- Deliberate Actions

We should seek to gain clear understanding of our individual purposes and intents prior to any actions. Our individual actions should always be:

(1) In light of our personal consciences

“Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned ... Holding faith, and a good conscience ...” (I Timothy 1:5, 19).

(2) In light of our genuine desires (as well as likes and dislikes).

“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

Our actions should be deliberate and with forethought, rather than a mindless spur-of-the-moment “going along.” This is what the Christian life is intended to be – so that any action can be done heartily as unto the Lord.

- Genuine Respect

We should respect one another and not *trespass* each other's personal faith and consciences.

These principles would allow us to reflect our walk in liberty, as an act of worshipful faith *and* a walk in love.

OUR FREEMAN STATUS IN CHRIST

We have learned that even the restrictions of the law are, under grace, fulfilled in one word – love. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Love will never hurt or defraud one's neighbor.

“Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:8-10).

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Galatians 5:13,14).

As member's of Christ's Body, we are neighbors.

“... Speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another” (Ephesians 4:25).

Love is the fulfilling of the law. This is why to the pure, all things are pure, and there is nothing unclean of itself. This is why love is eternally bound to grace. Grace is the absence of law, and there is no need for a law where love is genuinely present ... *“and the greatest of these is love.”*

“Unto the pure all things are pure ...” (Titus 1:15a).

“I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself ...” (Romans 14:14a).

“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not” (I Corinthians 10:23).

“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (I Corinthians 13:13).

THE BASIS OF FAITH AND GRACE

It is extremely important that we remember that love (as well as *all* other areas of our lives) is based in faith and grace! These are indeed the foundational principles set forth in Romans chapter 14.

Faith

There is the principle of personal faith. Our walk before the Lord is to be one based upon faith! This faith is to be *personal*, and without the dominion of men.

“Whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).

“Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind” (Romans 14:5).

“Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God” (Romans 14:22).

“Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand” (II Corinthians 1:24).

Our love is to be one borne out of *personal* faith!

Grace

Then there is the principle of divine grace. God does not want us to judge each other regarding our *personal* faith. This is a real test of grace in our lives. It is easy to love and accept those who mirror our beliefs and practices – that takes little if any grace; but to love and accept a brother who has differing beliefs and practices requires a work of God’s grace in our hearts. What it really takes is the willingness to give up our assumed dominion over the lives of others.

“Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God” (Romans 15:7).

“Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth ...” (Romans 14:4).

“But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (Romans 14:10).

God has called us to a life of grace, not law – a life that proceeds from the heart and love, not from externals. Do we by grace afford others the liberty to study the Bible for themselves? Do we permit them to come to their own position of *personal* faith before God? Do we allow them to walk in accordance with that faith to His glory as an act of worship? Do we let them live their lives heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men?

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