



LIBERTY OR LEGALISM?

1. Weak believers are weak in their faith (Rom. 14:1), knowledge (1 Cor. 8:7), and conscience (1 Cor. 8:7, 10, 12).
2. Your knowledge (1 Cor. 8:11) and liberty (1 Cor. 8:9) may be a danger to weaker believers.
3. Walking in love often requires setting aside your Christian liberty to keep weaker believers from stumbling and hurting themselves (Rom. 14:21; 1 Cor. 8:13). An example is eating "all things" versus eating "vegetables *only*" (Rom. 14:2). In this age you're free to eat anything you want—meat, vegetables...anything. But if eating meat hurts a fellow believer spiritually by causing him to stumble, you should stop eating meat for his sake.
4. Don't put stumbling-blocks in a weaker believer's way (Rom. 14:13).
5. You may have to give up something you're free to do—temporarily (1 Cor. 10:25–28) or permanently (1 Cor. 8:13).
 - a. You can be too ascetic or too careless. Strive for a balance. If you give something up because you're afraid that sooner or later someone out there will stumble, you don't have any freedom. On the other hand, if you never take into account the ignorance and prejudices of weaker believers, you may cause them to stumble. A rule of thumb is this: If it's not hurting anyone, do it. But if you find out it's hurting someone, stop. You're accountable only if you knowingly hurt a weaker believer. You're not held accountable for what you don't know.
 - b. Hopefully the weak believer will grow and become strong so you can resume your liberty.
6. A weaker believer's spiritual health is more important than your personal liberty.
 - a. Walking in love always supersedes the law of liberty.
 - b. Walking in love treats a weak believer as more important than yourself (1 Cor 10:25, 32–33; Phil. 2:3–4).
 - c. You're not walking in love if you callously let your liberty hurt others.
7. Christian liberty must be defended against legalism (Gal. 5:1; Col. 2:16–17) but sacrificed for weaker believers (Rom. 14:21). Sometimes liberty must be defended; at other times it must be sacrificed. There is a big difference between willingly giving up something you're free to do out of love for a weaker believer and being bullied or forced to give it up to please a legalist. If it's a matter of love, give it up; if it's a matter of legalism, do it! The legalist is in no danger of being hurt spiritually—he wouldn't think of doing it. He needs to know what the truth is, not be encouraged in his legalism. Jesus, for instance, never catered to legalism. When the legalistic Pharisees protested healing a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, Jesus healed him anyway (Matt. 12:9–14; Mark 3:1–6; Luke 6:6–11).