

I. Introduction to Romans 14-15 and Review

We are in the book of Romans, and a couple of weeks ago, we took a Sunday off for Easter. I told you that we are entering into the last two chapters of the book of Romans. For you and for me, trying to build a New Testament church and all of the things that we endeavor to do for the Lord, there are no greater chapters anywhere that really help us. I gave you an outline last time, as I've done periodically, as we've recapped where we are at, so I won't do that again today.

Every chapter in Romans is a different aspect of what you and I are to believe as a New Testament child of God. When we get into chapter 14 and 15, the last two chapters, it is dealing with our relationship with each other as God's children, as Christians. We will use this, even today, as an introduction. There is so much material here and so many things that before we jump into Romans 14 and 15, we first need to fundamentally understand. We want to take the time and talk about it.

Remember last time we talked about the six basic fundamental things that we need to have in our lives through the process of spiritual growth. When you got saved, God wants you to grow. He wants you to come to the point. In fact, we have talked about it many, many times in the Bible that there are seven stages of spiritual growth found in the Bible. A new Christian is likened to a baby, and the Bible says that they desire the sincere milk of the word.

As they grow, they go through a process where the Bible says that they are able, just like your children when they grow up. They start out drinking the milk and the soft food, but then in time, they grow up to being able to handle the same things that adults eat: meat. Of course, we know that milk in the Bible is always a picture of the basic fundamental things of the Word of God, but meat in the Bible will always be a picture of the doctrines in the Bible.

We talked about these six basic fundamentals that we need to have in our lives for a good growth process. These are things that any church that is following a growth process with their people, the pastor and the leadership should look within and make sure these things are in the church and that you are getting them.

II. The Six Fundamentals of Spiritual Growth

Remember the first one I talked about how important it was that you see God for who He really is in our lives. Most people have a totally different concept of God than the concept that God wants us to see and understand. Most of us fear God. As children, it is never healthy for a child to fear his parents. He has to respect his parents and fear them in the aspect of a reverence, but to walk around in a paranoia of a terror of living in your home is a terrible thing, and it is terrible in churches too.

The second thing we talked about is you need to see yourself as God sees you. The moment you got saved, everything changed about you. In fact, one of the studies that we bring you through

here in this church to help you grasp that is probably one of the greatest things we ever did. That focuses on the seven things that changed about you the day you got saved. You ask somebody, "Well, what happened when you got saved?" "Well, I got saved." "Well, I got washed in the blood." "I got born again." Those are all the terminologies that we use to describe an event in the Bible that actually changed your life.

You need to know at one point in time as a sinner where you were at and how God looked at you, and then the very next instant when you trust Christ as your own personal Savior, what is different about you? It is really the key to your success, and it is really the key to your spiritual growth.

Then the third thing in the first section was to see other Christians as God sees them. We are going to have to get along with each other. There are people that we do not get along with now, or people that we have issues with, or maybe they have issues with you. But the truth of the matter is, we are going to spend eternity together in heaven. It is too bad that we have to get a glorified body before we can work out issues when all you have to do is follow the principles in the Word of God right now to get them fixed. But that is just the way that it is. So those three things were in the first section. Those things are absolutely important to your spiritual growth.

Then we talked about the second set. I told you on these that these are the three basic needs that you and I need to have to be fulfilled in our life as a Christian. When I look at you or you look at me, we basically have three fundamental needs that need to be met. When I preach the Bible or teach the Bible, no matter when it is, when you come over one-on-one with me or a Thursday night or in an institute or in Sunday morning or whatever we do, I always am looking at these three things in your life and my own life. Of course, we talked about whether it is male or female, we all have these three basic needs.

The first needs were physical needs. You have legitimate physical needs today that need to be met. That is why the Bible says in Philippians 4:19:

Philippians 4:19

But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

We also have spiritual needs. That is why the Bible says in 2 Peter 1:5:

2 Peter 1:5

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

And then the last thing that we talked about is the fact that we all have emotional needs. The Bible says in the book of Proverbs 25:28, one of my favorite verses, and it is so true in dealing with people:

Proverbs 25:28

He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, and without walls.

We know in the Old Testament that the walls were the defenses around the city. As long as that wall was up and it was not breached and it was strong, the enemy could not get in to spoil the city. Look at it like this: your life is a picture of that city. The wall around you is your emotions. If that wall crumbles, if your emotions are not held in check, if you do not gird yourself up with Bible truth to build that wall strong, then the Bible says that "he that hath no rule over his own spirit" (that is your emotions) "is like a city broken down, and without walls." Every problem we have, every issue we have as Christians, is going to fall into one of those six areas there, and they are really the key to do that.

III. The Five Pillars of Spiritual Stability

Then you remember, I told you how do we fix those things. I told you that in the last 25, 30 years of my life, I have come through the Bible myself. I have learned from my own mistakes, learned from my own areas of my life, and learned from other people in their lives as I have worked with them, and they have helped me and I have helped them. I found through the New Testament an absolute foolproof concept of building you spiritually the way God wants you to do. I gave you those things.

1. The first one was a sound mind. You have to start with absolute truth. We know that to be the Bible, do we not?
2. From the sound mind, you develop sound doctrine. That simply means that what you do believe is based on the Bible and not some man or not some emotion or not some feeling, but what you believe is built on sound doctrine. Sound doctrine will be the building blocks in your life. You remember the day you got saved? 1 Corinthians chapter 3 talks about you laid a foundation in your life. On that foundation, you build a wall, and that wall was built with the individual blocks that make up the individual Bible doctrines that are built on the foundation of the Word of God.
3. Then we talked about the next thing was sound words. Once I get you into the book, once I get you to the point where I start teaching you sound doctrine, then you begin to look at things differently as these six things that we talked about earlier begin to take over in your life, and you begin to use sound words. What does that mean? It means that you begin to talk with a confidence. You begin to know what you are talking about. You know what you believe. I find it incredible today that most of God's people would get up in any given Bible study or any given place where they had an opportunity and they would lay out what they believed. But if you threw them a Bible and asked them to prove what they believed from the Word of God, they would not be able to do that. We are a bunch of people today as God's people that believe a lot of things about the Bible, but we really do not know the Bible. I am not interested in you just knowing some things about the Bible. With where we have to try to go and what we have to try to do before the Lord comes back, it is absolutely essential that you know why you believe what you believe. Sound words.
4. That leads to sound speech. Sound speech is your ability to proclaim the Word of God. Not only does God want you to know what you believe, but when you put it out to somebody else, He wants you to proclaim it with the soundness of sound speech.

5. Of course, sound mind, sound doctrine, sound words, sound speech, it produces the final thing, and that is a sound faith. When you get to this point in your life, you are unmovable. It is a place in all of our lives that most of God's people never get. It is very hard today to get to that point because God's people are so unstructured, they are so undisciplined, they have got so many other issues in their life, they never put those six things in their life, and many times it is not their fault. Many times it is because nobody ever helped them develop that.

You would be surprised how many Christians when they got saved that all they got from their church was a slap on the back and a handshake and "Praise the Lord," and then immediately was thrust into ministry driving a bus or doing this or doing that, and nobody spent the time to help them understand how God looked at them, who they were, to deal with their emotional, physical, and spiritual needs, and then we wonder why they have such a struggle in life. Sound faith to me is the point that you come into your life as a Christian where you become valuable to this ministry. Nothing is going to shake you. You know what you believe, you know why you believe it, you understand God's plan in your life versus God's will in your life. You have a sound mind, a Bible that you can go to for your absolute truth. You have sound doctrine, you have sound words, you have sound speech. Now it has produced a sound faith, and that is the goal. That should be our goal.

You remember we talked about the ability as you grow spiritually to choose your battles. Christianity is always going to be a warfare, but there comes a time when you need to grow to the point and mature to the point that you understand what is really worth fighting for and what is not. There are some doctrinal things in the Bible that you and I ought to take an absolute stand on, but yet there are other things that people do or they get into that is not necessarily a doctrine in the Bible but is a conviction or maybe a personal preference. This is what I want to focus on today as we get into chapter 14 because this is where many times the issues come in.

Of course, we now know that chapter 14 is talking about Christians who are weak in the faith. That is not necessarily a bad thing. We would think when somebody says, "Well, you are weak in the faith," that is not weak, it is not a bad thing. What that simply means is that there is somebody in your life, and there are always going to be people in our church like this, and there is always going to be people in your life. There is going to be somebody who may or may not have the light and the truth about issues in the Bible to be able to discern between what is a doctrinal thing in the Bible and what is a personal preference or a conviction. This is really where he starts out in Romans 14.

We are going to talk about today in just a moment how to protect the young Christians in our church. We have a lot of people that get saved. We have a lot of people. There probably is not any time during the week that there is not 15 or 16 or 17 or 20 people that are new Christians one way or the other getting their foundation in the Word of God. With that responsibility comes a tremendous accountability to make sure that they get everything that they need.

I want to begin reading today in Romans 14, and we will come down through the first four verses here, and then we will finish our introduction today talking about probably one of the most important aspects of Christianity that you need to understand. Here is what he says:

Romans 14:1-4

1 Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.

2 For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.

3 Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.

4 Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

Now Father, we do thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus, and we ask You, Father, to help us today to learn some great lessons here as we can begin to put this thing together. Father, we will just thank You and praise You in Jesus' name. Help us to prepare ourselves when we get into chapter 14 and 15 that we learn the fundamental things we need to already have in place before we can grasp the great truths of these chapters, and we will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name for a sake we have. Amen.

IV. Redefining Biblical Concepts

You are going to find out the more you get into ministry, and this is so true in my life, it is hard to believe today how true it really is. 90% of what I do in the Bible with people, and a lot of what you are going to do with people in the Bible, is redefine things that were once defined but now the definitions are lost. We live in a world today called Christianity that really does not know why we believe what we believe. We talked a little while ago about the term "born again" or the term "being saved" or "washed in the blood." Those are terms that we know, but we do not really define them, how to define them in the Bible. Take the word "sanctification." That is a big word in the Bible, "sanctify," and yet most of us do not understand the definition of that.

You are going to find that we have gotten so far away from the Bible in Christianity, and this is something that I really try to get across to you people who are working with me with people. I have always tried to stay very aware of the people that I am talking with, dealing with, that I just assume that they understand what I am saying. Thursday night Bible study is a great example. We have an open forum where you can ask any question you want to ask about the Bible, and if you show up to the Thursday night Bible study, you know that those things run the gamut between very basic simple things and pretty heavy theological concepts.

My job as I stand before you laying those things out is to never lose sight of the fact of who my audience is. The guy that asked the question may be a third-year Bible Institute student, and he may be stealing something in the Bible that is way beyond most people, and he comes up with something and he wants to know how it works. But I have got to be relevant to the fact that in my crowd there is probably a lot of people who do not have a clue of understanding the relevance of what he is asking, and my job is not to confuse anybody because as we know from the Bible, God is not the author of confusion. Confusion comes in when we do not either stay with the Bible or we do not stay with the people in real life. So you will see how I will take an enormous amount of time. I do not do on Thursday night to see how many questions I can get

through. I just make sure that whatever questions I do get through, whether it be one, four, five (and you will notice sometimes it is five, sometimes it is four, sometimes it is three, sometimes it is one), my goal is not that I do not get paid more for every one I run off. My job is to make sure that the one I do, everybody understands and can get something from it, no matter what level you are on. That is the goal. My job is to teach you. My job is to try to give you the best shot I can at whatever the question is. That is not always easy to do given some of the questions that you ask.

I know many of you are afraid to ask questions on Thursday night because you always say this: "I think it is a stupid question." If you have been around long enough now, you know that there is no such thing as a stupid question, but some of my answers might be pretty stupid sometimes, so you just have to bear with that. But the bottom line is most of my ministry has spent redefining things, and I want to talk to you today about a concept that you have to get down if you are ever going to work with people. You have to get down if you are ever going to have a workable ministry. This is something that you are going to have to learn if you ever get anything meaningful out of Romans 14 and 15.

V. Understanding Liberty in Christ

It is one of the most misunderstood concepts that is not taught anymore today in the churches, and that is understanding the concept of our liberty in Christ. One of the most absolute fundamental teachings in the Bible. Most problems within churches between God's people will be a direct or indirect result of not understanding how this thing works. Your job and my job in this church, if you consider yourself a leader, if you consider yourself someone that is spiritually mature, your job and my job really basically and fundamentally is one deal, and that is to solve problems, not cause problems.

How do we solve problems? Every church has problems, and wherever you have people, you have problems. But the bottom line is this: we have an absolute standard to solve the problems. I am not saying that everybody will like the way it is solved, but that really does not matter as long as you use the Bible to solve it because that is the fundamental thing. We have to be problem solvers, not problem-causers. We have to come to the place where we are sitting on something that is explosive. We can do one of two things: we can either diffuse it or we can ignite it. That is the difference between somebody who knows how to use the Bible and somebody who does not.

I say that there is some problem that is unavoidable. When you get into doctrinal issues or somebody does something that is a clear violation of the Word of God, then you have to deal with it. It may not be a popular thing to deal with, but that is what you have to do. But our job always should be one of diffusing situations and looking how to solve problems and not cause them. It is really not that hard if you just follow a few basic concepts. We are going to talk about that today.

Let me just say this to you, and we have to kind of establish this. You remember when we came through Romans 7? Remember that great chapter? Remember how every chapter in Romans dealt with something that after we got past chapter 4 and 5, it dealt with something that was for you and me since Christ died? You remember in Romans 7 we were dealing with the issue of

now that we are saved and Christ has died on the cross, what is our relationship to the Old Testament law? Remember that chapter? You have to have the notes in your Bible if you are keeping up with it.

He used a story there that I thought was a great story. It is a story where he talks about a woman. He goes back under the law and he talks about a woman that is bound to her husband as long as she lives, which was the Old Testament law. Then he says that the only way that that woman can be free from her husband was for that husband to die. If he does die, then she is free to marry another man. That is basically the concept of it. But that story is an analogy. It is an example. It is a picture. What he is saying there is this: he is saying and showing you a picture of what happened today, you and I got saved. He is telling us that the woman is a picture of our soul. The husband is a picture of our flesh. What he is saying under the law, the flesh and the soul, like a husband and wife under the Old Testament law, were stuck together. You could not get them separated. One of them had to die.

Then he goes on and he talks about the fact that then the husband, the flesh, died. Once the flesh died or the husband died, then that woman is free to marry another man. Of course, in the chapter, the man that she is free to marry is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an analogy. It is an example showing that when Christ died on the cross, He gave us the ability not to be under the law anymore, that now our flesh was not subject to the law. He made a way through the cross that your soul and your flesh could be separated. The flesh is now dead, and your soul is free to marry someone else. We know that person to be the Lord Jesus Christ. It was a great example showing us that Christ fulfilled the law, that you and I have been set free from the law.

Then I want you to turn to Colossians 2. You need to see these basic fundamental things before we get into our liberty in Christ.

Colossians 2:11-17

11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:

12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

15 And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:

17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

Now, that sounds like a really hard passage, but it is really not when you understand how we have laid it out in the past. This passage again is a great passage, and it goes right along with Romans 7, and what it shows you and I basically is that Christ fulfilled the law. This passage again reiterates the fact that you and I have been set free from the law.

Look at verse 12, "Buried with him in baptism." That is not water baptism. The baptism of Ephesians 4 and Romans 6, that is by one Spirit, or you are all baptized into one body. That is the true baptism of the Holy Spirit of God that puts you into the body of Christ the moment you got saved. Notice verse 12, "operation of God." Notice verse 11, "circumcision made without hands." What does all that mean? That is what he is talking about, what he said in Romans 7, that there was a time when your flesh and your soul were stuck fast together. But God through an operation because of His death on Calvary's cross separated you. Your flesh is now dead, and now your soul is free to be with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 13 says you were dead in your sin. That is your old flesh, Romans 7, your husband. And you were bound to him, Romans 7 says. Now look at verse 13, "but now are you quickened." I do not know if you know what "quickened" means in the Bible, but "quickened" in the Bible is found here in Ephesians 2:1. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." When you find the word "quickened" in the Bible or "quick," it is always a picture of salvation in the Bible. 1 Peter 4:5 says that when Jesus comes back, He judges the quick and the dead. The quick will be the saved people, the dead will be the unsaved people. So wherever you find the word "quick," "quickened," lay it out in the Bible. It will always be a reference to the fact that it is talking about the day you got saved.

Now he says that you have been quickened, and because you got saved and you were quickened by the Holy Spirit of God, verse 14 says, "now blotting out the handwriting of the ordinances of the law and he took it out of the way." That is the Old Testament law. How did He take it out of the way? Look at the last point of that verse, "nailing it to his cross." When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He did away with the Old Testament law, and you and I are no longer under it.

Now look at verse 16, "Let no man therefore judge you in respect to meat" (that is what you eat), "drink" (that is what you drink), "holy days, new moon, Sabbath." Why? Because verse 17, "the body is of Christ." We are in the body of Christ, and we are free from the law. When we learn, after we have also learned this, that after He did away with the law, what did He do? He took all of the Ten Commandments and He put them in two, and those two were called, we studied it, the royal law in James 2:8, the law of Christ in Galatians 6 and in Galatians 5. All now the Old Testament law has been done away with and fulfilled in Christ, have now come to you and me in two concepts:

6. Love God with all your heart, with all your mind, and all your soul.
7. Love each other as you love yourself.

That is why we need to understand the great concept of the liberty of Christ. Now that we are in the New Testament, that He nailed the Old Testament to His cross, that no man is to judge you

and I in the respect of the things that we do that are not clearly defined in the Bible as wrong, we now through grace have liberty in Christ. That poses a problem, and this is where our problem comes in. This is what we have got to understand before we get into chapter 14 and certainly into chapter 15.

VI. Misconceptions of Liberty

I am a Baptist, and as a Baptist, I always claim myself. Somebody says, "What are you?" And I say, "Well, I am a Baptist with an explanation." I believe that the Baptist distinctives that go all the way back through church history, you never find a church by what it is called. Most people make that mistake. You want to find a church, and maybe you are looking for a church, do not ever find a church based on what it is called. Find a church based on what it believes. That is how you find a church because down through history of the church, there have been certain distinctives that the true church has always held. I know that every Baptist church does not believe the same thing because you have idiots wherever you go. As somebody said one time, "Wherever you have light, you have bugs." I know that.

The bottom line is simply this: I am not a Baptist because I associated myself with a denominational name. I am a Baptist, or more, a Bible-believing Christian, based on the fact that I believe what the Bible says about certain things. One of the things that I believe, and you do too if you are a member of this church, we also believe in the fact of eternal security. What does that mean? That means that when you trust Christ as your personal Savior, there is nothing that you can do that you can lose that. I know there are a lot of people that believe that you can lose what God gave you, and I understand that. That does not change the fact the Bible says you cannot. But I understand also why people get caught up in those things.

I had a person one time say, "Well," and this is my reasoning on it, and I am not a very smart person, and I have to keep things pretty simple. A person asked me one time, "Do I believe in eternal security?" And I said, "Yes, I do." And he said, "Well, I believe that you can do something that you would lose your salvation." And I asked them, I said, "What would make God take His salvation from you?" And he said, "Well, because that you would do something that would make you unworthy to keep that salvation." That was his answer to me. My question back to him was, "How can God take salvation away from me, now that I am not worthy of it, when I was no more worthy of it when He gave it to me?" Do you actually think that you became worthy of God's salvation at some point?

Truth of the matter is, folks, we all had to lose salvation today. If I knew what you knew about you, if you knew what I knew about me this morning, you would not even sit here and listen to me. But if I knew what you knew about you this morning, I would be out of here so fast you would not know what hit you. There is never a time in our life where we deserve salvation. There is never a time in your life where we are worthy of it. You are as unworthy now with it as you were before the day God saved you. That is why it is "by grace are you saved through faith." You never deserve it. Once you get it, you still do not deserve it. That is why David, when he prayed his prayer in Psalms 51, he said, "Lord, restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." David knew it was not even his salvation.

But legitimately, here is what we get criticized for. I have heard this, and I am sure you have too. Because with that concept of eternal security, I am going to stay back at least six feet because I am in a spitting mood this morning, and I do not want to get on anybody. Here is the bottom line, and this is legitimate criticism. Because with the concept that you cannot lose your salvation also comes the concept, and here is where some people get hung up on it, comes the concept, "Well, if I cannot lose my salvation, then I can do whatever I want and still go to heaven." I have actually had people say, "Oh, you are a Baptist. You believe in eternal security. You believe that one saved, always saved. You believe that once you get saved, you can do whatever you want to do." That is a legitimate criticism. Believe it or not, I have actually had some of God's people over the years tell me that.

But you know what the truth of the matter is? If we want to stay with the Bible, if you are really saved this morning and your salvation, you really got it at some point in your life. Anybody I ever met that was truly saved and truly born again, they did not want to go out and just do wrong. In other words, one of the attributes of being saved is out of the darkness into the light. Part of the concept of salvation is repentance. When you turn from the way that you once were, you understand that. Now you come to the place where when you do something wrong against God, it just kills you that you did it. You do not go out and say, "Tonight, Saturday night, I am going to go do what I want to do, and I am still going to go to heaven." No, that is not the right attitude. If you are truly saved, and very frankly, I would think if somebody would have that attitude, they probably never been saved.

The bottom line is simply this: if you are saved, then you get His nature. If you are going out and having a great time in the world, and it is not driving you nuts because you are grieving the Holy Spirit of God inside you, I would get along someplace and pull your dipstick and see how low the oil is. I do not think you have it. But that is human nature, is it not?

VII. The True Definition of Liberty

The Bible is a definitive passage on New Testament liberty. You want to get this down: 2 Corinthians 3:17. When I talk about liberty, when I talk about you not being under the law anymore, now you are under liberty, here is what I am talking about:

2 Corinthians 3:17

Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

You see now, the real Bible definition is your liberty in Christ was not given to you so you could do whatever you wanted to do. You have to get this. Your liberty in Christ was not given so you could do whatever you wanted to do. Your liberty in Christ was given to you so you could do whatever God wanted you to do without the concept of the law. But we get the definition so messed up. I am honest with you, I will tell you the reason. You have heard me say it many, many times, Thursday night, Sunday morning, we are in the Laodicean church period. In the Laodicean church period, we know that the word Laodicean means "rights of the people." We as Christians, we think that we have rights as God's people.

I love to listen to the radio talk guys. I do not listen to them much. They give me a headache after a while, but everybody likes Glenn Beck. Glenn Beck is on a radio, he is on television at 4 o'clock. He is a great defender of the rights of this country. He is somebody that gets on there and they started the Tea Party movements, and he tries to get all those things going. He is on a kick now, and has been for quite a while. He is on a kick now where the fact that they are talking about the fact that they are trying to take away our freedoms in America, that the government in time is one by one stepping out your freedoms and taking them from you very subtly right now. In time, you are going to wake up one morning and every freedom you have is gone. When you want to push your agenda that way with conservative people, what do you do? You put God in it. The idea is that God gave us certain rights. That is the big deal today. That is a hallmark of the Laodicean Church.

You will find out that our government goes around killing other people and oppressing other people. I am not anti-government. Do not misunderstand me. I was in the military. I fought for my country once. I would fight for it again. I like killing people. I have no problem with it. I did not mean that last part. But it is legal then. You know what? Where in the world can you just throw a hand grenade? What in life can you do to have more fun than blowing things off? I am not anti-American, but I am pro-Bible. I understand that America, like all the other nations that are in the book of Zechariah, is going to wind up with the Antichrist. I am not stupid. Not too stupid anyhow, but I understand those things.

I start talking about that our government goes in and we wanted to free Iraqis because of the fact that we wanted to give them a democracy because they needed to be free because of Saddam Hussein. How is that working out for you? The bottom line is this, without wasting a lot of time on this this morning: as human beings, as Christians, we only have one right under God. It is not the right of free speech. It is not the right to bear arms. It is not the right. The only right you and I have is to die and go to hell and scream our lungs out for all of eternity from a holy God. That is the only right we have. After you get saved, you have no rights because the Bible says you are bought with a price.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

You are a slave after you get saved. This idea that you and I have some kind of right is not true. He says, "Well, here is what we have to do. We have to believe in God." Everybody loves that. Everybody loves the concept of believing in God. Then we said the second thing we have to have is truth. But you know what? All of his monologues and every show he has, he will never bring up the name Jesus Christ. Not one time. Not one time. He will talk about God. Nobody gets upset when you talk about God. That pool can be God to some of you. Your cigarettes are God to some of you. We all have, everybody has gods. You can get away with that. Anybody can get up and say, "Let us talk about God," or "We have God," or "We believe in God." Everybody loves it.

When you bring Jesus Christ into it, you narrow the field, do you not? Then he has the audacity to say, "We believe in God, believe in truth." My Bible says Jesus Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Bad definition.

I am not fighting anybody. I am just telling you why we are in the mess we are in. It is just that simple. You cannot take Jesus Christ out of it. When you do, you are done. Your liberty in Christ was given to you and me so we could do whatever God called us to do, not because you and I wanted to do what we wanted to do. But yet God gave us a, God did not give us a hard, fast set of laws, like in the Old Testament, did He? You and I are free to make our own choices with really no restrictions. I will show you what I mean. But the Bible is the book that God gave us within our liberty because "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Your liberty was given to you by the Spirit of God to open up the Bible, find out what was good and bad, and then follow the right precepts to do the right thing.

I will give you one in the Old Testament. You could not marry other nations or other races. You could not do it. The nation of Israel was told very clear and plain, they were not allowed to marry outside their nation, outside their race. That was a law in the Old Testament. We do not have that law today. You can marry whoever you want as long as they are saved. But you know what? You can find somebody, sweetheart, that says he is a saved man, or buddy, you can find some gal that says she is a saved woman. The bottom line is you think you are safe in your liberty in Christ, and you marry that person. Then you find out six months later, a year later, two years later, three years later, that he is not what they claim to be. You know why? You had liberty to marry them. They are saved. But your liberty was not given to you so you could do whatever you wanted to do and marry whoever you want. Your ministry is first if you are a saved person. On top of that, someday you are going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. You realize you married a wrong man, sweetheart, and you could just kiss your whole judgment seat of Christ away. You understand, pal, you can marry the wrong woman, and you could just kiss your millennial reward right out the window. Because that is how important that is.

Yet in liberty, you marry whoever you want. But God gave you a book with principles that showed you the guidelines by which you do those things and make those choices. You are not free just to do whatever you want to do. That liberty was given to you so you could keep your ministry and your priorities straight and understand that God has a job for you to do. Within that job, you have liberty by the Spirit of God to take the book that God wrote you and make the right decisions. Because you are not under a hard, fast law. In the Old Testament, you did not have a choice in it. You did not look up nothing. You knew what was right and what was wrong. You did not have a say in it. Today you do. Nobody tells you where you can go. There is no church that has a right to say, "You cannot go here and go there." Some of them try to do that. But there are clear places in the Bible you know you should not go. God wrote you a book where the Spirit of the Lord is. There is liberty. The bottom line is when you get into that book, you will find out where you should go and where you should not go. When your ministry is on the line and you respond to other people, it will make you more aware of places you should not go and the things you should not do. It is just that simple.

There are no laws of what you can eat, what you cannot eat. There are no laws today that hold you to any particular holiday or holy day or Christian day. You have the liberty to make your own choices based on the Word of God that God has given to you and the Spirit of God He has put into your heart. But at the same time, Galatians 5:1-13 says this, and here is what happens because we do not understand the definition of it:

Galatians 5:13

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

You have been called to a liberty, but not to use it for the flesh. Your liberty in Christ is not so you can do whatever you want to do. Bulldoze over anybody you want to bulldoze over. There has to be a process. In this passage in Romans 14, you start to see this thing work and sail out. In reality, he is basically saying to you and me, we need to understand our liberty. Our job as Christians is to solve problems, not cause them. We fix things, we do not destroy them. Now, sometimes the process you take in the Bible is going to cause a destruction, but that is beside the point. We do not get outside of the Bible.

1 Peter 2:16

As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

I say it again, our liberty was not given to you and me so we could wear what we want to wear, do what we want to do, go where we want to go, be what we want to be. Our liberty was given to us through the Spirit of God and the Word of God, that we would have the freedom to minister the way God wants us to minister. In the Bible, it is called stewardship. When I got saved, God gave me things to be stewards over. One of them was my family. When you got saved, God gave you some things to be stewards over. One of them is your family. When you grow, when you get to the point where you get where God wants you to be in your life, then God will add things to be that steward. When I got to the point when God wanted me in the ministry, then at some point, God took His ministry, gave it to me, and then clearly said, "Bob, I am giving you this, with it comes responsibility and accountability, because now I am giving you this ministry, but it is yours, but it is Mine, but it is yours in the sense that you are doing it for Me. Therefore, you are My steward in the thing." Then He gave me a whole list of things that I am to be a steward over. People do not even know what they are today. That is a tragedy, but definition is our problem, is it not?

Ezekiel 22:30

And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none.

That was back in 606 BC or thereabout that time. God was looking for a man back there that would make up the hedge, stand in the gap. The gap is the hole that they have cut in the line, the enemy. He says, "I am looking for a man to stand in the hedge and make up a gap." But He said, "Found none." You could not find any back there. God is still looking for that man today or that

woman today. He cannot find him today. It is because we do not understand that our ministry is stewardship. With ministry comes accountability and responsibility. With ministry, sometimes you have to make the hard decision. It is hard to find men today who will make the right decision and the hard decision. It is hard to find women today that will make the right decision or the hard decision when it is right to make. That is the problem we have in ministry today. Your liberty was to serve one another.

You never want to be a stumbling block in a young Christian's life, a weaker Christian, by abusing your liberty. Even though I have a right to basically do whatever I want because I am not under the law, that does not mean I can just go out and do whatever I want. God has a plan. He has a mission for me. That mission has to come first. That is why the Bible says, "Let not your good be evil spoken of." That is why the Bible says that you and me, that we are to abstain from all appearance of evil. That is why the Bible says that we are to walk circumspectly. What does that mean, circumspectly? "Circum" is a circle. Go around in a circle. It means that you walk around things instead of going through things that are dangerous. You avoid them is what it is saying.

He says in Romans 14:1 that we are to receive the weaker Christians, but not to doubtful disputations. The job of a New Testament church is a very basic, simple format. It is so basic and easy. I know there are a lot of parts to it, a lot of movement going on. But when you look at a church and you look at it from the New Testament of what God designed it to be, basically in its fundamental format, it is simply the older Christians who know the Bible helping the younger Christians who do not know the Bible. It is Romans 15:1:

Romans 15:1

We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

What does that mean? You that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak because of the fact that if you are mature, if you have been around for a while, if you have got yourself grounded in the Bible, if you have worked through those processes, you realize that there are always going to be younger Christians coming in who do not have the light that you and I have. Our job is through the Bible and what you know to help them, certainly not hurt them.

VIII. The Nehemiah 8 Pattern for Ministry

We were talking to the ladies' prayer group and the men's prayer group here in our second session on our Saturdays. I was going through the nine gates because many of them, if not most of them, were not here when we did that. I wanted to understand how those nine gates out of Ezra and Nehemiah really work into our ministry. In Nehemiah, we got down through there, and one of them that I want to show you how it fits in today. I told you, I did not read this passage in Nehemiah. I told you to read it. I had in mind sometime down the line today that we would go through it. I asked you to read that for yourself so you would have it.

Turn over to Nehemiah 8. One of those nine gates is called a Watergate. This is not the one that Nixon went through. This is God's Watergate. Most of you do not even know who Nixon is

anymore. Sometimes it is just better to say nothing. This Watergate, I told you, is a picture of our Bible teaching and our Bible preaching ministry. Historically, the Watergate was a gate that the water came into the city through a viaduct. It was where the city got their water from. We know that in the Bible, water is a type of the Word of God. The woman at the well in John 4, she came to that well every day to get water. Then one day she came there and she met the Lord, and the Lord said, "The water I give you will spring into the well of everlasting life." She got saved. She took the everlasting water. So it is a picture of being saved of the Word of God in the Bible.

If you notice down through here that this water, when you are coming down through here, is always flowing. It is always moving. My job as a pastor of this church is to always keep the water flowing. What happens in churches when the water stops flowing? The water becomes stagnant, it becomes stale, and it begins to smell. The job of leadership in a church is always to keep the water flowing. You know where it has to keep flowing first? In your own personal life. You have to keep the water flowing in your life. What does that mean? You have to keep growing spiritually yourself. When you do not, you get stale, you get stagnant. When a church does not keep on doing it, then they get stale and they get stagnant. That Watergate was where the water flowed into the city for the people to have all the water that they needed. It was always flowing, and that is the job of this church. This is the job of a function in its big basic form of our Iron Man sharpener groups, our prayer groups that we are starting this first of this year.

I have told you many, many times that in time, I want these groups to develop. Right now, I am looking at people who have the ability to lead and do a good job with it and watch what they do with the people. Out of that, in time, maybe not this year, maybe not next year, but in time, I want those prayer groups to develop into self-contained groups. We have a discipleship program in our church for basic Christians. We have a discipleship program for people who are a little farther along. We have a lot of people come in with marital counseling, so we have that kind of aspect. We are going to start biblical New Testament counseling once we are done with our third year of institute. That will make up the fourth and final year of it. Because many of you are dealing with people, and you come to the point where you always are touching people's lives. In time, I want these groups to be self-contained. I want to be able for those groups to take somebody that comes in, and you have within your group of four or five gals everything you need to do any of those things. That it is all self-contained. You work as a ministry team together with younger Christians. The leader of that group will be smart enough to know that as that group grows and you get 12, 15 people in it somewhere in there, that then your job is to train somebody that in your mind sees somebody to be a leader. When you get your group big, then you split that group, and they take that group, and a whole process starts over again.

The mark of a healthy church is one concept. It is just one concept. I know I throw a lot of things at you, a different thing. But at the end of the day, the mark of a healthy church is just one basic concept, and that is its ability to reproduce. It is just that simple. That is a biblical format all the way through the Bible. God reproduced Himself in His Son. Jesus Christ came down to this earth. Jesus Christ reproduced Himself in me. Your job is in this church. Your job is to reproduce yourself into others. The ultimate job is for our church. Most churches just stop there. But you cannot stop there because the multiplication process of reproducing goes all the way down. God

reproduced Himself in His Son, and Son reproduced Himself in me. You reproduce yourself in somebody else. But it gets stagnant if this church does not reproduce itself someplace else.

Why do you think when we got to this great time in our growth process, after almost seven years of laying the foundation and digging all the stuff out of the rock, why do you think when we got this year started and we get this year moving and the prayer groups start together, we get two churches that we get a chance to reproduce ourselves in? Because that is the process. Some of you do not see that. Some of you, and I told you this before, every church is made up of people who are on the inside of ministry and the outside of ministry. Churches are made up of people. All they see is the wrong thing with the church, and other people, all they see is the right thing for the church. Of course, that is just the way it works. It is just the way it is. Always going to be that way.

My goal is to, the church at Warrensburg is a great deal. It is one of those things where it gave us an opportunity for some of you guys to go down and teach. Of course, the mission is another place. But you notice how God, as we grow, God is giving us more places to preach. Now, this Wichita deal is a totally whole other deal. I have known these people down here for probably, I look at the thing in Warrensburg as a temporary deal. I mean, we will do it forever, but sooner or later, those kids are going to grow or go out someplace. But the church in Wichita, the place in Wichita, these people have been around for quite a while. I have known these people 20, 30 years. They have no church in Wichita. They are excited, and they are talking about the fact that there are lots of people down there that cannot find a church. I am just telling you, I do not read the hand of God or the mind of God any more than He gives me the revelation out of the Bible. What I am telling you, here is a place that down the line will play. You talk about our church reproducing itself. Here is an opportunity to do that.

But I have a plan. I want you older guys. This is not something where I want teams of two guys and two girls to go down there. I want one guy who is going to have to really be able to teach the Bible on a higher level, because you are not going to be able to go down and wing this. You are going to have to, this is where you guys who have done the Word of God, got into the book, stayed in the thing, and grown. You now you are going to get to the next level in your own personal relationship and building to teach. But it just is not about going about going down there. It is about you taking three or four, two, one younger Christians down there and teach them the same process that I have taught you. It is just about reproducing yourself by bringing somebody to get saved. It is about reproducing what you know in the Bible.

We talk about the three P's: perspective, passion, and purpose. What is your perspective of this church? What is your perspective of being here today? The obvious answer would be, "Well, my perspective is I come to get taught the Bible." That is your perspective. My perspective is you come here to teach the Bible. I teach you the Bible so you can go teach somebody else. That is my perspective. Now, I know that that will not happen in everybody's life. It is just the way that it is. But that does not mean that that is not the way it should be. I will tell you what. We have an opportunity. We have an opportunity to reproduce ourselves as a church. Through that, everything we need to look at and build, we need to build the older ones, helping the younger ones, realizing that we are here to solve problems. Sometimes that means making the hard

decision in face of your friends or your relatives when it comes to the book. That is tough. But that is what the function of this church has to be. It has to be train you, and then you train somebody else.

Now, I want you to see this here. Nothing explains this better than Nehemiah 8. To me, this is the method to my madness. This is my picture in my mind many, many years ago. I told you when we started our church, the format I took you through was Ezra and Nehemiah. Everybody should know that. I have laid it out many, many times. But when it comes to my Bible and teaching and preaching ministry, Nehemiah 8 is the pattern that I follow. I want you to see this. Remember now, three P's: perspective, purpose, and passion. Now watch.

Nehemiah 8:1-8

1 And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel.

2 And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.

3 And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.

4 And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up:

6 And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

7 Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place.

8 So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

Within this passage right here, these few eight verses, is everything our church as far as the teaching in the Bible ministry is. In here is the job of all of us. Maybe you have never seen it to this point, but everything you have heard me say many, many times, and I firmly believe this, everything rises and falls on leadership. That is why you understand, and I made it no secret, that if you are a deacon in this church or you are a leader in this church or someplace else, I hold you

to a higher accountability than I do the average person who walks in here, because everything has to rise and fall on leadership. It is just that simple.

Now I want you to look at verse 8, and I want you to notice some great characteristics here that I try to build into this church. Maybe it will help you today get a better understanding what your job is.

- 1.) Unity: All the people gathered themselves together as one man.

Our unity is not built around a personality, me or you or anybody else. Our unity has to be built around the Word of God. If the book is an absolute supreme, and we do not all follow it, we have to have the same rules for everybody. You cannot say you are a member of the leadership team in this church and do this, do that, and then not follow what the principles are. If it is wrong for the other person, then it is wrong for us. You have to deal with everything and keep that unity. Sometimes unity, keeping it, is not always a good thing. I mean a good thing from the fact to keep the unity, but sometimes you have to deal with issues to maintain the unity. That is called the hard decisions in ministry. Most people, most men, cannot make.

- 2.) Love for the Book: They read therein before the street that was before the Watergate from the morning until midday.

They started at six o'clock in the morning reading the book and went till 12 noon. Six hours. They took two hours off to go get a snack someplace. Six hours. Today, I know how that would go. But my point is this: they had a love for the book. I am not saying you have to go six hours in a service or a Bible study to be spiritual. I am not saying that at all. But the point is simply this: most churches you go, you get, here is what you get: you get 45 minutes, "We need more money," and then another 20 minutes, "We need more money," and then you get 10 minutes of the Bible. The bottom line is simply this: these people had a love for the book.

- 3.) Attentiveness: All the ears of the people were attentive unto the book of the law.

There are two people groups in this verse, if you did not catch it yet. "He read therein before the street that was before the Watergate from the morning until midday before the men and the women." That is your first group. And then the second group, "and those that could understand." Two groups. You have the older people who understood what was going on. They had all the men and women that were younger that did not know what was going on. You have two groups here. You have the same two groups you have in this church here this morning. You have those who have been around for a while, and you should know what is going on. Then you have those that have come in, and you are trying to figure out what is going on.

- 4.) Purpose of the Pulpit: Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose.

We talked about our three P's. There is your purpose right there. They had a purpose for the pulpit. You will find it in most Baptist churches, and this is where it was started. You will find a pulpit is in the middle. You go to some churches, the pulpit is over to the left or the right, or they have a split pulpit or whatever the case. You will find in biblical New Testament Baptist churches

when they started to meet in churches or wherever they were, the pulpit was in the middle. You know why? Because they understood what that pulpit was for. That pulpit was for the preaching of the Word of God. They wanted that pulpit dead center in the middle so everybody knew that the focus in that church was on the pulpit because that pulpit had a purpose, and the purpose was declaring the Word of God. We have one reason for being here today. That is why this pulpit is here. That is why it is in the middle. It is here for one reason because it stands for what we do, and that is the centralization of the Word of God is the most important thing in your life and declaring it. So they had a pulpit with a purpose.

- 5.) Standing Together: Beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiyah, Maaseiah, Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchiah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

All the people who are the older ones are standing with him. We had in our ladies' meeting last week or two weeks ago when one of our ladies gave an incredible testimony. I built the whole thing I wanted to do. I wanted to give Leah the chance to lay it out, and I was simply going to build on her. She said a number of things that were incredible. But one of the things she said is she had to ask herself, and she was basically asking the ladies that morning, "What is your purpose in this church?" That got hit like a ton of bricks. I brought that, and I think I even mentioned it either on Thursday night or Sunday morning at some other point. But that is the first question that we have to look at looking at this: what is your purpose for being here this morning?

Once you read this, you find that the people were in two groups. You find that there was a unity. They find that this Watergate is a picture of where the Word of God and where it was taught. They opened up the Word of God. They are reading it. They are attentive to it. Yet they had a purpose to it. Yet when you come down through there, there were two people groups. There was the ones who were the younger ones. And then there was the ones who understood. Yet when you come down through here, when Ezra got up to declare the purpose, did you see that? When Ezra got up, declared a purpose, even though he stood up by himself, he was not by himself. Because the Bible says for Ezra the scribe, "stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood." There were people standing with him.

I have two questions for everybody in this church. It is simply this: What is your purpose here this morning? And who stands with me? I do not ask you who stands with me in the sense of whatever other than who stands with me to take the younger ones and teach them the Bible. Because that is our goal. We do not have any other reason for being here. I do not know why you are here today, but if you are an older person, you ought to have been around for a while. You ought to be here for one reason, and that is to understand that your job is to help the younger ones. If you are a younger person here today, you ought to understand that your job is to get to the point where you can help somebody else out.

- 6.) Distinct and Understandable Teaching: So they read in the book of the law of God distinctly and gave the sense and caused them to understand the reading.

The older people were reading the Word of God distinctly. They are found again in verse 7. The Bible says, "And all these people in verse 7 of these Levites, they caused the people to

understand the law and the people stood in their place." This church has people who want to understand the Word of God, and it is up to us as the older Christian to help them get to that point. We stand together in a unity to help younger Christians understand the Word of God. Verse 8, "So they read in the book of the law of God distinctly." You learn that book distinctly and "gave the sense." We call it doctrinally, inspirationally, and historically. "So they read in the law of God distinctly and gave the sense and caused them, caused them, caused them." There is your perspective. You see the pulpit was for the purpose. The younger people helping the older people helping the younger ones. There is your perspective. They get them to understand the Bible.

- 7.) Passion and Application: For all the people wept.

They had a purpose. The purpose was the pulpit to put out the Word of God. The job of every older Christian in that place was to help the younger ones get to it and read the Word of God distinctly and gave the sense and caused them to understand the reading. When they did that, the people got the right passion because they got the right teaching.

Now look at verse 10:

Nehemiah 8:10

Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

That is our job. There is the end result. The end result is for you and me to get trained spiritually, you get what you need out of the Word of God, and what God does. God takes you down to Warrensburg. He takes you down to Wichita. He will take you back to work. He will take you wherever He goes. You sit around here and you eat the fat and you drink the sweet. But you know what He does with you then? He sends you to somebody for whom nothing is prepared, and the process starts all over again. You have to see that. You just have to see that. Everything we do here, we have to always keep our perspective, our purpose, and our passion. Everything that we do, we have always got to consider the weak Christians, the struggling ones, and try to help them get farther down the line.

IX. Application of Liberty: Expediency and Edification

When I think of all this, I think of the church at Corinth. The church at Corinth was one of the most messed up churches. We are going to get into it a little bit when we get into 2 Corinthians when we are done. But the church at Corinth was one of the most screwed up, messed up churches. You talk about a church that has lost the three P's and has no idea what is going on. They are. I will tell you what, every wrong definition we get today is because somebody in 1 Corinthians had a wrong idea about it. I do not know of another book in the Bible that matches up to where we are at today as the body of Christ.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:11, "there are contentions among you." He says in 1 Corinthians 1:10, "there are divisions among you." You cannot all speak the same thing. It is abundantly clear that they have lost their perspective, their purpose, and their passion. Yet if you had walked into

that church, you would have seen banners up and flags up and Christian crosses everywhere and the whole nine yards. Yet they have come to the place where Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3:

1 Corinthians 3:1

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:2

I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.

1 Corinthians 3:3

For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

He says this church is full of babies. You have divisions, you have strife, you are not helping each other, you are not working together, you have every problem in the world. He says, "I have not given you any meat because all I can do is feed you milk, and here you are, you have been in church now for four or five years, and I still cannot give you any meat because you walk around like men, but in reality, you are just a bunch of spiritual babies." This church has completely lost its way and has no idea of its calling to God, and they are absolutely abusing their liberty.

It is no wonder when it comes to understanding your liberty and my liberty that we find two of the greatest verses found in 1 Corinthians. This is what I want to talk to you about here as we bring this thing to a close this morning. The first one is found in 1 Corinthians 6:12. Remember your liberty is given to you by the Spirit of the Lord to do what God wants you to do with your life, not you and I to do what we want to do with our life, but we are under liberty. Every day in your life, ladies and gentlemen, you are going to have to make choices and make decisions, and you make the right ones, you are going to get along fine. You make the wrong ones, you are going to pay the price for it, and it could cost you dearly by just making some bad choices.

1 Corinthians 6:12

All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

The word "expedient" is another word, our word for "wise." He says, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient." "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." As Christians, we should be different from the world. One of the words we do not understand today is separation. The church today is married to the world, much like our church in Pergamos was when we studied in church history. What we try to do to reach people is we try to bring the church down to a worldly level. We try to make our services more worldly, so we have contemporary services now. If you do not like to go to church on Sunday morning, you ought to see the churches that are doing away with Sunday morning church service and having their church services on Saturday night. You know why? Because people do not want

to get up on Sunday morning to go to church anymore. The churches have bent themselves to meet where the people are.

It does not matter that the Bible tells you very clearly that in a New Testament church in the book of Acts, they met on the first day of the week. That seems not to have any issue here at all. We want to do what we want to do. That is liberty. But it is not liberty based, it is a liberty that you cannot take. That Bible is very clear when the New Testament Christians met. If you want to meet on Saturday night, that is up to you, but the bottom line is you do not sacrifice your Sunday morning service, which is laid out doctrinally in the Bible, just for what? Because the people do not want to get up. That is where we are at.

When I grew up, rock music was very clearly what it was. But you see, we wanted to reach people. So what we did, we brought Christian rock into it, whatever that is. I like rock and roll. You might not think that about me, but I am a rock and roller from way back when. Absolutely. My feet are on the rock, and my name is on the roll. You thought I would go somewhere else, but I did not. I am not oblivious to this. When I was a young man, I used to play the trumpet. I was a fairly good trumpet player. I was not a very real good trumpet player, but I could fake my way along pretty well. I played a lot. My senior year of high school, I toured Europe for a couple of months with a band that was playing over there and all of that stuff. So I know how the thing works. My big deal, my stuff back then was dance bands.

I remember the lesson God taught me about this. This is my own personal testimony now to some degree. I got saved right with God. I still had my trumpet in my hand. I was still hooked up with some of the big guys that were playing back there. On Saturday nights, I would go out and play at Myers Lake and the ballroom and places like that. I played the dance band, and I would get up and go to church in the morning. For a long time, I thought that was just fine. Then as I got growing into the thing, I got growing into the thing. I came to the point where I started learning my Bible a little bit, and they asked me to teach, and I will never forget this. I taught a couple of things, and I was obviously pretty good at it, or they did not have much to call on. Maybe, I do not know. But anyway, as time went on, I got asked to teach a couple of Sunday school classes with fairly large crowds of people.

I will never forget this night. I was teaching a Sunday school class for college-age kids the next morning. About 200 people. But I had a dance band gig that night, and I played it, and I was just happy as a frog in the world. I mean, I had everything. I was saved, and my wife had just gotten saved. She was my wife then, but she had just gotten saved, and I had the best of both worlds, and I was just having a great time. I will never forget. I played that night, and I was driving to church that morning, all ready to go, and I was just happy as can be. The Lord came down, and He said, "Are you happy this morning?" I said, "Oh, I am just happy." He said, "Did you have a good night last night?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Can I ask you a question?" I said, "Sure. What do you want to ask me?" He says, "How do you justify the fact that last night you stood up there, and that was a hot lick you played on the string of pearls?" He said, "How do you justify last night you fed all of those unsaved people's flesh, and out of that, you are going into My house with My children. You are going to feed their spirits. Well, tell me how that works." I never

thought of that. You know what I did right at that point? Never picked that trumpet up again as far as playing for the world.

I had to come to a point in my life when I realized that I cannot have one foot in both things. I had to make up my mind. So then I started playing for the Lord. That is when God opened it up. Then I started traveling around with another preacher, and he would preach, and I would play the trumpet. I would play "Onward Christian Soldiers" and "The Rollers Caught Up Yonder." I used to get down to Steubenville and West Virginia and Southern Ohio and places like that, Bridgeport. We had some of the greatest revivals in the world, but I had to come to the place that I realized that I had to be separate. It was my liberty to do that. All things were lawful, but not all things were expedient. I had to come to the place in my life that I realized that separation meant what it means: separation. It is just that simple. You have to get past the idea that you have to look like the world to reach the world. All things may be lawful, but all things are not expedient because it may be a stumbling block to a weaker Christian.

Then he goes on and he says, "but I will not be brought under the power of any." That is because remember the Spirit of the Lord is the source of our liberty. 2 Corinthians 5:20 says that once you got saved, one of the seven things that changed about the day you got saved, I will give you one of them. The Bible says you are now an ambassador for Christ. You know what an ambassador is? An ambassador is somebody that goes to a foreign land and represents his home country in that foreign land. I guarantee you if you went to Washington D.C. and you would go down Ambassador Row where all the embassies are, and you would go into the ambassador of Thailand, and it was Thanksgiving, I guarantee you he is not celebrating Thanksgiving, but in Thailand they have the "Beyond Checkout Day," whatever that is. While we are over here doing our deal, he is celebrating his day. You know why? Because he may be in this country, but he is not a citizen in this country. He is only an ambassador from his foreign country. So he may be here, but he does not partake of all the things that Americans do because he is not American.

The day you got saved, my citizenship changed, my passport got stamped, and a new one. Now I am seated in heavenly places with Christ Jesus. But then He sent me back to be an ambassador, and I am representing heaven. You cannot represent heaven while you are living like the world. You cannot represent heaven while you are looking like the world. You cannot represent heaven while you smell like the world. You have to be separate. Now, is it lawful? Absolutely. Because you are not under the law. Is it expedient? Absolutely not. There has to be a difference. This is our liberty in Christ.

Two great words come up with this: discernment and discretion. God's people come to the point where there are certain religious groups, and I do not argue with them. I do not care one way or the other, so I will not even mention them. A certain religious group, Protestants included, that the pastor wears a certain suit of clothes to set him apart. I had a chance to preach a funeral for a guy that was up at the gym where I work out, and I got to know him. He helped some of your families out at Christmas, and you never even knew it. He was the same guy. I witnessed to him a lot. Well, he died, and his wife called me and asked me to do the funeral. A lot of the people from the gym came there. I had a tremendous opportunity to witness. There is one old boy up there that his name is Don, and I love Don to death. Don is going to probably die and split hell

wide open. He thinks he is going to work his way to heaven, but Don came up, and he said, "I would like you to," he said, "That was the most," he says, "My preacher," he says, "I have never heard a preacher say anything like that about anybody. My preacher just does about five minutes, and he is done." I said, "Well, I do not know what to tell you, Don." He said, "What I want you to do, will you do my funeral?" And I said, "Well, yeah, if you are, I will be glad to do your funeral." He said, "But Don, I have one stipulation." I said, "What is that?" He says, "You have to wear a robe." He says, "You are not a man of God without a robe." Now you are laughing. But you are the only people who think that. I thought him, "I wear a white sheet." I said, "How would that work for you?" I said, "You know what he confirmed in his mind that if you do not, if you are a pastor, you do not wear a robe." What does it say? His thing is, he says, "You are legitimate when you wear a robe." There are people who actually think that their pastor or priest or whatever, because he wears a special suit of clothes, that that makes him holy. There are no clothes that make you holy. You cannot go buy holy clothes unless it is a second-hand store and that is the holy you are looking for. You cannot buy clothes and put them on and be holy. You are not any holier than who reigns inside you. But that is the key. You can put all of those things on, and you can still be as wicked as the world as you could ever want to be. It does not prove anything.

The second verse also found in 1 Corinthians and found in 1 Corinthians 10:23. Here is another great one. It goes right along with, almost says the same thing, which is a little twist on it that makes a lot more understanding.

1 Corinthians 10:23

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.

Listen to me. I am not under the law, nor are you. Basically, unless it is just a clear thing in the Bible that we know is deadly wrong, there is just, we could go just to do about anything or anywhere. But the bottom line is two things. You have to be careful.

8. First of all, you do not want to use your liberty as a stumbling block or the occasion of the flesh.
9. Second thing is this: you do not want to be brought under the power of any.

Nothing wrong with going golfing. But not on Sunday morning when you ought to be in church. There is nothing wrong with golfing itself, but you do not do it when it takes the place of taking something away that you know where you need to be for God. That is what God wants you to do. The bottom line is you do not want to be brought under the power of any. Then the other thing says here, "not all things, all things are lawful, but not all things edify." That is a great word. You know what that word means? That means that everything you and I do as a Christian, everything that you and I do as a Christian should help other Christians get stronger.

I tell you all the time, and I do not say this because I do it all the time. I mean, I have as much trouble with this as anybody else. I like to have a good time, but you have to be careful. I look at those things and I say to myself, "You know what? Every day of my life, I have eight or nine

people I am going to see today. I have this I have to do today. My goal is wherever I go, whoever I meet, whoever I talk with, God, allow me to leave them stronger than I found them today." That ought to be our goal. My grandmother used to say, "If you cannot say nice about something about somebody, then do not say nothing." Why not? If you cannot edify somebody and you cannot help make them stronger, why would you say something that would make them stumble? I do not understand why we do that. That is not the mark of spiritual maturity.

My job, your job as a mature Christian, is all things are lawful. You can go where you want to go. You can dress the way you want to dress. You can pretty much do whatever you want to do. But that does not mean it is the right thing to do just because there is no written law on it. We have always got to look at the fact that we are going to be a Christian ambassador. We never want to do anything that would compromise the concept of Christ. We never want to do anything that would embarrass our homeland heaven. Therefore, everything we do, we need to look, we need to do it cleaner, clearer, and better because of who we are. Edifying is the key.

The job of the church in Ephesians 4:12:

Ephesians 4:12

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

That is our first job is to perfect the saints. That is everything we saw back there in Nehemiah. That is our job. The number one job of this church is to perfect the saints, help you in your walk with God get better. Every one of us, that is our final fundamental responsibility. Perfecting of the saints. Then look at the next thing, "for the work of the ministry." My goal someday is for every one of you to be in ministry. Right now we are working through these prayer groups. In time, I envision these prayer groups to be self-contained ministries where I have got 20 or 30 of them that basically are self-contained. Everything somebody needs can get put into there and get everything they need to grow. Then the last thing he says down through there, "for the edifying of the body of Christ." That is our job. My job is to help you grow, not to hurt you grow.

That is why I tell you all the time, you have to choose your battles. There are some issues that you do not make a big deal about, and then there are other issues that you just clear up a spot, and you have to hold the line when they are doctrinal. But our job, it needs to be one to protect the younger people in this church. That is our job, and not just to protect them, but help bring them to the place where they grow by the older ones understanding our perspective, our purpose, and our passion.

Romans 14:19

Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

Leaving people better than you find them. As we enter Romans 14, which we are going to do next week, we need to see and understand our liberty in Christ. That we are not under the law. Christ did away with the law. We are not under the law. All things are lawful, but we need to

view our liberty as a privilege and not a right from the standpoint of us being an ambassador to Christ. Our job as mature Christians is to balance our liberty with biblical principles, growing up in the areas of our lives and helping the younger Christians for the sake of this ministry. Romans 14 lays that things out. We are going to talk about this next week. Romans 14 is probably built around four or five of the greatest single concepts that you are ever going to find that you want to remember in your life when dealing with people. Our job is to protect the weaker Christians, to help them get to the place where they get the light and grow the same way you did, and not becoming a stumbling block to them. Even though there are some things we can do, they are under the law, there are things that are not wise to do because they will bring us out from under the power of the Holy Spirit of God and under the power of something else. Remember, where the Spirit of the Lord is, that is where your liberty is. Not to do what you want to do, but to do what Christ wants you to do.

We are going to be done here in just a second, and we will be finished. Let me say, as we get dismissed, all of you go back to Barb quickly so she can get that done. I do tell you that over on the thing back here, if you are going to sign up to help me with Wichita, I want to send teams of two guys and two girls down. I want to work that thing where we are going to go down, we are going to teach a Bible study at four o'clock in the afternoon. They want us to come down in the afternoon so you can leave out of here at 12, get down there, and still get back by 10 o'clock that night. We are really going to try to build these teams. So the sign-up sheets are back there on that table. I am going to take those teams today, and I am going to reformulate them into my teams, and I am going to meet with you guys Thursday night. We are going to get the first teams up and ready to go and get that thing going as we work with everything else. God bless you. Let us have a word of prayer, and we will be dismissed.