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THINGS LAWFUL NOT EXPEDIENT

– 1 CORINTHIANS 10:23-33. – JUNE 30. –

Golden Text: – "It is good neither to eat flesh nor to drink wine nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth." – Romans 14:21.

OUR lesson relates to personal liberty, and is interjected into the regular course as a temperance lesson. It is a fact that no other religious system teaches personal liberty in the sense and to the degree that it is taught in the Bible – by Jesus and his apostles. Even the Jews under the Law were taught a higher degree of personal liberty than were others in their day – by the Law itself. The essence of all human religion and philosophy seems to be the bondage of the individual to the customs, the usages, of his forefathers, bound by ignorance, superstition and priestcraft. It may be argued that amongst Christians, too, priestcraft, ignorance and superstition are quite prominent and weighty. We assent to this, but point out that such bondage is quite contrary to the teachings of the Scriptures. It is written, "Whom the Son makes free is free indeed" (John 8:36); and everywhere the teaching of the New Testament is that "Where the Spirit of Christ is there is liberty." – 2 Cor. 3:17.

MENTAL POISE OR BALANCE

If so great personal liberty is accorded under the Gospel, the question arises, Why should there be any difficulty along this line? We reply that the difficulty lies in the fact that the Lord's people, who are given this large liberty as New Creatures, find difficulties to its exercise in their own flesh – because of inherited weaknesses, mental and physical; and they find perplexities and difficulties also because of the general undone, fallen condition of humanity, and because human weaknesses take so many different forms, all of which need more or less

restraint in some form or other. The difficulty is in knowing how to balance our liberties as New Creatures with these blemishes of the old nature – the natural man. Nor is it possible to make this question entirely clear to the natural man because, as the Apostle says, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." – 1 Cor. 2:14.

Even to those whom the Scriptures recognize as "New Creatures," begotten again of the holy Spirit, the elucidation of this question is difficult, because so many "New Creatures" fail to recognize the difference between the new (I) and the old (I). The newly begotten spirit is represented by the new will, and the old flesh is reckoned dead when we are begotten again. The New Creature, having no proper body until it shall experience its resurrection "change," is permitted to use the fleshly body as its servant, which is reckoned alive for that purpose. This body is subsequently reckoned as having passed from death unto life to be the body and servant of the New Creature until the latter shall have eventually experienced its perfecting in the resurrection "change," in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. The Apostle explains this new relationship between the spirit-begotten mind or will and the body reckoned dead and reckoned as awakened again, saying, "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit which dwelleth in you." The power of God which was sufficient to raise Jesus from the dead a quickening Spirit is surely powerful enough to operate in our mortal bodies so as to permit us (New Creatures) to use them in God's service.

LIBERTY OF THE SONS OF GOD

Let us get the proper thought: The holy Spirit is a **[R4005 : page 172]** spirit of liberty – God "seeketh such to worship him

as worship him in spirit and in truth": he seeks not the worship and service of slaves under bondage and restraints. Hence amongst the angels we may be sure there is no compulsion to divine service – they all serve willingly, gladly, joyfully. We may be sure that it is the ultimate design of God that every creature throughout the universe which has not and will not come into absolute harmony with the Creator – no other restraint but of joyful willingness – shall ultimately be destroyed as unworthy of further divine favors unto life eternal. But mankind is not in this free condition. The liberty of the sons of God was lost to our race through the disobedience of our first parents: we were alienated from God, and came under his sentence of death as unfit for eternal life.

The Scriptures tell us that we were "sold under sin" – sold into bondage, servitude, into sin, by the disobedience of our first parents. The world is still in this bondage, and hence is not free in any sense of the word, and should not be. As bond-slaves of sin, the world must wait for the deliverance which God has willed and will fully provide, and of which the Apostle writes, saying, "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now," "waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God." "For the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God." (Rom. 8:19-22.) Here the Apostle tells us that the world's liberty awaits the dawning of the Millennial morning, when the sons of God, Christ the Bridegroom and the Elect Church his Bride, shall be manifest in power and great glory as the divinely appointed Royal Priesthood, judges for the world – to lift them out of bondage to sin and death, and by restitution processes to give back to them, by the close of the Millennium, the full perfection of their human nature and a perfect home, and divine favor and blessing unto everlasting life – all the unwilling and disobedient being destroyed in the Second Death.

"NOW ARE WE THE SONS OF GOD"

With one voice Jesus and his apostles assure us that those of the human family who have had the ear to hear and the heart to appreciate the message of God's grace in Christ, God has been willing to accept as sons of God, and to accord to them the liberty of the sons of God without their waiting for the times of restitution to secure these favors. Those who by faith have the eyes of their understanding opened and who evidently hear, are reckoned as justified – as made right in God's sight – because their minds are right, their wills are right, however imperfect their flesh may be. Those of this class who consecrated themselves irrevocably to the Lord and were begotten of the Spirit were counted New Creatures, of a new nature, to whom old things had passed away and all things had become new – who henceforth walked not after the desires of the flesh but after the desires of the Spirit. These are the New Creation, begotten by the Lord's Spirit.

It is to these New Creatures that God has accorded liberty – not to the world nor even to the flesh of the New Creation. The New Creature, because in full accord with the Lord, may be granted full liberty; and hence it is that the Church, the body of Christ, is left without bondage to any law except that they shall love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, and their neighbor as themselves. They are entirely free within these limitations, which are the very most that could be granted under the divine arrangement, which recognizes only those who have the Spirit of God as being sons of God and having any liberty whatever as such.

CONFLICT BETWEEN THE FLESH AND SPIRIT

Here arises the conflict: the spirit indeed is willing to use its liberty only to the glory of God, but the flesh is artful, cunning, strong. Although condemned to death, "crucified with Christ"

and "dying daily," as the New Creature grows "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," nevertheless the flesh – always contrary to the spirit on these subjects – argues for its rights, its privileges, its liberties, in a manner which the New Creature, the new mind, the new will, must frequently disregard, deny. It is a trick of the condemned flesh to appeal to the New Creature along the line of personal liberty, pointing out in the words of our **[R4006 : page 172]** lesson that all things are lawful to it – that is, that there is no law restraining its liberty, and that therefore it should grant to the flesh larger concessions in some respects, at least, than the world would enjoy.

Our lesson is the Apostle's answer to such an appeal: he declares that while nothing is forbidden the New Creature under direct divine law, it is also true that there are many things that would be inexpedient, ill-advised, contrary to its best interests, its strengthening, its development: hence such inexpedient things should be noted, and the interests of the New Creation should always decide the question, although the New Creature, begotten of the Spirit of God, loving God supremely and his neighbor as himself, is forbidden nothing. It is to be remembered, says the Apostle, that not all things edify, profit, strengthen, build up, encourage. And whatever is not to edification is not profitable, and is not to be entertained or practised regardless of law on the subject.

"AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?"

Continuing his argument along this line, the Apostle shows that the New Creature, while not restrained by law, is restrained from many things by his own nature. Begotten of the spirit of love, and loving his neighbor as himself, he is bound to think not only of what would be harmless to himself but also to consider what would be helpful or injurious to his neighbor: hence, as the Apostle says, none of us should seek his own welfare merely, but

each also his neighbor's welfare. In a word, the Apostle shows that the New Creature is his brother's keeper in the sense that he must consider his brother's interests as well as his own. Not that he should interfere with his brother's rights, privileges and interests, and be a busybody in other men's matters, but that he should allow the Spirit of the Lord, the spirit of love, to so thoroughly fill his own heart that he would be a helper and not a stumbling-block to the brethren and to the world.

These New Creatures to whom the Apostle ministered resided in the midst of civilized heathendom, and hence were exposed to trials along lines very different from those [R4006 : page 173] affecting the converts from Judaism residing in Palestine, where the surroundings would be godly at least. Not that the Christians of Palestine had no difficulties, for we know that they had their special trials in respect to the demands of the Law, the usages of the synagogues and the Temple, etc., but the Apostle was now discussing the special trials of Christians in foreign lands. The custom of that time was to offer animals as sacrifices to idols, and then to give the carcasses of the animals to the priests, who in turn sold these through butchers in the public markets. Hence those who would eat meat at all would find it almost impossible to avoid eating meat that had been offered to idols. This was a serious point and a very perplexing question: what should they do? Some were stronger of mind than others, and could understand that an idol was nothing, and that therefore the offering of meat before nothing could do it no injury. However, all were not thus minded: some brethren and sisters were weaker – unable to draw such a distinction, and for these New Creatures to live conscientiously would mean that they must deny themselves frequently the use of such meat. The case would be particularly difficult where some of the members of the families were Christians and others were not. No wonder the Apostle referred to this question in more than one of his epistles and indicated its importance.

There were two sides to the question: The idol being nothing, the offering of the food to it being nothing, the personal liberty question alone would be in dispute, for there was no law given on this matter except the law of love. The other side of the argument would be that the brother who could not conscientiously partake of such meat might have too much pride or an insufficiency of courage to follow his convictions, and might thus violate his conscience in trying to keep pace with another whose eyes of understanding open more widely or more quickly. The Apostle's exhortation is that these should be remembered, and that the one of broader comprehension should be willing to consider his brother and not to stumble his conscience – be willing to refrain from eating such meat rather than run the risk of injuring his brother, whom Christ so loved that he died for him.

"EAT, ASKING NO QUESTIONS"

In the verses preceding our lesson the Apostle urges great care on the part of believers, pointing out to them that God delivered the nation of Israel, but that subsequently, because of their lack of loyalty, he permitted them to die, some for one offence and some for another. His suggestion is that we, having been set free from the bondage of Satan, should be careful how we use our liberty, lest it become to us a snare, a stumbling-stone. In view of the prevalence of idolatry at that time he felt it expedient to urge the Church, saying, "Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry." (1 Cor. 10:14.) He then proceeds to contrast the feast which marks us as Christians – the Memorial of our Lord's death – with the heathen feasts to which many of the Lord's people would undoubtedly be invited, and in which they would be exposed to various misleading influences which might prove injurious to them as New Creatures in Christ, tending to relax their vigilance over the flesh and to hinder them from progress in growth as New Creatures. He points out that

there is a fellowship, a communion, implied in our partaking of our Lord's loaf and the Lord's cup – that we thus indicate that all of the New Creation are members of the body of Christ, participants in the same joys, blessings, hopes, promises and sufferings. Then he declares that in the feasts of the heathen not God but devils were worshipped, and he asks what communion or fellowship could there be between the table of the Lord and the table of devils, and between those who feast at the Lord's table on the heavenly spiritual things and those who were more or less identified with the heathendom of the time. The implication is that there is no fellowship, no communion.

Although in our day conditions are in many respects much more favorable, nevertheless there is some similarity. Many of our dear friends and relatives fail to worship the true God, the God of love and wisdom and power, but the declaration is that Christ has been provided as a "ransom for all, to be testified in due time." Many on the contrary, while thinking that they worship God, really worship "doctrines of devils," of which they are ashamed, and by which they are hindered and restrained from progress in the Lord's good way. While we should sympathize with these and with all mankind in their blindness and superstition, yet what communion, what fellowship could there be between ideas so diametrically opposite? What fellowship of worship and teaching could there be between such and those who recognize God as the loving, merciful One who willeth not the death of him that dieth, but who would that all should turn unto him and live, and who has made a full provision that the knowledge of Christ shall reach every member of Adam's race either in the present age or in the coming Millennial age by an awakening from the tomb. Surely there can be little harmony between us and those who believe and teach that God, before he created mankind, deliberately planned the eternal torment of the great majority of them and determined a plan by which only a

mere handful, a little flock, should ever hear of or enjoy a knowledge of the truth and an opportunity for salvation.

The food upon these two different tables is so very different as to make a breach. Not that we will be out of accord with our brethren and neighbors, but that to the Lord and his Word we must be true. We cannot but show forth the things which we have seen and heard: we love to tell the story, and to refrain from so doing would be woe to us, "Woe to me if I declare not the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16); and again the Apostle says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" – and we know that all will be granted an opportunity of knowing and believing. – Rom. 1:16.

The Apostle points out the reasonable, proper course to be followed under such circumstances. If a Christian of that time were invited to a feast he was not bound to suppose that the meat had been offered to idols, and therefore not bound to refuse it. On the contrary, he might give thanks and eat it without injury to his conscience if able to see the matter in its true, proper light. But if some brother said to him, The meat provided here has been offered to idols, and I fear that it would be wrong for us to eat it, then, says the Apostle, it should not be eaten for the sake **[R4006 : page 174]** of the brother who indicated his own knowledge and fear – for his conscience' sake – lest he should be stumbled. I am to be willing, yea, glad to deny myself what otherwise would have been my liberty, my privilege, since my conscience was not at all involved, but clearly discerned that the idol was nothing and did no injury whatever to the meat. How grand is this lesson of brotherly consideration; – yet it is strictly within the lines of the law of love, for are we not to do to our brother or neighbor as to ourselves? and would we think it right to risk our own spiritual standing for a morsel of meat? How then could we risk our brother's standing on such a consideration? The law of our liberty in Christ, love, must govern our conduct automatically on

every occasion. The Lord wishes us to learn, not as children, certain fixed rules, but as philosophers the fixed principles which can be applied.

THE PRINCIPLE OF WIDE APPLICATION

All who have been begotten of the holy Spirit of love will perceive that the principles governing the New Creation are of very wide application indeed. The committee selecting this for our lesson desired that we forget not the application [R4007 : page 174] of this principle to the subject of temperance in respect to alcoholic liquors. Surely so grave an evil should not be overlooked, and to it we might advantageously add the influence of other narcotics – opium, morphine, cocaine, etc. These evils which so seriously tempt the human race, which have wrecked so many lives, blighted so many prospects, destroyed so many homes, and which annually consume an amount of wealth which, applied properly, would mean so much of comfort, blessing and elevation to the race, certainly demand thought from all who have been begotten of the holy Spirit of love. Such cannot be indifferent to the interests of their brethren nor to the interests of mankind in general. True, we have neither the word nor example of our Lord and his apostles to the effect that we should leave the more important work of preaching the good tidings of the Kingdom to engage in a temperance work; but we may be sure that whatever influence we have that cannot be used in the forwarding of the Kingdom message could much better go to the restraint of this demoniacal influence in the interest of our fellowmen than to almost any other cause in the world.

The reason why the Kingdom message is given precedence to all others is that, whatever may be done for the world under present conditions, will be merely palliative and not radical cures. The Kingdom under the whole heavens, the exercise of

divine power in the hands of the glorified Christ, is the only power to which we can look for the overthrow of these venomous evils. We may be sure that when the Kingdom of God's dear Son is established and the will of God begins to be done on earth as it is done in heaven, it will mean the utter abolition of every ensnaring and degrading influence – the bringing of all things into subjection to the will of God in Christ. We may be equally sure that it would be pleasing to the Lord that all who would be his true followers should give no countenance to these evils, nor to any others in the present time, even though we cannot share with our fellowmen in the hope that any powers of ours would ever ultimately put down these terrible evils. We must still wait for God's Son and his mighty power to intervene, and hence we continue to pray and to labor for the Kingdom that is to come.

A TERRIBLE AND TRUE INDICTMENT

A minister of God makes the following indictment against the influence of the saloon: –

"The saloon is the enemy of God. Its forces are against the forces that make for righteousness. It makes a brute of the being God created in his own image and likeness. Its very atmosphere wrecks with blasphemy. It is destructive of all faith, all virtue, all love toward God, reverence for God and likeness to God. It is the organized expression of the kingdom of Satan amongst men.

"It is the enemy of man. It bloats his visage, corrupts his heart, weakens his will, sears his conscience.

"It is the enemy of the home. It puts out the fire, empties the larder, turns the protector of the family into a thing of abhorrence, clothes the wife in rags and brings the children to suffering and shame.

"It is the enemy of the State. It is the breeding-place of all the plots and conspiracies that threaten the downfall of society. It is the Gibraltar of bad politics. It is the gathering-place of thugs and repeaters, the market of the purchasable vote, the fountain head of municipal wrong-doing.

"The devil is for it; God is against it. Vice is for it; virtue is against it. The brothel is for it; the home is against it. Falsehood is for it; truth is against it. The anarchist is for it; the statesman is against it. Poverty is for it; plenty is against it. Misery is for it; happiness is against it. Disease is for it; health is against it. Death is for it; life is against it."

"ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD"

The Apostle sums up his argument in favor of loving consideration for our brethren and liberty of conscience for ourselves – "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God." More than thirty years ago this text was so impressed upon the mind of the writer that he had it beautifully painted on glass and it still greets the eyes of visitors to the WATCH TOWER office, the Bible House parlor and the Editor's study. It is difficult to imagine a more comprehensive statement of the Christian's liberty and limitations than is expressed in these words. To whatever extent one learns to govern thoughts, words and deeds by this glorious precept he is becoming more and more filled with the spirit of the law of love, strengthened in character and meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. This limitation to what would be to "the glory of God" will enter into and affect all the affairs of life if we will only permit it. A dear brother now deceased told us on the occasion of our first meeting that for years he had been a nominal Christian, first a Congregationalist and subsequently an Episcopalian, and always found of his personal liberty; but how, failing to see the other side of the question, he had allowed

his liberty to lead him into various excesses. He felt that he was exercising his personal liberty when he drank wine and occasionally played a social game of cards with the rector of his Church, and generally he felt at liberty to do whatever would not be in violation of the laws of the land.

His inquiry was, "Brother Russell, can you explain to **[R4007 : page 175]** me the change which has come over my life: I do not understand it myself. My friends used to hand me tracts in opposition to wine and tobacco, etc., but I pooh-poohed them and said in effect, 'I am as good as you; mind your own business and let me mind mine. I am violating no law, I am merely exercising my personal liberty.' But, Brother Russell, since I read MILLENNIAL DAWN, Vol. 1, a change has come over me, and those practices which I once considered my liberty I now esteem to be my snares and avoid them. The matter came about in this way: I first asked myself, Is that time spent with the rector playing cards a profitable use of my time? Are you doing it to the glory of God? And as for the wine, do you use that to the glory of God? I was obliged to answer both questions in the negative and discontinued both practices. It was not long after this that I found myself striking a match and about to light my usual cigar. The thought of doing all things to the glory of God came to my mind afresh and I said, 'Can you smoke that cigar to the glory of God?' It took a little time to decide the question, for I had been in the habit of smoking on an average ten cigars a day. That match went out and I struck another while still thinking. I finally decided that I could not smoke the cigar to God's glory and I threw it away. It was only a short time after that that I found myself feeling for my fine-cut tobacco, and about to take it as a substitute for the cigar. Again the question arose, Can you chew the tobacco to the glory of God? My judgment answered, No! and I threw away the tobacco. I have never used either since. Conscious that the thing that had influenced me to this course was the reading of the DAWN I reexamined the volume

carefully, but could find in it no tirade against the practices I had just discontinued – no recommendations even along sumptuary lines. I want to ask you what it was in the DAWN that effected such a revolution in my life." We replied that the DAWN, instead of attacking the branches of evil, followed the Scriptural course of laying the ax to the root of the tree. Whoever realizes the true meaning of his consecration vow, the true significance of his begetting of the holy Spirit, the true meaning of the perfect law of liberty under which he has come, the law of love, will find it ample for the regulation of all of life's affairs, for he must seek thereafter that whether he eats or drinks or whatever he does all shall be to the glory of God.

"GIVE NONE OFFENCE"

The Apostle carries this thought of our personal responsibility in seeking God's glory to its legitimate conclusion. He shows that we will be disinclined to do anything that will stumble either Jews or Greeks or the Church of God. And he declares in the last verse of the lesson that this was his own course in life – that so far as possible in line with his conscience he sought to be pleasing to all men in all things – disregarding his own advantage and considering chiefly the profit of the many that he might do all possible for their salvation. This noble spirit is the only one consistent with our law of liberty – love which is always generous, thoughtful of the interest of others, unselfish, not proud, boastful, greedy; – not ill-mannered, not careless of the interests and feelings of others, either in the great or in the small things of life – the present or the future. We are glad that the Apostle was able to call attention to his own course as an exemplification of his teaching. And this should be the rule with all of us, not merely to give precepts but to follow them with example.

The Apostle in the next verse, which should be a part of the same chapter, says, "Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ." It would have been strangely inconsistent of the Apostle to set himself up as an example in anything except as he had pointed out either directly or indirectly that he could be an example only because he was a follower in the footsteps of the Redeemer. Christ is the pattern of us all, though we may learn to appreciate the grandeur of his example better by our closer contact with some who are walking in his steps and with whose experiences we may be able the more closely to sympathize. O that this lesson of the import of our law of liberty in all the affairs of life might be with us with increasing force, not only in our own affairs but also in our relationship in the Church, the body of Christ, that each might be the more careful as the days go by to exemplify the love of Christ, the love of God, the love of the brethren – the love even of our enemies.
