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SELF-RESTRAINT IN LIBERTY

– *1 COR. 10:23-33.* – *SEPTEMBER 26.* –

Golden Text: – "Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification." – *Rom. 15:2.*

WE KNOW not to what extent intemperance and other vices prevailed in the Apostle's day. In a general way the Church is cautioned, warned against every form of vice, of sin, of intemperance. These are questions which might have been discussed with Jews and Gentiles entirely irrespective of religion. These are not the questions discussed in this lesson. Indeed, the Scriptures say little respecting the grosser vices, because the Apostle addressed Christians and not the worldly. Note the address of each of the epistles – To the believers, the "household of faith," the "saints." These, having left the world, having turned their backs upon sin and debauchery of every kind, needed not to be specially exhorted along the lines of vices. There were other questions more important to the saints and these the Apostle discussed.

Our lesson specially relates to a religious difficulty of that time. The Gospel teaching was that idols were nothing, and hence that offering of meat to these idols could do no harm to the meat. At the same time a question of principle was involved. Idolatry was so general at that time that it had become the general custom to offer upon the altar of sacrifice to their gods certain parts of the animals and the remainder might be taken by the sacrificer to eat at his home, or it might be given to the priests, or it might be sold in the market-place. Indeed, much of that which was contributed to the priests found its way to the markets. The public in general being fully in sympathy with this custom, were glad to purchase these meats, and they were in general use. When the question of the eating of these meats came up, some had much

difficulty while others had none; the consciences of the former rebelled against their eating what had been offered to idols.

We can certainly sympathize with those who had trouble with their conscience in this way, even though we clearly see that the idols, being of stone or wood, could do the meat no injury. However, this was one of the burning questions of that time. Its discussion by the Apostle implies this. We can readily see that whoever would violate his conscience would injure his spiritual welfare and interests, regardless of whether the thing was right or wrong. We can readily see, too, how one might influence another. The brother of strong mind, discerning the situation, might eat with impunity; while his neighbor, less strong in mind, might be influenced by his example to eat, to the injury of his conscience. And, as a result of doing violence to his conscience he might be led out of the way altogether. This is the thought the Apostle had in mind in writing the lesson of today.

The essence of this lesson is that the Christian, by Divine arrangement, has a great deal of liberty to do good, to do everything that is proper, to do everything that will not injure himself or a brother or a neighbor. But he has no liberty to do wrong – no right to do anything that would injure himself or his brother or his neighbor. In other words, our liberties, while apparently absolute, are really limited. All the *Thou shalt nots* of the Law are removed, but the essence of that Law still remains, briefly comprehended in the statement, *Thou shalt love* the Lord thy God, and thy neighbor as thyself. The Christian is at liberty to do anything that does not conflict with this basic Law of his new nature – the Law of Love. This appears upon first sight to be a great liberty, but, on closer examination, it is found to give us much less liberty than others exercise, as they think, with propriety. Not only does the Law of Love thus control us, because that is the Divine standard of justice, but additionally, God has accepted us in covenant relationship with himself under the

Abrahamic Covenant, under Christ our Head, the Mediator of the New (Law) Covenant. Under this Covenant agreement with the Lord we are firmly bound to more than the Law or justice requirement; we are bound to *sacrifice* our rights and privileges, in the interests of others.

Below we furnish an arrangement of St. Paul's various expressions, touching this general subject, compiled by Prof. Wells:

With what weapons and in what spirit Christians should gain the victory. [R4478 : page 285]

1. STAND BY YOUR PERSONAL LIBERTY.

Ye, brethren, were called for freedom. – Gal. 5:13.

Why is my liberty judged by another conscience? – 1 Cor. 10:29.

Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, eat, asking no question for conscience's sake:

For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. – 1 Cor. 10:25,26.

2. BUT CONTROL YOUR LIBERTY BY THE LAW OF LOVE.

All things are lawful, but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. – 1 Cor. 10:23.

Destroy not with thy meat him for whom Christ died. – Rom. 14:15.

Let no man seek his own, but *each* his neighbor's *good*. – 1 Cor. 10:24.

But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to the weak. – 1 Cor. 8:9.

Overthrow not for meat's sake the work of God. All things indeed are clean; howbeit it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.

It is good not to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor *to do any thing* whereby thy brother stumbleth. – Rom. 14:20,21.

Use not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh, but through love be servants one to another. [R4479 : page 285]

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. – Gal. 5:13,14.

3. KEEP YOUR CONSCIENCE PURE.

Happy *is* he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he approveth. – Rom. 14:22.

Each one of us shall give account of himself to God. – Rom. 14:12.

4. CONSIDER THE EFFECT UPON THE CONSCIENCES OF OTHERS.

But if any man say unto you, This hath been offered in sacrifice, eat not; for his sake that showed it, and for conscience's sake:

Conscience, I say, not thine own, but the other's. – 1 Cor. 10:28,29.

Let us not therefore judge one another any more; but judge ye this rather, that no man put a stumbling block in his brother's way or an occasion of falling. – Rom. 14:13.

5. THE PRACTICAL CONCLUSION.

Wherefore, if meat causeth my brother to stumble, I will eat no flesh forevermore, that I cause not my brother to stumble. – 1 Cor. 8:13.

Even as I also please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the *profit* of many, that they may be saved. – 1 Cor. 10:33.

THE TEMPERANCE QUESTION

As already noted, the Apostle is not discussing a worldly question, but one applicable to the Church only. However, the same principle may not improperly be applied still more broadly to the world and the Christian's relationship to mankind in general along the lines of temperance. It is not sufficient that we appreciate our own liberties. We have a still further responsibility towards those who are not so strong or not so clearly informed as ourselves – a responsibility that we will not wish to pass by if our hearts are in tune with the spirit of Divine love. The Apostle gives us a lesson, saying that we should "do good to all men, especially to them that are of the household of faith." This thought can be well applied to the last verse of our lesson (33), "I please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved."

If every Christian could apply these words of the Apostle truthfully to himself, the effect upon the world would be magical – suddenly energizing. They would see in Christians a renouncement of their own tastes and preferences in the interests of others, a principle which the world could very thoroughly enjoy and very quickly grasp. Should all those now enjoying Present Truth resolve to live henceforth, even in the spiritual affairs of life, up to the standard of the Lord, what an influence it would bring, what an influence would extend from their words,

their thoughts, their deeds! Then the Church would become, indeed, a shining light in the world! It is for us to take our stand with the Lord and wait patiently for him to bring to us more than compensating blessings in his own good time and way. The Vow is assisting many to do this. He who does not learn to sacrifice his own will, his own preferences, in the interests of others, will never, we fear, have that preparation of character which the Lord demands of those who shall be joint-heirs with himself in the Kingdom

