

Free to offend?

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There is great freedom in Christ. We are free from the baggage of sin and free from the requirements of the Old Law. It is a wonderful thing to be under a faith system in which we do not fear that with the first transgression of the law that we now stand condemned. Paul even wrote in Romans 8:1 “Therefore there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”. As Christians we do not have many physical requirements placed upon us by the New Testament. There are many items that are left open and without legislation so we are often free to make whatever choice we desire within the parameters of biblical principles.

For example, the New Testament does not tell us what to wear when we worship, it does not tell us what to eat or how to do our hair. The New Testament does not tell us how to design a church building or what it should be used for. The Bible does not tell us how long a sermon should be or the order or format of the worship assembly. There is great freedom in how we choose to serve Christ; it could be through public teaching, giving, benevolence and many other ways. We are free.

With this freedom, however, comes great responsibility. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians that we are to use caution with our Christian liberty and make sure that what we chose to do (even if what we do is not a sinful act), that it does not become a stumbling block for someone else. We are made free in Christ, but not free to offend. In 1 Corinthians 8 the topic of discussion is meat that was originally used in idol worship. The stronger Christians understood that it was just meat and nothing special, but the weaker Christians had a big problem with it, because to them as ex idol worshippers, it meant something more. Concerning this topic Paul writes:

But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble. (1 Cor. 8:8-13).

We have freedom in Christ to do many things, but sometimes we have to put aside our freedom for the time being to make sure that we do not cause someone to participate in something that violates their conscience. We are free, but not free to offend.