**Transforming Grace by Jerry Bridges**

**Chapter 9 – “Called to Be Free”**

1. What are the two characteristics of the legalism Bridges addressing in this chapter (p. 132)?
2. Read Galatians 5:1, 13-14. Then answer the following questions.

**Galatians 5:1** – It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

**Galatians 5:13-14** – 13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only *do* not *turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

* 1. What is the freedom for which Christ has set us free in vv. 1 and 13? (consider what it means to be “subject again to a yoke of slavery” to help you answer this question.)
	2. What does it mean to “keep standing firm” in this freedom?
1. Read the following quote from Martin Luther, and answer the question.

*“A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly*

*dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”* – Martin Luther

How does this quote relate to Paul’s command in Gal 5:13 and the reason for the command in v. 14? In other words, based on Galatians 5:13-14, what is Martin Luther saying, *practically* speaking?

1. In what specific ways have you put up “fences” in your life to deal with sin? How have they been helpful? How have they not?
2. Romans 14 deals with conscience issues, which Bridges calls “differing opinions.” Read all of Romans 14 to grasp the context of the following questions. Then read the paraphrase of Romans 14-15 at the end of this document.
	1. According to Romans 14:5-7, 22-23, what should govern which preference we have on a conscience issue? (A conscience issue is a preferential issue that is either not explicitly condemned or approved in the Bible.)
	2. What are some preferences that can become unwritten rules in a church? Which ones are (or could be) spiritually harmful, and why?
3. What is the right way to think about the spiritual disciplines (like Bible reading and prayer)? How can practicing these disciplines become twisted?

**Romans 14-15 - Paraphrase**

The “weak” are those whose consciences are overly sensitive to preferential issues.

 This person is “weak in faith,” not in knowledge or practical godliness per se. Their faith

to trust in Christ that it’s perfectly acceptable to eat meat (marketplace meat was often

leftovers from idol worship rituals) is *not there yet*.

Note: You can be weak in one area, while strong in another.

Those who aren’t “weak” in a certain area are called to “accept” the weak in faith, but not for

passing judging on this person’s opinions.

So, don’t fake-accept them only to judge them and put them down for having personal convictions about what they can eat/drink/do.

One person’s faith enables them to “eat all things.” And another person’s faith enables them to eat vegetables only. It’s a matter of “faith” – as with the whole Christian life.

 So, the meat-eater must not view with contempt (look down on; ridicule the person who doesn’t eat meat. And the person who doesn’t eat must must not judge the meat-eater.

 In both cases, God has accepted his child. And each person, remember, is eating or

 abstaining from faith.

Each believer is a servant of Christ, not of men.

To Christ will both the meat-eater and the one who abstains meat stand or fall. Ultimately, the servant of the Lord (any believer) “will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.” (v. 4)

Jesus is mighty and gracious to not let us just keep sinning against our consciences. Or just let us keep scorning those who have different preferences and convictions than we do. All believers are enabled to stand in the Lord *by the Lord*. (stand in the Lord = remain with and in Christ and not fall away)

So, it’s not your conscience that make you stand in the Lord. It’s not your preferences that make you stand. It’s not your convictions that make your stand. It’s solely the Lord as any believer trusts in Him and clings to His love and care for him.

It’s not only with food that conscience areas can become a source of judgment and division in the church. It could be about celebrating certain days.

 No matter, the same principle of the conscience stands. Each believer “must be fully

 convinced in his own mind.” A believer must observe a day as special by faith. And the

 other believer who doesn’t observe any day as special must do so by faith too.

The key is this: the person observing a day as special must do it for the Lord (i.e., by faith in Him). And the one who eats meat must do so for the Lord. The same is true for the one who doesn’t eat – he does not eat “for the Lord” (not to feel better about himself or set himself up as a judge of others).

 And you can see that he is eating or observing (or not eating or not observing) “for the

 Lord” and not for himself or because someone else said so or out of cultural pressure…

 because he genuinely gives thanks to God for whatever he chooses to do or not do!

We do everything for the Lord because our lives are not our own. So, don’t live for ourselves, and we don’t die for ourselves (v. 7) Our lives are “for the Lord.” Our deaths are “for the Lord.” No matter what, we are always in every circumstance “the Lord’s.” (vv. 7-8)

How did we become the Lord’s? He died and lived again (resurrection) that He might be the Lord of those who are now in heaven (dead) and those believers who are alive. (v. 9) We are now truly and wholly His by the Gospel.

So, we must not judge our brother in Christ. We must not regard them with contempt (v. 10). Because we’re all going to stand before God’s “judgment seat” at the end of our lives to be evaluated and rewarded for our good works done in Christ.

We will all bow before Him. We will all praise God. And we will all give an account of ourselves (not of others) to God:

 *Did we do things by faith? Did we do things out of love for God and others? Did*

*we judge others and regard others with contempt? Or did we accept differing brothers and sisters in Christ?*

In light of the future judgment seat, let’s not judge one another ever again. Instead let’s determine to do this – “not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block” in a fellow believer’s way. (v. 13)

An obstacle or stumbling block is doing something that will tempt a weaker-conscience brother to sin.

However, nothing is unclean – no food or object or non-sinful activity. But if someone thinks something is unclean, “to him it IS unclean.” That’s where his faith is at.

 So, we ought never to hurt this brother by flaunting our belief or conviction that this

 food or activity is clean. Instead, we ought to walk in love and not destroy a brother oveer

 eating something. This is a brother “for whom Christ died.”

 So, in the case of Rom 14, it would be eating meat right in his face or encouraging him to

 eat when his conscience is saying “no.”

Let’s not let something which is for us a good “be spoken of as evil” – whether it’s meat or going to the beach or drinking alcohol or watching certain movies. (v. 16)

 Because the kingdom of God is not about food and drink. It’s about “righteousness and

 peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (v. 17)

And whoever serves Christ in whatever they eat or drink or do “is acceptable to God and approved by men.” God will be pleased by your heart and actions. Because you’re not trying to cause others to stumble (at least knowingly and willingly), others will know that you’re marked by love. (v. 18)

 So, we should “pursue” whatever makes for peace and the building up of one

 another in the church of Christ. (v. 19) We ought never to tear down a believer (and the

 church) over food!

Remember, all things are truly clean – the Law is obsolete as it was fulfilled by Christ.

 But when you eat idol-meat, for example, and it causes a fellow believer to stumble, that

 food has now become “evil” since it gives offense to that other believer! (v. 20)

So, it’s good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that will cause your brother to sin by his engaging in the same activity that his conscience is telling him not to do. (v. 21)

 Again, don’t encourage the weaker brother to do that thing by your actions in his face.

 [Paul is not telling us to change your convictions to match the weaker brothers. It’s

 talking about encouraging or pushing the weaker brother to violate his conscience

 because he sees you partaking of that activity.]

Your faith is your own. The other brother’s faith is his own too. Have your own convictions before God. But never do something that your conscience is bothered by. (v. 22)

But if you doubt whether eating meat or doing something is acceptable for you to do, and you go ahead and do it, you are condemning yourself because you didn’t do it “from faith.”

 And whatever you eat or drink or do that isn’t from faith is sin.

 So, make sure that in your own heart, regardless of what anyone else does, that you’re

 doing that thing from faith.

Now, the strong in conscience must bear the weaknesses of those whose consciences are bothered by eating meat or drinking wine or doing anything else that isn’t prohibited by God.

We must not just please ourselves because we are free in Christ. That is an abuse of the freedom from the Law that we have in Christ (v. 1)

No. We must please our neighbor “for his good, to his edification.” We must seek to build up our brother’s faith in the Lord. (v. 2)

Why? Because even Christ didn’t please Himself selfishly. The reproaches of sinners against God all fell on Christ at the cross. (v. 3) Jesus didn’t run away from that to please Himself. He didn’t get angry or complain. He submitted to the will of His Father in joy.

This is the Gospel-motivation for not doing something in the face of another believer who

could stumble into that same activity because he sees you engaging in it.

The principle from this OT Scripture applies to us now.

Persevere by faith in God’s word and take the encouragement from His word so that you have hope. Hope that you can build up your neighbor. Hope that you won’t just please yourself. Hope that you can practice all things from faith (v. 4).

Pray that the God who gives you perseverance and Scriptural encouragement may grant the church to all have the same mind according to Christ Jesus, not according to cultural or family norms, preferences, and expectations. (v. 5)

And when we are operating out of the same mind in unity in Christ, we will glorify God with

One voice, not scattering praises to Him from voices in discord. (v. 6)

Therefore, accept one another…strong the weak and weak the strong…just as Christ accepted

sinners like us to the glory of God.

Christ accepted us when we had no faith, when we sought to please ourselves alone, and

when we did whatever we wanted/however we wanted/whenever we wanted/with whom

we wanted. (v. 7)

Remember, Christ has become a servant of Jewish people on behalf of the gospel **to confirm**

**ancient promises** made to the patriarchs and Israel AND He’s become a servant to the Gentiles

so that **they might glorify God for His mercy.** (v. 8)

So, meat-eaters (Jewish) and vegetables-only eaters (Gentiles) – you have all been served by Christ in your salvation! Be at peace with one another. Accept each other. Don’t judge each other. Love one another. Guard each other’s freedom of conscience. Don’t bind anyone else to your level of comfort. And don’t expect others to adjust to yours.