

# ISSUES

Hear Michael: The Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and strength. And these words that I command you to love the Lord your God are the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

## Heart

of the

Important Truths for Your Heart and Mind.

frontlets between your eyes, so that when you write them on the doorposts of your houses and on

www.religiousaffectionsministries.org

August, 2009

acceptability of meat that had been offered to idols in pagan temples. This meat would be available for purchase and eating both in the temple itself and in the markets of Corinth. Objecting to eating idol meat would not only complicate one's grocery shopping, but it would also have a serious impact on one's social life. Feasts in the temple were an important part of Corinthian social life. Archeologists have discovered ancient invitations for wedding feasts at the temple of this or that god. Those of us who have wrestled with the decision to attend a family function at a Roman Catholic Church can sympathize with the strife that refusing to attend a temple ceremony could have caused.

**Activities that we claim to be within the bounds of our liberty must be those whose moral value is not found in themselves.**

This issue apparently raised no little strife in the Corinthian church, because it was one of the many issues about which the church specifically asked for Paul's counsel. If you read the book of 1 Corinthians carefully, you will note that Paul is addressing a laundry list of problems brought to his attention in a letter from the Corinthians themselves. He will frequently start a new topic by saying, "Now concerning..." (see, for instance, the questions regarding marital relations in chapter 7) and offer some quotations from the Corinthians. Note that in our passage, in 8.1, the expression, "we all have knowledge" is likely a quotation from the Corinthians (as some translations rightly interpret).

So this issue had added to the divisions that were already threatening the Corinthian

## Liberty, Legalism, and Love: A Biblical Approach to Christian Liberty

Michael Riley

When I was a student at a broadly evangelical seminary, it was not uncommon that I find myself in discussions with other students debating the legitimacy of modern Fundamentalism, and more particularly the Fundamentalist emphasis on standards of personal holiness. While at times the shots taken at Fundamentalism are based on ridiculous caricatures, such as the long-rumored pink and blue sidewalks of Bob Jones University, some of the criticisms seem to have some merit. Isn't Fundamentalism legalistic? Doesn't it contradict our liberty in Christ? Why should I be limited by another believer's overly sensitive conscience? And so it becomes readily apparent that this idea of Christian liberty has come to dominate discussion of personal standards.

Christian liberty, however, is not a purely abstract concept; rather, it is drawn directly from concrete circumstances addressed by Paul. Therefore, to think biblically about the issue, we need to go back to the text of Scripture itself. In this case, Paul's most extended discussion about Christian liberty is 1 Corinthians 8-10, although he also takes up the subject in Romans 14-15 and Galatians 2. For brevity's sake, this article will concentrate on the Corinthian passage.

To adequately understand Paul's discussion of liberty, we must first understand something of the cultural context that the Corinthians faced. What was so significant about the eating of meat? The issue was not clean and unclean foods as established by the Old Testament; rather, it was the

how much time, effort, sweat, and (sometimes) tears required to wade through stacks of music from a variety of publishers in order to find those dozen or so gems that will work for your church.

If a church has a full-time music director or pastor, this task is a bit easier since that director can give hours of his time to the task. Even so, this task is daunting!



## Church Music Files

Church Music Recommendations

However, most churches with no full-time director have a problem – not enough time! Most smaller churches simply choose to trust one or two publishers from whom they get the bulk of their music. The problem with that is two-fold: (1) these churches are missing out on perhaps the best music, and (2) not all that these "trusted" publishers produce is very good.

So what is the solution? [ChurchMusicFiles.com](http://ChurchMusicFiles.com) is here to help.

We have indexed hundreds of choral, instrumental, and vocal selections from dozens of publishers. We regularly add music daily to this index.

The benefit of [ChurchMusicFiles.com](http://ChurchMusicFiles.com) is that it eliminates at least one layer of filtering for you. You still need to work through the music on the site to find things that fit for your church, but at least you know that what you'll find on [ChurchMusicFiles.com](http://ChurchMusicFiles.com) has been filtered and includes only the best, conservative church music.

The site also includes a powerful search feature and a helpful theme index to help you find what you need.

Most of the selections have audio and visual samples for you to review as well.

Our hope is that [ChurchMusicFiles.com](http://ChurchMusicFiles.com) will be a great help to conservative churches! Visit today!

- How To Be A Good Choir Member
- Church Music Administration
- Congregational Song Leading
- Beginning/Advanced Accompaniment
- Teaching Music to Children
- The Layperson's Guide to a Worship Service
- How to Find Good Music to Play in Church
- Christian Music Philosophy
- There will be something for everyone!

*This is a perfect retreat for a church choir to attend together!*

**Children are Welcome!** You are welcome to bring your children to this retreat. We will be providing special services, activities, and music classes.

This year, we are offering two registration options:

**OPTION 1:** Specifically designed to meet the needs of pastors and music directors. *Thursday evening – Saturday afternoon*

**OPTION 2:** Specifically designed to meet the needs of lay musicians, choir members, church accompanists, and students. *Friday evening – Saturday afternoon*

**Bring 5 or more people from your church and receive \$10 off each person!**

Simply choose which option best fits your needs and your schedule!

**Speakers:** We have an exciting line-up of speakers this year: Chuck Phelps, Dean Kurtz, David Rasbach, Scott Antol, and Steve Allen.

We hope you can make this refreshing, uplifting, and equipping retreat!

Visit [www.CampJoy.org](http://www.CampJoy.org) for more information.

## Introducing ChurchMusicFiles.com!

We are thrilled to announce a new web site that we have been developing that seeks to help pastors, church music directors, and other church music directors as they choose music.

If you have spent any time at all choosing music to perform in your church, you know

assembly. On the one hand were those saved from a life of idolatry, for whom the thought of eating meat offered to idols seemed nothing less than a betrayal of the Lord who bought them. On the other hand were those who, recognizing that the meat was simply meat and the idol simply a chunk of stone, felt free to partake of the idol meat. Further, those who believed that they had liberty to eat believed that they were glorifying God by reveling in the freedom from the law provided by Christ. It is not difficult to see how a situation like this could quickly escalate into discord and infighting in the Corinthian church.

In seeking to apply this text to today, we must realize that a legitimate issue of Christian liberty is one in which the activity itself is neutral. This seems natural enough. No Christian could seriously argue that Christian liberty is the liberty that we have in Christ to sin freely. However, the sticky point is this: who gets to decide whether the debated activity is amoral? Certainly, the weaker brother (those who refused to eat) did not consider the eating of the meat to be an issue of neutrality. It is easy enough for the strong brother to claim that the meat is neutral; he feels free to take it or leave. It is the weaker brother who believes that Christians are not so free to take it. While it is valuable to recognize the criteria of neutrality, such recognition alone will not resolve the disputes over liberty. The issue might be clarified if we realize that the weaker brother did not object to the eating of meat per se, but the eating of meat that had been offered to idols. This is a significant distinction. Even the weaker brother recognized that in itself, the eating of meat was not an immoral activity. Rather, the eating of meat took on moral value only when connected to the pagan rites. I believe that this is highly significant in the application of Christian liberty principles in our lives today. To be strictly faithful to the text, the activities that we claim to be within the bounds of our liberty must be activities whose moral value is not found in themselves, but is assigned to them through

why Paul confronted Peter's compromise so forcefully.

Notice also that Paul could react differently to the very same issue depending on the attitude of the person with whom he was dealing. Paul may well abstain from meat to further the sanctification of the weaker brother, but if a person insists that abstaining from meat earns favor with God, Paul disagreed in the strongest terms. Thus, when we are dealing with a real issue of Christian liberty, we must consider whether the person who abstains is doing so on legitimate grounds of conscience, in which case we must be sensitive, or whether their abstinence is an attempt to be self-righteous, which demands that we defend the free offer of the gospel. Obviously, such a distinction is not always easy to make.

### **We must do everything we do for the sake of the gospel.**

The key to determining our own actions when faced with debatable issues is this: we must do everything that we do for the sake of the gospel. And we must take "for the sake of the gospel" in the broadest possible way, referring to both the evangelism of the lost and the sanctification of the believers. Thus, my decisions on debatable issues must not be made in isolation from the people around me, both believers and unbelievers, with whom I must be a minister of the gospel. If my liberty is a cause for the weaker brother to stumble, because my ultimate goal is the progress of the gospel, I must be willing to curtail my liberty. Certainly, Paul is the chief example of this. He vowed that he would not partake of any meat if it would hinder his ministry. However, if it becomes apparent that those to whom I minister have made abstinence from a legitimate activity a requirement for righteousness, it is my responsibility as one who values the righteousness that is only found in Christ to confront such legalism. The Fundamentalist answer to questions of Christian liberty should not be either libertinism or legalism;

rather, we should be guided by genuine love, which works for the Christlikeness of all those to whom it comes in contact.

What about those issues, like entertainment choices, that are not intrinsically amoral, but about which Christians are often sharply divided? While I do not believe that Paul is directly addressing such issues in the Christian liberty passages, there is a secondary application that can be made. Assume for the sake of argument that our entertainment choices are genuinely neutral. Even if this is the case, in light of the passage that we have just surveyed, we cannot argue from this that our entertainment choices can be made without considering the body of believers to which we belong. If issues of entertainment are causing strife in the body and hindering our ability to do the work of the gospel, we must forsake the lesser pleasures in favor of the greater rewards promised us for obedience to Christ. If our primary motivation is our own rights, we will chafe against such a teaching. However, if our chief priority in the cause of Christ, such sacrifices should seem like no real sacrifice at all.

Michael Riley holds an M.Div. degree from Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary. Michael serves on the board of directors for Religious Affections Ministries.

## **Get help with music ministry issues at the Camp Joy Music Ministry Retreat**

**January 21/22 – 23, 2010**

We are very excited to announce next year's Music Ministry Retreat sponsored by Religious Affections Ministries and hosted by Camp Joy in Whitewater, WI.

The Music Ministry Retreat is designed to be a time of refreshment, encouragement, and equipping for pastors, church music directors, and laymen involved in the church music ministry.

### **Sessions include:**

- Beginning and Advanced Choral Conducting