

ROMANS

THE CHRISTIAN'S CONSTITUTION

STUDY THIRTY-SIX

Liberty on a Tightrope

Romans 14:13–23

You're called to freedom. There's no doubt about it. So, get out on that cable. Start your walk. Learn to balance. However, remember that not all can walk there as you do, so you need discernment. Most importantly, you need love for others.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WE'VE seen the acrobats in circuses who jump on a tightrope, maintain balance, hop and flip, and leap back and forth. The thrill in their eyes, the agility of their moves, and the speed of their transitions are on display as they fly in the air, feeling free as a bird.

True spiritual freedom is much more exhilarating! In Christ, we are “released from the law . . . so that we may serve in the *new life of the Spirit*” (Romans 7:6 NET, emphasis added). What could be more thrilling than walking free with the Spirit? In his letter to the Galatian believers, Paul loudly proclaimed, “It was for freedom that Christ set us free” (Galatians 5:1 NASB)!

Paul knew firsthand the exhilaration of living free. He was once a Pharisee—the strictest religious sect of his times—and now he was enjoying life on the highwire of freedom, breathing the fresh air of grace! But, as Paul leaped and jumped, he explained to his readers that, while enjoying Christian liberty, *balance is necessary*.

Listen to Paul's instructions to the Galatians:

For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. (Galatians 5:13)

Serving others in love is the purpose of our freedom—not satisfying self. In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll discover how love and self-control can help us keep our balance as we walk the tightrope of Christian liberty.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

The Lord walks with you! Let that wonderful truth sink into your soul. Express your confidence in His faithfulness and request His blessing on your time in Romans.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Let's get some historical context to understand the central issue in Romans 14. In 722 BC, the Assyrians conquered and scattered the northern ten tribes of Israel as God's judgment for their disobedience ([2 Kings 17:1–18](#)). The spiritual decline of the southern kingdom led to their destruction in 586 BC by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, who carried away to Babylon some of its citizens as captives ([2 Chronicles 36:14–21](#)).

Miles away from home, Daniel, Hannaniah, Mishael, and Azariah—four brave Hebrew young men—determined to remain loyal to their God. When challenged to eat the king's meat, which most likely was offered to idols, they chose a diet of vegetables and water instead ([Daniel 1:1–21](#)). To them, to eat meat offered to idols was to become pagan. God blessed Daniel and his friends and elevated them to positions of prestige.

In the Greco-Roman world, the meat from animals sacrificed to pagan gods was also sold in the marketplace and eaten by idol-worshipping gentiles. Some members of the church in Rome—who knew that idols are mere inanimate objects that hold no power—purchased this meat and enjoyed it for dinner. Others refused to eat such meat, following the example of Daniel and his friends. Paul addressed this controversial issue in Romans 14. He permitted believers to eat temple meat but to do so with caution.

What are some modern-day issues—equivalent to the ancient practice of eating meat offered to idols—that require caution?

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Observation: Caution in Christian Liberty

Observation is foundational to understanding and applying the biblical text.¹ So, to begin, carefully read *Romans 14:13–23*, observing what it says.

Note how “Therefore” (NASB) or “So” (NLT) at the beginning of *14:13* connects this section to the previous one (*Romans 14:1–12*). What words of caution did Paul give to the Roman believers in this verse?

To maintain balance on the tightrope of liberty, Paul gave his readers three reminders.

Nothing Is Unclean in Itself—Romans 14:14–16

In *Romans 14:14*, Paul first reminded his readers of what foundational principle? According to *14:15–17*, what happens if our brothers and sisters are hurt because of our actions?

The Essence of Christianity Is Not in Externals—Romans 14:17–19

Look at Paul’s second reminder in *Romans 14:17–19*. What did Paul say the kingdom of God is not? What is the essence of Christianity? What should we do as a response to knowing these truths?

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The essence of Christianity is not externals. It's "eternals." How easy to get hung up on tangible things. But the organ of life's richest delight is not the stomach; it's the heart. What you will answer for is not what you put into your stomach but the attitude of your heart. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

When My Liberty Hinders God's Work, I Yield—Romans 14:20–23

Summarize in a sentence or two Paul's third reminder in [Romans 14:20–23](#).

When my liberty hinders the work of God in someone else's life, I care. Why do I care? Because I love that person. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Love Trumps Liberty!

Paul cautioned the Roman believers to determine “never to place an obstacle or a trap before a brother or sister” (Romans 14:13 NET). Look up the two Greek terms, *proskomma*, “obstacle,” and *skandalon*, “trap,” at billmounce.com. Read [14:13](#) in various translations such as the AMP and MSG. How would you explain this verse and its significance to believers exercising their liberty?

Love is the card that trumps liberty. And you show your immaturity when you have little room for love and ample room for liberty because they must be seen together and held in balance. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Paul said that, although “no food, in and of itself, is wrong to eat” we should not “ruin” with our choice of food a brother or sister for whom Christ has died (Romans 14:14–15). Read [14:15–16](#) in the AMP. How could carelessly exercising freedom “ruin” another believer? What was Paul’s central concern?

I know you’re free. You know you’re free. But if you flaunt your liberty, it becomes an offense to some. And out of love for them, guard yourself from doing that. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Christian Liberty

The New Testament speaks about our freedom in Christ in several passages. What do passages such as [John 8:34–36](#) and [Romans 6:14–22](#) teach about spiritual slavery and freedom in Christ?

See how Paul wrestled with the Galatian believers in [Galatians 1:1–10; 3:1–14; and 5:1–13](#). Why was he warning them? How important is it for all believers to walk in freedom?

*Don’t go back to the legalistic lifestyle. Don’t think by living up to someone else’s “dos” and “don’ts” you’re more spiritual, or that God somehow will smile on you or accept you into a special category of His family called, “the spiritual.”
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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According to *1 Corinthians 8:4–6*, what is Paul’s theological basis for permitting Christians to eat meat offered to idols?

Christians who were weak in their faith didn’t grasp this truth. How did Paul say the strong should show consideration to them, according to *8:9–13*? How does this passage correlate with Paul’s teaching in Romans 14?

There must be control mixed with love, or it won’t be freedom at all. It will be an offense. It will be a license. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Let Love Rule

Personalizing the passage is the last step of the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method. Walking the tightrope of freedom requires you, first, to be *considerate*. Be sensitive to the believers around you, understanding their journey of faith and sympathizing with their struggles. To whom might you need to show consideration regarding your freedom?

Second, be *convinced* about your convictions. Your list of standards regarding grey areas is between you and the Holy Spirit. Pray for guidance and follow the Spirit’s lead. And then, third, be *consistent* in how you maintain your convictions. Be bold on the tightrope of freedom as you obey your conscience.

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How can you walk with more confidence? How might you experience a closer, freer walk with the Holy Spirit?

Christianity is not about externals but about the attitude of your heart. In prayer, request God's assistance to love others in tangible ways as you follow the Spirit on the tightrope of Christian liberty. There's no more thrilling way to live!



A FINAL PRAYER

*Today, Lord, help me to pursue the things that bring peace and build up others.
Guard me from inadvertently tearing down, weakening, or offending someone.
Let Your love show through. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2008, 2025 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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