

# We Are Baptist

## Individual Soul Liberty

**Romans 14: 1-12** *Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.*

### Introduction

One of the great blessings of living in America is that we believe all men are created equal and have a right to make their own choices for their faith. We live in the land of freedom and are able to make choices that many around the world never get to make.

As we see these freedoms erode, it is evident how it continues to impact our country in a negative way. Freedom is always worth fighting for. Freedom is not only a vital part of America, but it has also been a vital part of the Baptist faith long before America. It is a Baptist doctrine that ought to be promoted and lived by every believer. I have the right to worship God and follow Him without any interference or force from any other person or institution.

Around the world, people who have put their faith in Jesus Christ are locked up in prison because they refuse to believe the way a man, a country, or a religious leader wants them to believe. Yet, they are willing to lose their physical freedom to fight for their religious freedom! Why? Because it is important that man has the right to choose whom he will serve. While we ought to believe in the one true

God, our God has never forced man to accept Him. He has paved the way that man may have life, but he still gives us the choice to accept or reject Him. If Almighty God gives man a choice, then no other man has a right to force their beliefs on another. We can preach, teach, and encourage others to follow God, but ultimately, it is their freedom to choose as their conscience leads them.

## I. Defining the Doctrine

A. Individual Soul Liberty is the belief that every individual is free to **worship and believe** according to the dictates of one's own conscience.

- Individual Soul Liberty is also called the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Liberty and has ties to Soul Competency.

B. Individual Soul Liberty stems from our interpretation of Scripture in which God has given all men a **free will**.

- Within that free will is the ability to choose how each person will follow God. Although I may not agree with someone's choice, it is our belief that everyone has the right to make that choice.
- Throughout history, religious groups have worked to force people to accept their faith. Whether it be Constantine who required every soldier be baptized, or the present-day Muslim movement which bans any other religion from being presented. They demand you worship Allah or face shunning or death. Radical Muslim fundamentalists still today do not allow people to choose who they will worship.
- Long before this was an American right, it was a belief held by Baptists.

*Baptists have had a long-term determination to adhere to the Biblical doctrine that they call "Individual Soul Liberty." Church history verifies that Christians have died for this principle. The teaching that individuals are sovereign in matters of faith is one that Baptists will not compromise. The individual soul is answerable to Almighty God and to Him alone. This precludes giving up that independency to a pope, a priest, a system, an organization, a convention, a fellowship, an association, or any other human being. None of these are given the authority to interpose anything whatsoever between the individual*

*believer and God concerning any matter of faith. A person may then choose to be a Baptist, a member of another Christian denomination or to choose no religious belief system and neither the church, nor the government, nor family or friends may either make the decision or compel the person to choose otherwise. Furthermore, a person may change his/her mind at any time.*

*This doctrine springs from the many examples in church history where the independency of the believer was stifled and sometimes even forbidden. Under the rule of Constantine, Roman law demanded that all people in the Roman Empire become Christians. The result of this law was forcing Christianity upon the masses by infant baptism and a meaningless profession by adults. Accordingly, the Dark Ages are a testimony to the absolute failure imposed on believers when the "church" begins to dictate whatever "truth" it deems necessary to force all members to conform. Not only is Roman Catholicism guilty of this but so are many of the mainline Protestant denominations.*

*Furthermore, Baptists themselves would do well to avoid the denial of this doctrine. Pastors who overlord their flocks or churches that submit themselves to denominational control will need to return again to the Scriptures concerning this vital historical Baptist distinctive. To demand, whether directly or indirectly, that believers submit to any kind of authoritarian rule is both unscriptural and, in fact, questionable. This generation has seen its Jim Jones's and David Karesh's. Whenever believers give up their individual soul liberty in favor of following the demands of another person or affiliation, they do indeed compromise this essential doctrine of the faith.  
(allaboutbaptists.com)*

## II. Defending the Doctrine

A. In Romans 14, we see the **application** of individual soul liberty at work in the preaching of Paul. He is writing to the church and instructing them on our liberty in Christ.

1. In verse 1, Paul teaches that we are to accept those who are weak in faith without disputations.
2. In verse 2- 6, Paul explains that people may have different convictions on meats or days, and we are not to judge them for their preferences.
3. Then in verse 7, Paul explains that it is never about us.
4. In verse 8-11, he tells us that we are to live unto the Lord and to ourselves.
5. Then in verse 12, he sums it up by telling us we are ultimately accountable first and foremost to God.

B. In 1 Corinthians 8 / Galatian 5:13 he adds two other elements:

1. We are not free to sin! Our liberty is not a license, but a responsibility.
2. We are not free to cause others to sin! Our freedom cannot infringe on the rights of others.

C. Scriptural references to support Individual Soul Liberty

1. Romans 14 - **accountable** to God
2. 1 Corinthians 8 - **responsible** to others
3. Galatians on liberty – **free** to choose
4. 2 Corinthians 4:2 – **conscience** is our guide

### III. Practical Principles regarding Individual Soul Liberty

- A. I am **accountable** to God and His Word above all others and any institution for my decisions regarding my faith. (Rom. 14:12)
- I can be beaten and tortured, but no one can make me believe something that I don't believe. You cannot force faith on someone! My relationship with God is personal, and I am accountable to Him alone for my faith.
  - Soul Liberty means I am accountable to my God for my faith and practice. My faith comes from His Word and His Spirit and not by the force of man.
  - Free-will over election. To believe in individual soul liberty is to accept and recognize that God has given every human a free will. In other words, you are not ordained or pre-chosen for salvation. Each person must choose to accept or reject Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Your church membership or family ties do not guarantee you salvation. You must by faith repent of your sins and put your faith in Jesus Christ! Someone cannot get saved for you!
- B. I am **responsible** to consider others when making choices. I can witness and encourage others, but not force them to believe what I believe.
- I am commanded not to judge others (Romans 14). This does not apply to following authority and making judgements as a boss or leader. It applies to me judging someone else that is not under my authority.
  - I am commanded not to be a stumbling block Rom 14. While I have a right to choose how I serve my God, I have a responsibility from God on not doing anything that would cause someone else to stumble in their faith. This is the accountability that keeps us from becoming selfish and self-worshippers. I must always consider how my decisions will affect those around me. Just because I can, doesn't mean I should!

C. I am to follow my **conscience**.

**Acts 24:16** *And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.*

**2 Corinthians 1:12** *For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.*

**1 Corinthians 8:7-10** *Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols;*

1. The conscience is a real part of our being and acts as our **guidance system**.

- It will alert us when we are doing good and it will warn us when we are doing wrong. It is a built-in protection to help guide us through life. It should not be ignored.
- Often in life we ignore warning signs. For instance, when a light comes on our dashboard. Too often we take it as a suggestion and fail to act. If this action continues it can have bad effects on the operation of the vehicle. So, a wise man heads the warning signs.
- In life God gave us a conscience to help us make the right decision. There is a clear warning not to damage your conscience. It will take away our peace!

2. It can be damaged – **seared conscious!**

**1 Timothy 4:2** *Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;*

- This is in reference to false teachers who have so damaged their conscious by teaching error that it does not bother them.

3. It is wise to **confess and correct** your sins quickly to avoid a damaged conscience. Acts 24:16

4. When it appears that your conscience and the Word of God are in conflict, **always trust Scripture.**

- The Word of God is absolute and never changes, so it is the higher authority. Your conscience is used by the Holy Spirit to guide you, as well as the Word of God. When working in conjunction, they help you to make decisions of faith that will guide your life.

*There is only one way to achieve happiness on this terrestrial ball, And that is to have either a clear conscience or none at all. (Ogden Nash, Leadership, Vol. 8, no. 2.)*

#### **IV. Conclusion**

- A. Individual Soul Liberty is the belief that every individual is free to worship and believe according to the dictates of one's own conscience.
- B. I do not have a license to do what I want, but a freedom to do what I should!
- C. I am directly accountable to God and God alone for my faith! I must choose to accept Him and follow Him or reject Him.
- D. I am responsible to my fellow man and have no right to infringe on their liberty, as they have no right to infringe on my liberties in Christ.
- E. I am to live by the Word of God and my conscience. Since the Word of God never changes then it will be the higher standard for all decisions.