

1 Corinthians: A Congregation in Crisis

Lesson 4: A Crisis Over Food and Freedom (1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1)

Introduction: Read these famous quotes about freedom.

- "For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others." (Nelson Mandela)
- "I think of a hero as someone who understands the degree of responsibility that comes with his freedom." (Bob Dylan)
- "Freedom makes a huge requirement of every human being. With freedom comes responsibility. For the person who is unwilling to grow up, the person who does not want to carry his own weight, this is a frightening prospect." (Eleanor Roosevelt)
- "May we think of freedom, not as the right to do as we please, but as the opportunity to do what is right." (Rev. Peter Marshall)

- What would you say is the common thread running through these quotes?

KNOWLEDGE VS. LOVE

1 Corinthians 8 Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. [2] The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. [3] But the man who loves God is known by God.

[4] So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. [5] For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), [6] yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

[7] But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. [8] But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

[9] Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. [10] For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? [11] So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. [12] When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. [13] Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

1.) What are the main themes running through Chapter 8?

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2.) Your friend is a recovering alcoholic, but no one knows. What might you do to support your friend when the rest of the group invites the two of you to go out to the bar for a couple of drinks?

FREEDOM

3.) List some of the freedoms and rights Paul claimed to have as one of the apostles in Chapter 9:1-18.

> **1 Corinthians 9** Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? [2] Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. [3] This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. [4] Don't we have the right to food and drink? [5] Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? [6] Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?
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> [7] Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? [8] Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? [9] For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? [10] Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. [11] If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? [12] If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?
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> But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. [13] Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? [14] In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. [15] But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast. [16] Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! [17] If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. [18] What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.

4.) What might be some risks associated with the style of ministry Paul described in 9:19-23? What rewards might come with it?

> **1 Corinthians 9:19-23** Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. [20] To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. [21] To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. [22] To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. [23] I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

5.) While Paul strove and sacrificed and put his own rights aside to win as many as possible, what goal did he also keep constantly in view?

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. [25] Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. [26] Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. [27] No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

DANGEROUS FOOD

6.) In 10:1-22, Paul uses two examples—one from Israel's history and one from the congregation's activities—to warn the Corinthians. What was he be warning them about?

1 Corinthians 10:1-22 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. [2] They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. [3] They all ate the same spiritual food [4] and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. [5] Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.

[6] Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. [7] Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." [8] We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. [9] We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. [10] And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.

[11] These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. [12] So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! [13] No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

[14] Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. [15] I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. [16] Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? [17] Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

[18] Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? [19] Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? [20] No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. [21] You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. [22] Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

FREE TO DO ANYTHING?

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1 "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is constructive. [24] Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

[25] Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, [26] for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." [27] If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. [28] But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake— [29] the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? [30] If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?

[31] So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. [32] Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— [33] even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. [11:1] Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

7.) Some of the Corinthians were claiming that "Everything is permissible…" What guardrails does Paul put on a believer's freedom?

8.) Let's apply Paul's advice to some hypothetical situations:

- Preparing the menu when you invite your friend, who is a convert from Islam, over for dinner.

- Having alcohol at a church function.

- Only worshiping online when you have the opportunity and capability to worship in-person.

- Exclusively using a praise band (soloist, electric guitars, keyboard, drums, etc.) for worship.

CONCLUSION

How has this lesson made you re-evaluate your rights and freedoms? What are some things you are free to do that bring you joy each day? List them, and then take a moment to thank God for the freedom to enjoy all of his good gifts!