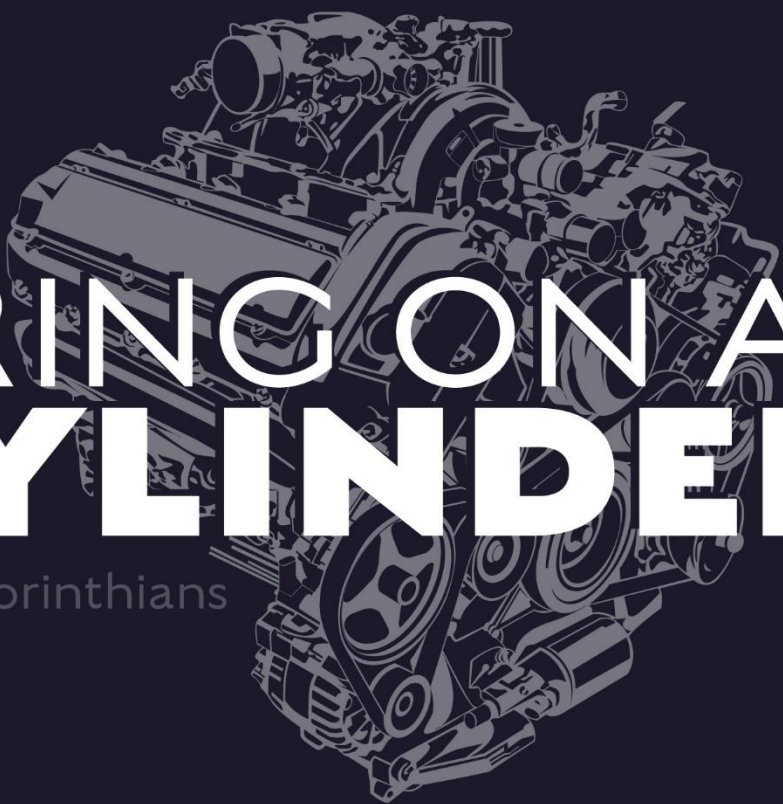




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FIRING ON ALL CYLINDERS

I Corinthians

SMALL GROUP LESSONS

PACKET 5

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Right Premise, Wrong Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Slogans. Taglines. Catchphrases. We see them, hear them, use them all the time. From popular brands to politicians, from protestors to pastors, slogans are everywhere. They are powerful, easy to remember ways to communicate an idea, a truth, a point of view. Repeated often enough they become engrained in our minds. In fact, they often become so much a part of the way that we see the world that we don't even think of them as something true or false, they are simply the way the world is.

The problem, of course, is "If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it." That quote is usually attributed to Joseph Goebbels, the infamous head of the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda. Note the irony here: he probably never said it. The idea of a "big lie" was used by Hitler and by Goebbels himself in their discussions of their enemies but probably not about their own strategies. It turns out, as C.S. Lewis writes in *The Last Battle*, "By mixing a little truth with it they had made their lie far stronger."¹ That can definitely be true for the easily recognizable slogans we regularly hear.

That is the very premise of *The Last Battle*: a character lies, using truths or references to the truth, and slowly people are deceived and find themselves doing all sorts of things that they would never have imagined before. But such twisting of the truth need not have such obvious ill intent. How many of us have heard that it takes 10,000 hours to become an expert in a given field? Malcom Gladwell popularized this idea in his book *Outliers*. Many of us believe what he says because it sounds so plausible. There is a certain amount of sense to it—if you want to get good at something, you have to put in the time. Gladwell bases his thesis on the research of Anders Ericsson who studied violinists in Berlin and who himself argues that Gladwell's "rule is an oversimplification, and in many ways, an incorrect interpretation of his research." There are numerous issues with Gladwell's take, including focusing solely on the amount, not quality of practice.² Gladwell takes something true and comes to a false, or at least misleading conclusion.

And that is exactly where we find ourselves in 1 Corinthians 8—slogans with an element of truth that lead to radically wrong conclusions.

¹ C S Lewis, *The Last Battle*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1984), p. 116.

² Michael Miller, *The Great Practice Myth: Debunking the 10,000 Hour Rule*, <https://www.6seconds.org/2022/06/20/10000-hour-rule/> accessed 10/18/2024.

BREAK THE ICE

Can you think of any slogans or “big lies” that seem plausible on the surface but don’t hold up well under scrutiny? Why do you think they are so easy to fall for?

READ IT

Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

EXPLORE IT

1. What is the main issue for this passage?
2. What does Paul contrast in verses 1-3?
3. What does Paul say about idols (v. 4)?
4. What has happened to some recent converts (v.7)?
5. What is Paul’s warning to those eating? (vv. 9-12)?

APPLY IT

Food offered to idols. Not exactly a live issue for most of us in the 21st century (though there are still places and cultures around the world where this is a real concern). It is easy for us to breeze past a passage like this: “doesn’t apply, let’s move to chapter 9.” But there is more going on here than a specific issue that we modern Christians don’t need to deal with. The issue of eating food sacrificed to idols in Corinth exposes serious problems in Corinth. Problems of knowledge, of cultural pressures, and of lack of awareness of how our own actions can have serious repercussions for others. It also offers the opportunity to see how our theology connects to the way that we live. Chapter 8 introduces Paul’s response to a Corinthian question (“now concerning” in verse 1 is the same way he begins to answer their question in 7:1). Paul’s response is actually a long and complex argument that extends all the way to 11:1. While chapter 9 and the first half of chapter 10 seem unrelated at first glance, they actually continue Paul’s correction of the Corinthians’ faulty reasoning. It is only when we take this entire section together that we get a complete picture of Paul’s teaching.

Eating food sacrificed to idols was not unusual in the ancient world. It was actually quite common. There were many “gods” and many temples in and around Corinth. Animal sacrifices were a regular part of religious observance. Part of the sacrifice would be given as a burnt offering, part would be eaten by the priests, part would be used for meals in temple “restaurants” (it seems that almost all temples included these), and some would have been sold in the markets (more on this in chapter 10). It is the temple restaurant that is mostly in view in chapter 8 (see v.10). These temple restaurants were more than merely places to eat (inns and the like did exist) or meeting places (like banquet halls). While they were used in this way to celebrate things like birthdays and weddings, there was always a religious as well as social connection to the god of the temple. Archeologists have found invitations to events at these restaurants which invoke the name of the god. The social pressures to participate in such events could be enormous and it is understandable that many want to find out if it was ok or to justify their participation. This was not just an issue in Corinth. The Jerusalem council (Acts 15), which dealt specifically with requirements for Gentiles who were being converted, listed abstaining from food sacrificed to idols first among the prohibited practices. This council happened before the church in Corinth was planted.

Throughout 1 Corinthians, we have seen that the Corinthian believers both value wisdom (“knowledge” v. 1) and that they think they have it. Most scholars agree that Paul recites several slogans or rhetorical phrases the Corinthians use to build a theological case for why they should be able to eat this food. (Though there are differences in what is counted as Paul’s quotation.) You can see these phrases in quotes in verse 1 and 4:

- “all of us possess knowledge.” (v.1)
- “an idol has no real existence,” (v. 4)
- “there is no God but one.” (v.4)

The question is whether Paul agrees with the Corinthians in regard to the first question, he certainly does in the cases of the second and third.

6. **While eating food sacrificed to idols is not a live issue for most people today, can you think of any areas which may have similar concerns or consequences to the scenario Paul lays out in this chapter?**

7. Do you think that Paul's instruction in chapter 8 contradicts the Jerusalem council? Why or why not?

8. Do you think that Paul agrees with the Corinthians assessment that they all have knowledge? Why or Why not? (remember what Paul said to them in 2:6-3:4).

Considering where Paul is headed in this chapter and in 10:14-22, as well as the prohibitions of Acts 15, it is probably wise to move where the quotes are at. Paul Gardner makes a compelling case that "we know that" in both v. 1 and v. 4 are a part of Paul's reciting of the Corinthian position.³ This makes great sense of both the flow of the book (see previous question) and the flow of this argument. It also resolves any perceived contradiction between Paul and the Jerusalem council. The Corinthians believe that they have a solution to their problem, but Paul is slowly building the case that they haven't thought all of this through.

Knowledge, as they have pursued it, has not gotten the Corinthian church as far as they had thought. From factions to immorality, lawsuits to church discipline and marriage, the Corinthian believers have shown that their knowledge has often been self-centered and has neglected love. Verses 1-3 both show the deficiencies of their "knowledge" and give a reminder of the connection between knowledge and love.

9. Do you naturally feel more drawn to knowledge or to love? Why?

³ Gardner, Paul. *1 Corinthians* Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids, Michigan : Zondervan, 2018), p. 366, 371.

10. Why do you think knowledge has a tendency to “puff up”?

11. How would you rewrite the point Paul is making in verse 2 in your own words?

Verse 3 sets the stage to move from the statement Paul doesn’t agree with to the ones he does. Loving God leads to or means that God *knows* the person. It is not the Corinthians’ knowledge that shows their faith and connection to God but their love. Gardner states:

Elsewhere Paul refers to love as one of the “fruits” of the spirit (Gal 5:22), and unlike the gifts, love lasts into all eternity (1 Cor 13:8, 13). Paul’s emphasis on the centrality of love builds to its exciting climax in chapter 13, but it is important to remember in this chapter, as Paul addresses idolatry and its associated sacrifices and meals, that the authenticating function of “loving God” appears in the first of the Ten Commandments, which is actually a command against idolatry. “You shall have no other gods before me. . . . I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments (Deut. 5:7-10 ESV; cf. Exod 20:2-6; Deut 7:1-10).⁴

So the ideas of loving and knowing God have been connected to the issue of idolatry from the very giving of the Law. Idolatry was, in fact, the predominant and recurring sin of Israel in the Old Testament. Paul, as a Jew and a former Pharisee not only knows this, but he knows just how serious the problem of idolatry was (and remained). The Corinthians’ slogan seen in verse 4 combines two bedrock Jewish beliefs—there is only one God and idols are nothing, beliefs that the entire nation, however, would constantly struggle with.

The Shema, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” (Deut. 6:4-5) would become and remains the central prayer of the Jews, encapsulating the first command. Interestingly, at the end of his life, God tells Moses that after the people enter the Promised Land they will forsake God and follow after foreign gods (Deut. 31:16-18). God then tells Moses to write a song and teach it to the people as a witness against them in that time. Deuteronomy 32 records the song which includes the following:

⁴ IBID. 370.

“But Jeshurun [Israel] grew fat, and kicked;
 you grew fat, stout, and sleek;
 then he forsook God who made him
 and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation.
 16 They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods;
 with abominations they provoked him to anger.
 17 They sacrificed to demons that were no gods,
 to gods they had never known,
 to new gods that had come recently,
 whom your fathers had never dreaded.
 18 You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you,
 and you forgot the God who gave you birth.
 . . .
 21 They have made me jealous with what is no god;
 they have provoked me to anger with their idols.

The Corinthians are completely correct in their theology but come to precisely the wrong conclusion about their ability to eat this food. True there is only one God. True, the idols are nothing. But as Paul will deal with later in 10:14-22 and as Deuteronomy 32:17, the fact that the idols are nothing and that those “gods” are nothing does not mean that there is no spiritual reality at work. Demons masquerade as gods and participation in the sacrifices associated with them makes one a participant with those demons (1 Cor. 10:19-20).

So loving and being known by God is in direct opposition to participation with idols even though, as the Corinthians rightly understood, the idols themselves are nothing. Paul continues by acknowledging that both in heaven and on earth there are many “so-called” gods and lords. (Some think that verses 5-6 refer not only to the Greek and Roman pantheons and mystery religions but also the fact that increasingly the Roman emperors were worshiped as gods. This would have been an especially potent issue in Corinth which had been rebuilt as a Roman city). Paul contrasts these “gods” and “lords” with the one God and one Lord, identifying God as the Father and source of all and Jesus, the opposite of a Roman lord or emperor in all earthly senses, as the very means by which the Father both creates and reconciles us to himself.

12. How should the fact that the Corinthians had some aspects of their theology so correct yet came to such problematic conclusions affect us as we seek to live out our faith?

13. Paul shows that the idea of one God is both true and a marker of Christian identity “for us” v. 6 shows that we are known by God. How does this knowledge impact the things that we involve ourselves in?
14. The Israelites had such prohibitions against idolatry yet kept falling into the same trap, showing the pull of idolatry. How can we fall into similar traps today even if we don’t believe in other “gods”?

Not all of the Corinthian believers had the same “knowledge.” Indeed, Paul gives an illustration, perhaps hypothetical but definitely plausible, of a rather new Gentile convert who had formerly participated in idol worship and sacrifices. Those people, with weaker consciences, become ruined or defiled because they see some other Christians eating at the temple. A few notes are important. At the time of Paul, the term conscience was only just beginning to take on the idea of a moral guide. It was used far more often (and this makes sense given the context) of self-awareness. Second, this scenario is not the same as the “strong” and the “weak” of Romans 14 and 15. The situations are different and here the “weak” are not corrected or in any way reprimanded by Paul. These are not people with overactive consciences in the way we think of the term. They are not the person who is offended by participation in certain activities. Rather, they are people who would be likely to be pulled back into their idolatrous ways.

15. What are some ways in which our actions, or insistence on our rights, can lead fellow Christians to stumble and compromise?

16. How does Paul's instruction in verses 7-13 fly in the face of contemporary Western culture's insistence on our rights? How should we approach our responsibility of love toward our brothers and sisters in light of this?

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Free of Charge

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 9:1-18

“Is Paul really an apostle? Does he really have authority?”

That seems to be the argument nattering up from some of the Corinthians. “A real apostle would expect the church to support him,” they seem to be thinking. “Paul’s not doing that. Case closed.”

So, in the first half of this chapter Paul gives his *“defense to those who sit in judgment”* on him (verse 3). **He asserts his rights to be supported, just as the other apostles are.** *“Don’t we have the right to food and drink? 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?”* (verse 5).

But, Paul says, even though he and Barnabas (his missionary companion) have the authority to expect this kind of support from the church, **“We did not use this right”** (verse 12). Rather, he made it his goal to offer the gospel *“free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it”* (verse 18). As one of the commentators says, **he was committed to offering the “free” gospel “free of charge.”** He didn’t want to do anything that would *“hinder the gospel of Christ”* (verse 12).

But in the midst of this explanation, Paul makes something else clear. **He says he himself can’t take any glory for preaching the gospel,** as if he had voluntarily chosen to enter into this sacrificial service at his own initiative. No. **Rather, he is under divine compulsion.** He wasn’t a volunteer. He was drafted by the Lord God Almighty. If he’d signed on voluntarily, he might have deserved some reward. But he hadn’t. The Lord called him irresistibly into service. Therefore, when he preaches, he is *“simply discharging the trust”* that was committed to him (verse 17).

Yes, he has the rights of an apostle. But there’s no cause for boasting. **He has a calling on his life that cannot be ignored.**

Again, **the blinding glare of the Damascus Road** must be in Paul’s mind as he writes these words. He’d been arrested by the Lord himself, and absolutely turned in a new direction. He’d been following his own directives, but now he was decisively diverted into service to Christ, his Lord. Oh, there was joy in that commitment (*“Christ’s love compels us,”* he will later tell these same Corinthians in 2 Cor. 5:14), but he couldn’t take credit for the change – not in the least. **The Risen Lord Jesus had given him marching orders.**

And what about us? None of us have the status of apostle, but do we tend to pat ourselves on the back when we engage in real ministry? Do we find ourselves boasting, at least internally, when we do kingdom work? Especially if it inconveniences us? Especially if it calls for sacrifice and toil and ongoing expenditure of time and energy?

Instead, may we joyfully embrace Paul’s own word: “compelled.” Paul was *“compelled”* to preach – that was his particular calling. What’s yours? The Risen Christ is not just Lord of that road leading into Damascus. **He’s equally Lord of any path we find ourselves traveling.** Will we submit to his lordship, seeing ourselves not as volunteers who deserve compensation, but rather as divine recruits who are compelled into service? That’s our calling. That’s our joy.⁵

⁵ Devotional by Tim MacIntosh found @ <https://www.timmacintosh.com/post/1-corinthians-9-1-18>

BREAK THE ICE

Besides the gift of salvation, what is the best thing you have ever received for free?

READ IT

Read 1 Corinthians 9:1-18

EXPLORE IT

1. In 1 Corinthians 9:1-2, how does Paul establish his authority and rights as an apostle?
2. What are some examples Paul gives in verses 7-10 to illustrate his right to receive support?
3. According to verse 12, why does Paul choose not to exercise his right to financial support?
4. In verses 15-18, what is Paul's attitude toward preaching the gospel, even without compensation?

Ronald F. Hock has explained that within this cultural setting there was an ongoing debate about the appropriate means of economic support for a philosopher. Four basic models were advocated, each with its distinctive drawbacks.

- The philosopher could charge fees for his teaching, as the Sophists did; they were often accused of greed and manipulating their pupils.
- Alternatively, the philosopher could be supported by a wealthy patron, as the “resident intellectual” in the patron’s household, often with the task of educating the family’s children; such a role entailed an obvious loss of independence, for the philosopher would be tied to the purse strings of the patron.
- A third option, notoriously practiced by the Cynics, was to beg on the streets; for obvious reasons this was widely perceived as eccentric and demeaning.
- The final option was for the philosopher to work at a trade in order to support himself; this had the disadvantages of low social status and of consuming time and energy for mundane matters. At least, however, working for a living preserved the philosopher’s independence from control by other people.⁷

8. What might be the advantages of a congregation collectively providing for their pastor, and how could this model encourage mutual accountability and shared responsibility?

9. What are the benefits and challenges of a pastor working part-time or supporting themselves through a trade, as Paul did?

⁷ <https://www.bibleoutlines.com/wp-content/uploads/1corinthians.pdf>

Paul begins his rhetorical barrage in verse one with 4 rapid-fire questions all demanding a yes answer.

- 1) “Am I not free?” Yes! I am free in Christ (Gal. 5:1) as much as anyone.
- 2) “Am I not an apostle?” Yes, called by Christ on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:1-19; also Gal. 1:11-24).
- 3) “Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” Yes!
- 4) “Are you not my work in the Lord?” Yes! I planted the church in Corinth (Acts 18:17; 1 Cor. 3:6).

Verse two reinforces this last point, “If I am not an apostle to others [of course I am to them too], at least I am to you, because you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.” You authenticate and prove and validate my work and ministry in the Lord.⁸

10. In what ways did Paul’s direct impact on the spiritual lives of the Corinthians demonstrate the importance of supporting his ministry and leadership?

11. How does our support for church leaders today reflect the priority we place on spiritual growth and development within our church?

⁸ <https://www.danielakin.com/the-gospel-above-all-1-corinthians-91-18/>

Everyday experience teaches us that a **workman** deserves some reward for his labors. If a man is drafted to be a **soldier**, the government pays his wages and provides a certain amount of supplies for him. **The man who plants** a vineyard gets to eat the fruit, just as **the shepherd or herdsman** has the right to use the milk from the animals. Perhaps in the back of his mind, Paul was comparing the church to an army, a vineyard, and a flock. As an apostle, Paul was in the very front line of the battle. He had already compared the church at Corinth to a cultivated field (1 Cor. 3:6–9), and the Lord Himself had used the image of the vine and branches (John 15) as well as the flock (John 10). The lesson was clear: **The Christian worker** has the right to expect benefits for his labors. If this is true in the “secular” realm, it is also true in the spiritual realm.⁹

12. Paul mentions four occupations (vs. 7) that receive a return on their investment and effort: the workman, the soldier, the vinedresser, and the shepherd. In what ways have you seen or heard that ministry resembles each of these roles?

13. If it is the congregation’s responsibility to provide for church leaders, what does it mean for those who choose not to give? How might this impact the ministry’s ability to care for both its leaders and its members?

⁹ Warren Wiersbe: Be Wise (1 Corinthians): Discern the Difference Between Man's Knowledge and God's Wisdom. Page 111.

- 14. What challenges might a church face in its mission and ability to serve the broader congregation if it prioritizes financial support for its leaders to an excessive degree?**

Paul concludes this section with one final rhetorical question that informs us he does indeed have a reward, just not a monetary one. He asks, “What then is my reward?” Answer: “To preach the gospel and offer it free of charge and not make full use of my rights in the gospel.” To preach the gospel free of charge is his boast (v. 15) and his reward (vv. 17–18). The Message paraphrases: “So am I getting anything out of it? Yes, as a matter of fact: the pleasure of proclaiming the Message at no cost to you. You don’t even have to pay my expenses!”

At Corinth, for the sake of the gospel, Paul felt it was best to serve and preach without financial compensation. It was a decision he made for the spiritual benefit of others. And he was glad to do it. The Corinthians, therefore, would be well served to follow his example regarding eating food sacrificed to idols (chs. 8–10). Not causing a brother or sister to stumble will always trump my rights. Love demands it. The gospel above all demands it too.¹⁰

- 15. While all believers in a local church are called to give financially to support the work, what practical ways can we also show love, care, and support to those who look after us spiritually? Why might these forms of support be just as important as financial contributions?**

¹⁰ <https://www.danielakin.com/the-gospel-above-all-1-corinthians-91-18/>

- 16. With money aside, what motivates those who dedicate themselves to serving God and His church day in and day out? What do they gain from their commitment?**

Paul's actions reflect a mature understanding of Christian liberty—not as a means of self-indulgence but as an opportunity to love and serve others.

This self-sacrificial approach is grounded in Paul's commitment to the gospel. By refraining from asserting his rights, he exemplifies how our choices should reflect Christ's love and strengthen others' faith. Paul reminds us that while "all things are lawful," not all are helpful or build up the community (1 Cor. 10:23-24). His goal is not merely personal freedom but the growth and encouragement of fellow believers.

Paul's example challenges us to view freedom through the lens of love. Sometimes, this means limiting our preferences for the benefit of others, especially when doing so helps them in their spiritual journey. As followers of Christ, we're called to put the gospel above all, ensuring that our actions contribute positively to each other's faith, even if it involves personal sacrifice.¹¹

- 17. Paul willingly gave up his rights for the spiritual benefit of others. What personal rights or preferences might you need to set aside to avoid causing another believer to stumble?**

How does making these sacrifices reveal our commitment to placing the gospel above all else?

¹¹ Studies were compiled and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal (Sugar Grove Campus Pastor)



Winning More by Giving Up

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 9:19-27

[In our cultural moment], many questions have to be addressed before folks can even begin to take Christianity seriously. How do you reconcile Christianity and science? A loving God with pain, Hell, and the terrible track record of the church? Are the Bible and the resurrection of Jesus historically credible? What do we make of Christianity's exclusive claims in a relativistic world? What impact does the gospel have on civil society in a pluralistic one—on politics, economics, peacemaking, neighboring, and the public sphere? These are the issues that need to be addressed winsomely and apologetically; otherwise people will have difficulty taking Christianity seriously. Unless these are addressed, many things Christians say and do, no matter how well intentioned, are simply exercises in “aimless running” and “beating the air” (v. 26). Are we thinking deeply about them, and are we listening and learning to communicate in ways people can understand? It's tough to do this without help. Tim Keller's *The Reason for God* can be very useful. Not only does he raise a lot of the right issues, but he also speaks in ways people can understand.

Now it's true that we don't have to do any of this. We're free not to. We're free to keep doing business as usual. An athlete doesn't have to subject herself to rigorous training. She's free to reach for that slice of cake instead of an apple or to skip that morning session for an extra hour of sleep. But she doesn't because there's something that's more important, something worth the discipline. The same is true with our witness. Sure, we're free to do it on our terms. We're free to ignore the deepest questions of our neighbors and to speak in ways that are easier for us. But we don't because there's something that's more important, something worth curbing our freedom for.

And that's love. If a Christian is unwilling to discipline himself then something has gone terribly awry. It means that he might have something that might look like love but is really just sentiment cloaked in a thin veneer. This was the thing that Paul fought with all of his might to avoid. He says in verse 27, “But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” The word translated “disqualified” literally means “to be shown counterfeit.” And this is precisely what will become of our love if we're not willing to do the hard work of training ourselves. Our love will be shown counterfeit, a charade, a façade if we don't discipline ourselves to stay in.¹²

¹² Hughes, Kent R., Um, Stephen T., 1 Corinthians: The Word of the Cross (Preaching the Word) Article: An Effective Witness (1 Corinthians 9:19–27) Crossway. 2015.

BREAK THE ICE

Cross-cultural experiences can be a lot of fun! Share a time you visited another country or communicated across a language barrier. How did you make it work?

READ IT

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-27

EXPLORE IT

1. Why did Paul make himself a servant of all? (v.19)
2. How many times does Paul use the word “win” in our passage? (v. 19-27)
3. Paul tells us to “run” like the athlete who will finish in which place? (v. 24)
4. What kind of prize will Christians receive? (v. 25)
5. What two things does Paul do with his body as he keeps his eyes on the prize? (v. 27)

APPLY IT

Win More by Serving All (9:19-23)

As the passage moves into its next section (9:19–23), it is the word “free” that stands out with dramatic emphasis. Paul is “free” (ελεύθερος), and yet now he will demonstrate from personal examples how he has been prepared to relinquish this freedom and his “rights” so that more people may be won for Christ. Since people come to faith through the preaching of the gospel, Paul uses examples of different groups of people he has worked among and for whom he has been prepared to sacrifice his rights. After the introduction in v.19, which looks both backward and forward, Paul will talk specifically about his work among the Jews (v. 20), among the Gentiles (v. 21), and among the “weak” (v. 22). Verse 23 then reminds his readers of his purpose in relinquishing his rights. It is all “for the sake of the gospel.”¹³

6. What barriers have been overcome to bring the gospel from the resurrected Jesus in the first century AD to you today? See if you can think of three or four.

7. What have you given up or sacrificed in order to better minister to someone?

8. Paul sounds willing to do just about anything to help advance the gospel of Christ. What kind of flexibility for the gospel is helpful?

What kind of flexibility is unhelpful?

¹³ Gardner, Paul. 1 Corinthians (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament). Zondervan. 2018.

Paul has used the word “weak” to describe a people who have been made to feel inferior because they are not exercising certain rights related to gifts of the Spirit, such as wisdom or knowledge. These people are looked down upon by the elitists or “knowers” and so have been made to feel weak. Yet, in God’s eyes the so-called “weak” belong to him even without these (merely) human markers, and Paul can happily identify with that! ...Therefore, the word “weak” should not be seen as a derogatory term or even a description of a people who are basically inadequate in one way or another.¹⁴

9. How can we actively combat marginalizing a fellow believer who lacks worldly status?

10. How can you be all things to the people in your spheres of influence?

11. What bridges are you willing to cross to serve others at home, at church, and at work or school?

¹⁴ Ibid.

What Athletes Teach Us about Self-Discipline (9:24-25)

As today, there were numerous athletic competitions in Paul's day. In the Roman Empire there were both international and local "games." Among the better known were the Isthmian Games held in the city of Corinth, which would have included running and boxing and other sports. Murphy-O'Connor suggests that these games ranked below the Olympic games but above the games at Delphi and Nemea. They were a huge event held every two years, and Paul may have been in Corinth during one of these festivals since they took place in AD 49 and 51. Like the modern Olympic Games, though on a much smaller scale, wealthy patrons would sponsor the games at huge expense, even giving free food and drink to the crowds. The games also brought in a great deal of money for the local economy, as visitors poured into the city from all over.

Paul's use of the analogy of running a race is designed to make one simple point: "run" for the prize. In v. 24 the "runners" are the image Paul uses for all the people in the church. They are running toward a "prize" and should be running in a way designed to obtain it. They are to remember that there is only "one prize." This, of course, does not mean that only one Christian will ever receive a prize. Rather, the one prize is the inheritance of eschatological glory and is attained by all who complete the race (cf. 1 Thess 2:19). This means learning from the athlete (v. 25), whom Paul describes as exercising self-control in all things.¹⁵

12. What are some practices you know are needed to excel at a sport that might also show up in our Christian walk?

13. What does running the race of the Christian life in order to win the prize look like?

14. Is there any part of the 'Christian race' you feel you are doing half-heartedly?

¹⁵ Ibid.

Paul is still addressing the rights that he has given up and the rights that the elitists should be content to give up. Not to give these things up for the sake of the gospel may lead to a forfeiture of the race itself. Exercising self-control (ἐγκρατεῦομαι) as an athlete will be hard and sacrificial work. Yet athletes will put themselves through great deprivations and painful practice simply to receive a “perishable crown” of celery, [what the wreaths given to athletes were made of]! How much more should “we” (Paul and the Corinthians) be prepared to exercise this self-control in restricting “rights,” whether legitimate or not, for the sake of the imperishable prize.

- 15. We gain so much when we become a forgiven follower of Jesus. Why should this truth help us hold our “rights” with an open palm?**

Paul’s Example of Self-Discipline (9:26-27)

We have already seen at work in Paul’s life the principle of sacrificing one’s rights, especially in his consenting to have Timothy circumcised so as not to scandalize the Jews. We saw it also in his willingness to quote Greek poets in Athens at the Areopagus, but then to reason from the Scriptures when he visited Jewish synagogues. Again and again, Paul makes concessions to others for the sake of the gospel—not concessions striking at the heart of the gospel (he refused to circumcise Titus, for instance) but concessions preventing upfront revulsion. If the world recoils from him, Paul wants such revulsion to be because of the message of Christ and him crucified, not because Paul has insisted on some “right” of his own.¹⁶

- 16. James 1:12 says, “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.” How would you use that verse to encourage a fellow Christian living faithfully despite challenges?**

- 17. Write a two or three sentence prayer to God asking Him what you can give up to win others, and for the power to take that bold step of faith.**

¹⁶ Gilbert, Greg. *ESV Story of Redemption Bible: A Journey through the Unfolding Promises of God*. Crossway. 2018. Studies were compiled and questions were written by Pastor David Wood (Aurora Campus Pastor)



Can't Have It Both Ways!

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 10:1-22

The need to run the race and compete well to receive the prize functions as a transition to 10:1–13, where Paul warns the Corinthians about the danger of apostasy. Parallels are drawn between the experience of Israel and the church of Jesus Christ, and a litany of Israel's sins are noted so as to admonish the church not to fall as Israel did. Because of its defection, Israel did not enter the land of promise, so the Corinthians are admonished in order that they will receive the eschatological award on the day of judgment. The section ends with a word of comfort (10:13), reminding believers that God will faithfully keep from apostasy those who belong to him.

The main point Paul is driving towards surfaces in 10:14–22: the Corinthians must flee idolatry, for idolatry will lead to final judgment. Those who partake of the body and blood of Christ share in the benefits of what he has accomplished, just as those who eat the sacrifices benefit from what is offered on the altar. Paul does not revoke what he said about idols being nonentities, yet the situation is deeper than meets the eye. As we saw in chapter 8, the knowers believed that eating in an idol's temple was permissible since idols do not exist. Even though idols have no existence, Paul instructs the Corinthians that there are demonic powers behind the idols; hence if they partake of food in the temples of idols, they share with demons. There can be no compromise here: one cannot eat at the Lord's table and the table of demons. If the Corinthians go down that road, they will provoke the Lord to jealousy and face his judgment as Israel did in the wilderness.¹⁷

BREAK THE ICE

Write a brief “proverb” based on a lesson you’ve learned from the past.

¹⁷ Schreiner, Thomas R.. 1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Book 7) (pp. 267-268). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

READ IT

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-22

EXPLORE IT

1. What examples from Israel's history does Paul use in verses 1-5 to illustrate his point?
2. According to verses 6-10, what specific sins did the Israelites commit that led to their punishment?
3. How does Paul describe the purpose of these Old Testament examples in verses 6 and 11?
4. What warning does Paul give to the Corinthians in verse 12?
5. What does Paul say about the nature of temptation and God's faithfulness in verses 13?
6. In verses 16-22, how does Paul connect a believer's participation in Lord's Supper with the issue of food sacrificed to idols?

APPLY IT

Wisdom from the Wilderness (1-11)

Israel had been delivered from Egypt by the power of God, just as the Christian believer has been redeemed from sin. Israel was identified with Moses in their Red Sea “baptism,” just as the Corinthians had been identified with Christ in their Christian baptism. Israel ate the manna from heaven and drank the water God provided, just as Christians nourish themselves on the spiritual sustenance God supplies (John 6:63, 68; 7:37–39). However, these spiritual privileges did not prevent the Jews from falling into sin. There are dangers to maturity as well as to immaturity, and one of them is overconfidence. When we think we are strong, we discover that we are weak.

We can hear some of the “strong” Corinthians asking, “But what does that have to do with us?” Paul then pointed out that the Corinthian church was guilty of the same sins that the Jews committed. Because of their lust for evil things, the Corinthians were guilty of immorality (1 Cor. 6), idolatry (1 Cor. 8; 10), and murmuring against God (2 Cor. 12:20–21). Like the nation of Israel, they were tempting God and just “daring Him” to act.¹⁸

7. What are some practical lessons we can learn from Israel’s example in this passage?

8. Thinking of our liberties and freedom in Christ, how can we be susceptible to misunderstand and misapply these liberties?

¹⁸ Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Wise (1 Corinthians): Discern the Difference Between Man's Knowledge and God's Wisdom (The BE Series Commentary) (p. 101-102). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

We must not think that because the Jews were under the law that their sins were worse than ours and therefore dealt with more severely. Sin in the church today is far more serious, because we have Israel's example to learn from, and we are living "at the end of the ages." To sin against the law is one thing; to sin against grace is quite something else.¹⁹

9. Why are Christians today inclined to abuse God's grace?

10. Considering the example of Israel's past, what do you think Paul is concerned might happen if the Corinthians stay on their current course?

This kind of sin is serious and God must judge it. Not only did some of these rebels immediately die (1 Cor. 11:29–31), but those who remained were not permitted to enter the Promised Land. They were saved from Egypt but were not privileged to claim their rich inheritance. Paul was not suggesting that his readers might lose their salvation, but he was afraid that some of them would be "castaways" (1 Cor. 9:27), disapproved of God and unable to receive any reward.²⁰

11. In light of the consequences faced by Israel, how should we approach the seriousness of sin in our own lives?

¹⁹ Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Wise (1 Corinthians): Discern the Difference Between Man's Knowledge and God's Wisdom (The BE Series Commentary) (p. 103). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

²⁰ Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Wise (1 Corinthians): Discern the Difference Between Man's Knowledge and God's Wisdom (The BE Series Commentary) (p. 103). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

Watch your Step (12-13)

The Corinthians, then, should learn valuable lessons from the Hebrews, and so should we. However, there is something unique about our situation. Since the coming of Jesus Christ, a new age has dawned. We are among those “on whom the ends of the ages have come.” The last days have been inaugurated with the first coming of Christ. But the consummation or climax awaits his return (Rev 19:11-21). Gardner writes, “This is the age toward which all history and all God’s activities with his people have been leading” (1 Corinthians, 437). In that light we need to heed the warning of verse 12—“So, whoever thinks he stands must be careful not to fall.” The Message has a colorful paraphrase: “Don’t be so naïve and self-confident. You’re not exempt. You could fall flat on your face as easily as anyone else.” Pride is always a problem for the people of God. But a know-it-all posture is foolish and dangerous. Be careful. Watch out! God is the one who keeps you standing. You are incapable of doing that yourself. So, remember Proverbs 16:18 (NIV): “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”²¹

12. How can pride cloud our ability to recognize areas in our lives where we might be falling short or in need of correction?

13. What might it look like for pride to be disguised as Christian maturity?

²¹ Akin, Dr. Daniel L.; Merritt, James. Exalting Jesus in 1 Corinthians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 199). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Verse 13 confirms that promise and warning work together to strengthen the Corinthians as they run the race to the end (1 Cor. 9:24–27). Paul warns them against presumption, but he then assures them of God’s faithfulness. The temptation they are facing is not atypical or extraordinary, but accords with the experience of all people everywhere (cf. Jas 1:13–14). In such temptations, particularly the temptation to apostatize – which is here represented by eating food offered to idols – God is faithful. He does not abandon his people in the midst of temptations to sin, even if the temptation is quite strong in that the Corinthians would be cut off from society if they did not accept invitations to the temples of false gods.²²

14. How do we deal with the tension between personal ability and agency in fighting temptation and God’s provision in fighting temptation?

15. How have you experienced God providing a way out in times of temptation?

16. How can we learn to recognize and respond to God’s provision in moments of temptation?

²² Schreiner, Thomas R.. 1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Book 7) (p. 278). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

Flee Idolatry (14-22)

In the Lord's Supper believers participate in and enjoy the benefits of Christ's broken body and shed blood. At the same time, the unity of the church is represented in the Eucharist since believers share the one loaf. Thus the Lord's Supper reminds believers both of their redemption in Christ and of their solidarity with one another. We also see from this text that the relationship between idols and demons is complex.

- On the one hand, idols are nonentities (cf. Ps. 96:5; Jer. 10:11). Idols are completely ineffectual and cannot speak, see, hear, smell, feel or walk (Ps. 115:4-7).
- On the other hand, demonic powers are also present where there is idolatry; thus believers cannot eat in the temples of idols and escape unscathed.

We also see the influence of Deuteronomy 32 with respect to the theme of jealousy. Those who sacrifice to demons provoke God to jealousy (Deut. 32:16-17, 21). Such jealousy will lead to judgment and destruction, for the Lord does not, and cannot, tolerate idolatry.²³

- 17. While idol worship and food sacrificed to idols may not be part of our daily lives, what are some modern forms of idolatry that you need to be aware of in your own life?**

What steps will you take to address these areas and move forward in faithfulness?

- 18. Paul calls believers to avoid participating in idolatrous ceremonies ("You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons"). What are some areas today where Christians would need to consider their involvement in idolatrous or sinful practices?**

²³ Schreiner, Thomas R.. 1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Book 7) (pp. 285-286). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

“Are we stronger than he?” (1 Cor. 10:22) is directed at the strong Christian who was sure he could enjoy his liberty in the pagan temple and not be harmed. “You may be stronger than your weaker brother,” Paul intimated, “but you are not stronger than God!” It is dangerous to play with sin and tempt God.²⁴

- 19. Considering the strong warning in Hebrews 10:26-31, if we are covered by grace, why would we have any concern about God’s judgment and discipline being directed toward us?**

²⁴ Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Wise (1 Corinthians): Discern the Difference Between Man's Knowledge and God's Wisdom (The BE Series Commentary) (p. 104). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

Studies were compiled and questions were written by Pastor Jeremy Anderson (Indian Creek Campus Pastor)



A Matter of Conscience

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

We're moving on to the concluding section of Paul's extended exhortations against idolatry. Specifically, if you will recall, Paul has been addressing the question that was raised in chapter 8 about whether Christians can eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols. Pagans would sacrifice meat and dedicate it to pagan gods during their celebrations in the temple in Corinth, and then they would sell the leftover meat in the Corinthians' markets.

And so it is a simple question, "can Christians eat the meat?" However, the answer is not quite so simple, as we have seen. Some people, we might call them the Liberty party, answer the question in the clear affirmative.

Idols are nothing, and there is no real God but the God of the bible, so why wouldn't we eat the meat?

But another party, we might call them the legal party, would answer the question in the negative. Their reasons for answering in the negative come from various places, and various levels of Christian maturity. Some, who wanted to stay away from the sins of their pagan past, concluded that of course it would be sin to eat the meat. Others might have argued that eating the meat is participation with pagan worship, so of course it would be sinful.

So where does that leave us? Which is it, Paul? Is it liberty, or is it license? Is it freedom, or is it regulation?

Thankfully, Paul refuses to give us a simplistic answer. He refuses to give what many people have desired from me in this sermon series, and that is, a series of clear, categorical rules. You can do this, but not that. That's what would be easiest for us, because we all like clear, black and white rules.

But what Paul does, is he leaves room for faith, and for the Christian conscience, and for love. He gives us principles to work from, rather than precepts to apply legally. And in doing so, he gives us a principled framework that allows us to apply his logic to all manner of issues, not merely to the ethical dilemma before us regarding meat sacrificed to idols.

He gives us principles from which we can reason through whatever gray areas we face. I say gray areas because this life is full of decisions that aren't necessarily addressed in scripture. And in those cases, we must use our sanctified reason and Christian principles to make the proper choice.²⁵

BREAK THE ICE

What is the most exotic food you have ever eaten?

²⁵ <https://jonenglishlee.com/summary-of-christian-freedom/>

READ IT

Read 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

EXPLORE IT

1. Paul says that not all things are helpful and that not all things _____.
2. What are we to seek for our neighbor?
3. What reason does Paul give to the Corinthians as to why they should eat meat that is sold in the market?
4. What were the Corinthians supposed to do when they went out to dinner with unbelievers?
5. When were they not to eat the meat?
6. Why wouldn't they eat the meat?
7. Whatever a Christian eats or drinks, we are to do all for the _____ of God.

11. Can you think of examples where personal freedom might need to be limited for the good of others?

And then, in verse 25, he goes on to take the principle and apply it in very practical terms. And that brings us to the third ground rule, which is “Don’t tie yourself up in unnecessary knots.” And if we just anticipate where we’ll begin next time: you imagine Mrs. Brown, who goes to the market, and when she goes to the market, the man is there selling the produce, and she says to him, “Excuse me, sir, how much is that?” and he gives her the price, and then she says, “By the way, did it come from the temple before it arrived here?” And he says, “Uh, yeah, probably.” And she says, “Ah, do you know if it was involved in the sacrificial systems before it came down here?” And he said, “Look, I don’t know that. Do you want the meat or do you not want the meat?” And she goes over in a corner, and she has this big discussion with herself: “Well, I wonder if it went in the temple. If it went in the temple, does that mean it’s messed up? And if it’s messed up, then what’ll happen if I take it home, and then I put it on my husband’s plate, and then he’ll start the same thing all over again, and then we’ll have this big debate about whether we can eat it, and the meat will be freezing cold, and everyone will starve to death...”

Paul says, “Don’t get into that rubbish. Don’t be sitting in a corner asking fussy questions of overscrupulousness. Don’t become a Pharisee, for goodness’ sake,” he says. “I was once a Pharisee. I don’t want to go back to being a Pharisee again.”²⁷

12. What are some actions/activities that are not declared to be sinful in the Bible that Christians disagree about participating in?

13. How do you protect yourself from acting or thinking like a Pharisee?

²⁷ <https://www.truthforlife.org/resources/sermon/rules-christian-freedom-p1/>

14. Why is Paul concerned about the other person's conscience?

In verses 29b-30, Paul poses a pair of rhetorical questions, apparently to bring additional clarity to the matter under discussion. Nevertheless, for many readers these verses throw sand in the gears of the argument's mechanism. If one reads the two questions, which are formulated in a straightforward way in the Greek, Paul seems to contradict the advice he gave in verses 27 and 28. That understanding is impossible, however, for Paul reiterates the same advice about selflessness and putting others before oneself in 10:31 through 11:1. Thus, many commentators sensibly suggest that in these lines Paul creates an imaginary dialogue concerning what he has said up to this point. Verses 29B and 30 are objections that Paul imagines might come from those in Corinth who would not fully agree with him.

One further, somewhat speculative observation may lend support to the foregoing exegesis. One should note that Paul writes to the Corinthians as a group. But when the objections come in verses 29B and 30, one finds them in the first person singular. This self-centered point of view is the perspective Paul is calling the Corinthians away from in the main lines of his argument. From a purely personal, self-centered standpoint, Paul's directions are objectionable, but that viewpoint is exactly the one that Paul directs the Corinthian church not to take.²⁸

15. In Paul's rhetorical questions, what does he believe would be the Corinthians objections to this teaching of being concerned about another's conscience?

²⁸ 1 Corinthians, New International Biblical Commentary, Marion L. Soards, p.217

Christian liberty regarding things God has not forbidden is a precious blessing of the gospel as well as one of the most difficult aspects of Christian living to navigate. On the one hand, believers who understand that we are free in Christ to enjoy what God has not outlawed must take care when they are around less mature believers who do not understand this principle. To flaunt our liberty in front of such people might encourage them to act against their consciences and do what they think is a sin. The thing itself may not be a sin objectively according to God's moral law, but it is a sin to engage in it if one believes it to be evil. To do what one believes to be forbidden is to do what one believes our holy God has outlawed, so it is an act of defiance toward the Lord, not submission. It is not an act that proceeds from faith, and whatever does not proceed from faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). Therefore, mature believers who have consciences more fully formed by God's Word must be careful not to make a show of their liberty in front of less mature believers lest they lead such believers astray. This is one of Paul's points in 1 Corinthians 10:23–29 and Romans 14:1–15:7.

On the other hand, the Apostle also tells us in those same passages that we must not submit to what Dr. R.C. Sproul called “the tyranny of the weaker brother.” Weaker believers may not impose their scruples on stronger believers or demand that the church do the same. In fact, weaker believers have the responsibility to grow in their understanding of Christian freedom. Paul's letters were read aloud in their entirety to Christian congregations in the first century. The same Christians who heard that stronger believers should use their liberty wisely also heard that many of the scruples they had about food and drink were ill-founded. They were to understand this and begin to change their views accordingly.

As we seek to navigate issues of Christian liberty, we will not go far wrong if we heed Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians 10:31 to do all things to the glory of God. This entails, among other things, seeking to act according to love for other believers, being willing to not take advantage of our freedoms when it might cause harm. We are to seek to not give unnecessary offense, but we are to serve others. In so doing, we imitate Christ, who did not make use of His sovereign freedom for His own advantage at our expense but rather took the form of a servant (10:32–11:1; see Phil. 2:5–11).²⁹

16. What practical steps can we take to ensure that even in the most routine or mundane parts of lives we are striving to “eat and drink for the glory of God?”

²⁹ https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/all-to-the-glory-of-god?srsId=AfmBOoqpbP7HZOXL1CgViVZqwZr5VjPAd_8h_IB2r0fEY6wgE8m1yVDE

17. Paul mentions trying not to cause offense to Jews, Greeks, or the church of God (v. 32). How can we balance standing firm in our beliefs while making sure our actions don't alienate or offend others unnecessarily?

18. In verse 33, Paul emphasizes seeking the good of others so they may be saved. What are some ways to show genuine care and consideration that may lead others to faith?