

## Topic

Christian liberty

## Theme

Genuine Christian liberty operates within the boundsof love for others and God.

## Desired Learner Response

The learner will seek to glorify God and encour­ age his fellow believers with the choices he makes.

M ateria ls

* Resources 1 and 11

One Goal

## ScriptureFocus

1 Corinthians 8-10

## Summary

The Corinthian Christians held contrasting opinions about eating food offered to idols. Writingby inspir ation, Paul gave them principlesthat would help them handle these situations. The principles help us understand how to use Christian love to guide our Ch ristian liberties.

#### Outline

1. Addressing Christian Liberty Problems (8:1-8)
   1. Know ledge is inadequate (8:1, 2)
   2. Love is necessary (8:3-8)
2. Applying Christian Liberty Principles (8:9-10:33)
   1. Be considerate of weaker Christians (8:9-13)
   2. Exercise self-control (9:1- 27)
   3. Separate from sin (10:1- 22)
   4. Edify others (10:23, 24)
   5. Keep a clear conscience (10:25-30)
   6. Glorify God (10:31-33)

#### Memory Verse

*"Whethertherefore ye eat,or drink,or whatsoever ye do. do all to the glory of God"*

*(1 Corinthians 10:31).*

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**Ball Hog**

# GETTING STARTED

In basketball, a ball hog is a player who won't give up the ball. He prefers to dribble around incessantly until he finally forces up a shot or runs out of time. The opposing team guards him like a hawk, meaning his shots are heavily contested and usually off the mark.

**ASK:** What motivates a ball hog? (Ql) *To bring glory to himself instead of his team.*

**ASK:** Why mig ht playing with a ball hog be so irritating ? (0 2) *The ball hog cares more about padding his score total than he does about winning. He will often cause his team to lose so he might be his team's leading scorer.*

Church members sometimes have a ball-hog-lli<e attitude as they live and serve. They forget they are on a team and responsible for supporting and working with their teammates. Their goals are personal rather than team oriented. This les­ son encourages us to use selfless love to guide us to the one goal of glorifying God, particularly when dealing with questions about exercising Christian liberties.

### Now I Can Sin!

"Free from the law, Oh happy condition, now I can sin with Jesus' permission!" So goesa twisted version of a classic hymn. Unfortunately, many believers have adopted this outlook for their lives, claiming to be free in Christ to do as they please. When it comes to gray areas, they do what they want without regard for a weaker brother.

**ASK:** What is wrong wit h su ch an outlook on life?

Romans 14:1-15:21 is the other major passage in the New Testament that discusses Christian

liberty.

**ASK:** What could be the consequences of su ch an outlook?

Paul addressed how to address questionable activities on which believers disagree. Following his instructions should strengthen and unify a church.

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

The issue of determining who is in the right in a struggle over Christian liberty is not an easy one. First, we must determine if the issue is truly one of liberty orone of righteousness and sin. God ultimately determines what is sin, not any individual

believer. But not all believers have the same convictions about what is an acceptable practice and what God considers sin. Since differing believers are part of a team, they must be sensitive to each other's convictions. Paul helps us understand the need to be a sensitive member of team church. Therefore, we need to study 1 Corin­ thians 8-10 carefully before attempting to exercise our Christian liberty.

### Addressing Christian Liberty Problems (t Cor. 8:1-8)

* 1. **Knowledge is inadequate (8:1, 2)**

**64 OUT OF BOUNDS** • BLOWING THE WHISTLE ON TEAM CHURCH

The Corinthians had written to Paul about a difficult question: Was it right or wrong to eat food that had been sacrificed to idols (8:ia, 4a)? Some of the Corin­ thian believers reasoned that it did not make a particle of difference if they ate food that had been offered to idols. After all, they knew that the idol gods did not exist. Some of their Christian friends, however, held a different opinion. Having worshiped idols before trusting in Christ as their Savior, these Christians felt that it was wrong to eat meat that had been sacrificed for idols; their consciences would not let them do it.

Knowledge alone could not solve the problem and unite the church. It mere­

ly puffed up some Corinthians (8:1). Thinking they knew much, the Corinthians failed to comprehend how much they still had to learn in skillfully applying that knowledge in their relationships with others (8:2).

**ASK:** What te mpt at ions mi ght confront som eo n e who has a solid knowl­ edge of the Bib le but not a lot of expe rience in applying th at kn owledge? (Q3) *Pride,* a *faulty sense of spirituality and maturity or impatiencewith those who do not know as much.*

To understand this entire section, it is essential to recognize the value that Paul placed on the individual conscience. The conscience is like an alarm system that alerts a person to the fact that a thought or action is violating the standards set for the conscience. A weak conscience, which Paul discusses in 8:7, 10, and 12, will malfunction by alerting a person to wrongdoing too easily. A seared conscience (1 Tim. 4:2) is one that no longer works correctly because it has been violated repeatedly. Paul wanted to avoid that at any cost in his own life (cf. Acts 24:16).

Every believer should endeavor to strengthen his or her conscience by build­

ing it up on the Word of God so that it functions properly under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

**ASK:** What woul d you predic t about the accuracy of a believer's conscience if that be lieve r is not liv ing in su b m ission t o t he Holy Sp ir it ? (Q4) *It would become increasingly inaccurate by either alarming too often or not enough.*

 **ASK:** In additi on to studying Scriptur e, what are some other ways we can build a stro ng conscience? (QS) *By listening to its alarms and then submitting*

*to the Spirit's direction. The more wepay attention to our conscience, the louder the alarms will seem.*

Since no Christian's conscience is infallible, no one should attempt to force his or her views on another person unless those views are based on Scripture (cf. Rom. 14:22). Every Christian, as a believer-priest under Christ (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9), is given the dignity of determining his own mind on questionable matters.

This takes us to the heart of the tension in1 Corinthians 8. What do we do when Christians differ on matters that seem important to them?

* 1. **Love is necessary (8:3-8)**

The proud Corinthians needed to learn the importance oflove (8:1b). Love for

God is essential, and God knows those who love Him (8:3). Love helps us as believ­ ers to exercise our Christian liberty in ways that honor God.

The Greeks worshiped nume rous false gods, but Paul and the Corinthian believers knew there was only one true God (8:4) and that the false gods were en­ e rgizedby demons (8:5; 10:19, 20). The Corinthian believers also knew that the one true God controls everything and created everything through Jes us Christ (8:6).

But these knowledgeableChristians needed to exercise love toward new believers whostill imagined the idols were real and therefore could not with a clear con­ scienceeat food sac rificed to those idols (8:7.)

Since the Corinthian Christians' relationships to God were not affected either by ea ting food or abstaining fromit (8:8), they needed a set of principles to guide their dietary decision in light of its effects on other believers.

### Applying Christian Liberty Principles (8:9-10:33)

Even if the Bible does not specifically name a questionable activity, we can apply a number of prin ciples in deciding our position on it. Paul encouraged his Corinthian readers first to be considerate of sp iritually weaker believers.

### Be considerate of weaker Christians (8:9-13)

Although a believer in Corinth might claim Christian liberty in eating food of­ fered to idols, Paul advised him to consider how this would affect weaker believers (8:9 ). If a weaker believer observed him in the act of eating sacrificedfood, the weaker believer might *be emboldened to eat* the sacrificedfood in violation of his own conscience, which would be sin (8:10).

Although the knowledgeable believer would not be ensnared by the pagan be­ liefs and practices associated with the eating of sa crificedfoods, the weaker believer, having already violated his conscience, might be tempted to go even further into activedisobedience (8:11). The knowledgeable Christian would be sinning against Christ by injuring the weaker believer (8:12). Paul's appeal to the knowledgeable believers, then, was tobe considerate of weaker believers and control their use of liberty in order to avoid deterring the spiritual progressof others (8:13 ).

**ASK:** Is a believer with a legalistic approach to Christian living a weak or a strong believer? Why? (Q6) *He is a weaker believer, as he does not fully under­ stand the freedom he has in Christ. This may becounter-intuitive to the way that we sometimes think.*

**ASK:** Without naming people, describe a time when you had to app ly the principle of consideration to avoid offending a weaker Christ ian. (Q7)

### Exercise self-control (9:1-27)

In1 Corinthians 9, Paul used several illustrations to make one basic point at the end of the chapter: managing Christian liberty through self-control will help the disci­ plined believer to run like an athletetoward hiseternal reward. But before Paul could layout his arguments that led to this conclusion, he neededto address the fact that some believers in Corinth questioned his apostleshipand his motives for preaching.

Paul carriedgenuine apostolic credentials- Jes us personally commissioned him. And the Corinthian Christians themselves were evidence that the Lord had blessed his apostolic minist ry (9:1, 2). As an apostle, Paul could claim the same lib­ erty and privileges as other Christian workers. He was free to marry and to receive financial support from those to whom he ministered (9:4-14). Never theless,for the sake of the gospel, Paul applied the principle of self-control and set aside these privileges (9:12).

Ra ther than have someone accuse him of preaching only because he was paid to do so, Paul adopted the policyof preaching without pay (9:15). He did not preach to live; he lived to preach (9:16). He preached because the Lord had com­ missioned him to preach. He believed the Lord would supply his needs (9:17, 18). Obviously, Paul's motivesas an apostle were pure.

Paul chose to limit his liberty for at least three reasons: (1) to set an example devoid of criticism *(lest we shouldhinder the gospel of Christ* [9:12b]); (2) to place a check on his own motives to ensure that he would be qualified for heavenly reward *(i f I do this thing willingly, I have a reward* [9:17a]); and (3) to discipline himself from going beyond that which he was actually at liberty to do *(that I abuse not my power in the gospel* [9:18b]).

**ASK:** Why was it so important for Paul to be concerned about the example he presented to the early church? (08) *Considering his past transgressions (cf Gal. 1:23), Paul's work as an apostle and author of New Testament Scripture would be highly scrutinized. Any perceived hypocrisy or weakness would give his enemies cause to discredit him.*

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 9:19- 23. **ASK:** What three words would you use to de­ scribe Paul's actions in this passage? (09) *Perhaps humble, sincere, and selfless.*

Paul ministered with a servant's heart amon g Jews and Gentiles alike (9:19). Although his Christian liberty had extricated him from the demands of the law, he became as a Jew in order to win Jews to Christ (9:20). Among Gentiles, he lived apart from the Jewish lawin order to win Gentiles to Christ (9:21). 1n a sp irit of self-control, he was considerate of all because he wanted to win people to Christ (9:22, 23).

Some have used Paul's su mmat ion in 9:22, *I am made all things to all men,* as an excuse to employbizarre behavior that will supposedly enhance the ministry or make it appear culturally relevant to unbelievers. In context, however, Paul is clearly considering limiting his liberty- notextending it- for the sole purpose of proclaiming the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 2:2).

In fact, Christian liberty functions best within the bounds of se lf-control. We are not free to do whatever we feel like doing. Unchecked fleshly impu lses would surely wreck our testimony and Christian service record. Knowing this, Paul dis­ ciplined himself. Like a dedicated and well-trained runner, he kept his eye on the finish line and the winner's crown (9:24-26).

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 9:27. **ASK:** What did Paul's discip lined life preserve?

(010) *The ability to continue to serve God and influence others.*

**ASK:** What disciplines strengthen a believer in his walk wit h the Lord? (Q l l) *These include daily Bible reading and study, meditation, prayer, and worship-both private and public.*

Lesson 9 will consider 10:16 and 17 again in the context of the Lord's

Supper.

### Separate from sin (10:1-22)

Having raised the sad possibility of becoming disqualified for a reward, Paul reflected upon what had happened to the Israelites who lacked spiritual discipline in Moses' era.

Although God had redeemed all the Israelites from Egypt and directed them in the wilderness (Exod. 13:7- 14:31), fed them and given them water from the rock (Exod.16:11-16; 17:1- 6), He overthrew them there (1 Cor.10:1-6; cf. Num.14:1-38; Num. 20). Why? Because they failed to practice self-co ntrol in obedience to God.

They reveled in golden calf idolatry and committed fornication (1 Cor. 10:7, 8; cf. Exod. 32; Num. 25). Also, the unfaithful Israelites put God to the test and *mur­ mured* that He was unfair. Again God responded with judgment (1Car. 10:9, 10; cf. Num. 21:4-9; Num. 16).

What happened to the Israelites teaches Christians to stay close to God an d far from potentially harmful situations (10:11). These Corinthians who felt they could exercise their Christian liberty by participating in the idol feasts were running the risk of falling into sin (10:12). If they fell, they could not blame it on God (10:13.)So the wise course of action was to separate from idolatrous situations (10:14).

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 10:20. **ASK:** What sobering connection did Paul make in re­ gard to idol worship? (Ql 2) *Those who sacrificed to idols were sacrificing todemons.*

The idol feasts in Corinth reeked of demonic influence and were not fit for the presence of those who fellowshipped with Christ (10:15-21). The pagan Corinthi­ ans who thought that they were offering sacr ifices to their false gods would have been in terror if they had truly understood the connection they were forming with demons.

Those of the church who ignored this principle of separation would face the judgment of a jealous God (10:22).

### Edify others (10:23, 24)

Apparently, some Ch ristians pushed their liberty to the point where they felt free to do anything. Paul differentiated for them between what is *lawful* and what is *expedient* (profitab le) and between what is *lawful* and what will *edify* (10:23) .

An important guiding principle in deciding a course of action is not, *Do I have the right to do this?* but, *How will this impact someone else?* (10:24).

**READ:** 1 Corint hia ns 10:24.**ASK:** How does this verse speak to the idea that we need to be true to who we are and to fee l free to express ourse lves

without any inhi bitio ns? (Ql 3 ) *The verse reminds us that we have* a *responsibility as believers to edify others. Our primary focus in life should not be on ourselves and being our own person. God calls us to be part of acommunity of believers and gives us the responsibility to help others in the community to grow.*

### Keep a clear conscience (10:25-30)

If a believer purchased a cut of meat in a Corinthfan butcher shop, heshould eat it with a clear conscience and not investigate its origin (10:25) . After all, the Lord owns the whole earth, including the food supply (10:26). Similarly, if a believer sat at a Corinthian's table as a dinner guest, he should not ask where

the food came from, but rather eat it with a clear conscience (10:27). However, if the butcher or the host volunteered that the meat had been offered to idols, the believer should not eat lest he set a poor example of indiffer ence to the signifi­ cance of pagan religious symbols (10:28, 29). If a stronger Christian ignored others' concerns of conscience, his Christian liberty might be interpreted as license to sin. Any time a believer eats, he must do so in a manner that would cause himself and those around him to *give thanks* (10:30).

### Glorify God (10:31-33)

Though Paul has given us some principles that may be complicatedboth to understand and to practice, he concludes these three chapters with an unmistak­ ably clear command.

**READ:** 1 Co rint hians 10:31. **ASK:** What does it mea n to glorify God? (Ql 4) *It*

*means to reflect His greatness and thus bring praise to His character.*

**ASK:** Ho w does the con text of this verse affe ct your unders tanding of it ? (Ql 5)

In deciding questionable activities, a Christian ought to ask how he can best glorify God (10 :31). If his planned course of action would dull his testimony or hurt a fellow believer's walk with the Lord, he would glorify God by relinquishing his liberty out of love for others. If his planned course of action would enhance his testimony and edify a fellow believer, he would glorify God by pursuing it.

If a Christian conducted himself in a way that glorified God, he would not purposely offend Jews, Ge ntiles, or the church of God- the three classifications of humanity from God's perspective(10:32) .

Paul's goal was to strengthen Christians and to bring non-Christians to Christ (10:33). May we, like Paul, be so consumed with the spiritual needs of others that our trifling preferences will fade in comparison.

# MAKING IT PERSONAL

### Attitude Change

**ASK:** What was your attit ude toward exercis ing Chris t ian liberty before you st ud ie d 1 Corint hians 8 - 1O? (Ql 6)

**ASK:** What is yo u r attitude toward Christ ian liberty because of this s t udy?(Ql 7)

Verses 27-30 are diffi­ cult and may be read and interpreted in more than one way. The main point is clear: a believer

must not abuse his or her Christian liberty at the ex­ pense of becoming a poor testimony before those with less knowledge and experience.

All believing Jews and Gentiles are united in the church during this

church age (cf. Eph. 2:16). Unbelieving Jews and Gentiles are still some­ what distinct in God's program, however (cf.

Rom. 1:16; 11:25). God will continue to work out His unique plan for Israel and the Jewish people in the coming Tribulation, in the Millennium, and even in eternity future (cf. Rom. 11:1, 2, 26; Rev. 7:4; 21:12.)

At the sa me time, God will extend His grace and perform His plan toward the Gentile nations as well (Rev. 21:24).

Principles for Practicing Liberty

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### Exercising Christian Liberty

**RESOURCE:** Display reso urce 11 as a review of t he principles for exe rcising Chris t ian li berty. **ASK:** What changes might you nee d to make t o practice

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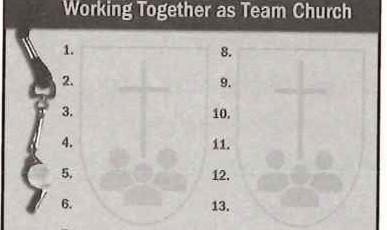
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you r Christian liberty within the bounds of love as part of team church?

(Ql 8)

Encourage your learners to consider whether they have been the *weaker* believer in certain situations. Have them evaluate their convictions in light of the Scriptures. (Q19)

Be cautious. You don't want weaker brothers to simply abandon convictions because someone else doesn't share the same ones. You want them to grow in their understanding of God's Word and to direct their lives accordingl.y



*1.*

#### Summary andMemory Verse

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: Exercise liberty within the bounds of love.

Encourage your learners to memorize 1 Corinthians 10:31. Give them an oppor­

tunity to quote the verse in class next week.