

Free of Me 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

Paul began this argument about the blessing of liberty, license, limitations, and conscience all the way back in chapter eight. The argument is about choosing what is *good* and what is *best*, between what is *permissible* and what is *advisable*.

When Paul says, “all things are lawful for me” in 6:12 and twice in 10:23, he knows that some people are going to misunderstand that statement. He’s concerned that people use his words to do everything, even to their own harm or the harm of others.

The question, according to Paul, is not, “May I?” but “Should I?” Even if things are permissible, they aren’t necessarily beneficial (10:23).

The choice isn’t between good and evil. That decision was made when we trusted Jesus. The choice is

- a) Is it expedient? - best
- b) Is it edifying? - beneficial
- c) Is it encouraging? - helpful

First: The Source of Corinthian Trouble

And...the object of this criteria is not me, self, but others.

This self-centeredness is the root of the church and personal problems the Corinthians are enduring.

Key - 1 Corinthians 10:24 - *Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.*

Matthew 22:35-40 - *And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”*

You love God *by* loving your neighbors.

When Paul later attempts to press this point again, he writes - 1 Corinthians 14:20 - *Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.*

Second: A Test Case (to prove Paul's point). 25-28

To demonstrate Paul's point, he returns to the issue of eating meat that has been sacrificed to a pagan deity and then sold at the Temple market.

Since idols aren't real, the meat sacrificed to them is no different than meat that is not sacrificed to idols. There are no biblical grounds for certain diets. You can't argue for or against diets on moral grounds.

This is rooted in God's goodness to all creation. He's citing

26 - Psalm 24:1 - *The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein*

27 - Paul's intent is to free the Christian's conscience when eating with unbelievers. Their erroneous beliefs don't require Christian abstinence from the meal.

28 – On the other hand, if an immature believer (weak) is present, then, on their behalf, refrain from eating the food that has been sacrificed to idols.

1 Corinthians 8:9-13 - *But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? ¹¹ And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. ¹² Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.*

29 – Paul does not mean that it binds your conscience about the meat but that it comforts the conscience of your Christian friend.

In cases like these, you're not surrendering your conscience on the issue. You are surrendering your liberty, however.

The Christian who most enjoys freedom is the Christian who surrenders her/his rights out of love, and not fear.

Do you see the difference?

- We should love Christians and nonChristians.
- We should fear only God.

Third: Three Summary Thoughts. 31-33

- a) 31 - Do everything for God's glory.

This is the plumbline for all your decision-making.

Don't assert your rights and make your life all about you.

- b) 32 – Avoid offending nonbelievers.

Be more concerned about the eternal welfare of others than your temporal care.

- c) 33-11:1 – Find godly models

Fourth: This Brings us to Jesus

Who is the ultimate model for -

- a) Fearing God most
- b) Loving people best
- c) Surrendering his own rights/privileges

Fifth: The Meaning of the Text

There are many things we can be slaves to and from which God redeemed us through the cross.
(Can you name a few)?

- We could be enslaved to a particular sin
- We could be enslaved to people's opinions, etc.
- We could be enslaved to the world's way of thinking
- We could be enslaved to ourselves

God did not, at the cost of his Son, free you from the penalty and power of sin and Satan, just so you could do your own thing, in effect, be a slave to yourself.

You are your worst taskmaster.

You are your Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Roman, all in one.

You are your worst sin.

I am only truly free to Jesus when I am free of me

Before Jesus, you were sending yourself to hell. Now that you are a Christian you are often the primary stumbling block to your sanctification.

Romans 7:14-25a - *For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

I know it only works in English but English is our main congregational language, so let me remind you that when you spell, **S 'I' N**, 'I' am the center of sin.

Conclusion: When it comes to liberty and conscience, we should prioritize loving Jesus and loving others, both Christians and nonChristians.

V 24 - *Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.*

When our motive is to glorify God and to edify or evangelize others, our decisions will be made in humility and our actions will display grace.

Community Groups:

- 1 – Read the text aloud in your CG
- 2 – Name some 'lawful' things that aren't 'beneficial?'
- 3 – Why is it natural but so hard not to seek my own good before that of others?
- 4 – Why is it so hard to put others first?
- 5 – What is the basis for Paul's argument that we can eat meat offered to idols?
 - If our conscience allows us to do so
 - God has created everything we eat
 - Look at Acts 10:9-16 and see the same basis in God's argument with Peter
- 6 – Why should we not serve each other out of fear?
- 7 – Whose conscience should I be concerned about in secondary/tertiary issues?
- 8 – How does the inability to surrender my rights demonstrate slavery?
- 9 – How does surrendering my rights demonstrate that I am truly free?
- 10 – What is my primary aim in caring for the consciences of others? V 31
- 11 – What is my secondary aim in caring for the consciences of others? V 32
- 12 – How can others help me to learn to do this and do it? Vs 33:11:1.