

[United] True Liberty, pt1: free to sacrifice for mission

1 Corinthians 8:1-9:14

MPS: Christians take care that rights of liberty never create stumbling blocks to faithful witness.

OBJ: Every person can understand how to live a gospel-centered life by a foundational principle, a faithful confession and a careful application.

INTRO In our series entitled UNITED: Together in the Gospel, a study of 1 Corinthians, we are laboring for one thing; to live as a people united in the gospel of Jesus Christ. **Unity fuels God's people for kingdom mission in the world.**

The first six chapters sets forth the gospel and how it unites us to live for God's kingdom mission in the world. What we learned in the first 6 chapters helps us apply a cross-forged (gospel-centered), Word-shaped (Biblical), Spirit-led application to remain "united" with God and "together" with one another. Chapter seven instructs in how Christians live in God's mission. Paul addresses a variety of issues that the Corinthians were dealing with and questions that had arisen in the church. His instruction shows how we apply our new biblically-faithful, gospel-centered, Kingdom-minded understanding to all of life. These are important questions for every Christian who seriously desires to walk in obedience to King Jesus. The next three chapters will help us understand not only the new liberties that we have because of Christ, but also how to apply those freedoms in the world.

When Jesus sets you free, you are free indeed. **But, what does freedom in Christ mean? Are you free to do whatever you please? How do you know what you can do? How does a faithful Christian use their freedoms to serve Christ?**

We begin today to address these issues. We are not talking about rights as a citizen of a country "formerly known as a democracy". What we begin today will take several weeks to fully cover, and a lifetime to fully apply. A Christian never moves beyond the faithful application of Biblically-obedient, gospel-centered, Kingdom-prioritized principles.

READ 1 Corinthians 8

*Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God. Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 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? And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. **1 Corinthians 8***

Christians take care that rights of liberty never create stumbling blocks to faithful witness.

OBJ: Today I want to begin to help you apply the gospel faithfully in your life. You can understand how to live a Biblically-faithful, gospel-centered, Kingdom-prioritized life by a foundational principle, a faithful confession and a careful application.

First, love is the foundational principle of the Christian life.

Love establishes the Christian's identity in God.

*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. **1 John 3:1***

We learn of God's love over and over again in scripture, "*For God so loved*". Love is the Christian's defining principle because it is God's defining motivation. We've been greatly loved by God. We want the world to know His love. We want every Christian to live fully in His love. [Love is the foundation for every faithful Christian witness.](#)

God's love for us provides the foundation for our love for one another.

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

*¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. **1 John 4:7, 11***

Love establishes Christian fellowship in community.

*For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. **1 John 3:11***

*Let brotherly love continue. **Heb 13:11***

Paul addresses a question that's been posed to him involving people eating food, specifically meat, used in idol temples. Some of the meat from the animals used in temple sacrifices would be sold in the markets. Even though the meat in the market had no direct association with the temple sacrifice, this still caused some people a conflict of conscience. This is Paul's meaning when he says "*food offered to idols*". Some were still eating in the pagan temples, even though they did not believe in the idols. The problem was not that they were sinning in their eating, but that their practice was causing problems for other Christian brothers and sisters whose knowledge of the idols condemned them.

Paul states that all possess "knowledge". This is likely a reference from their letter to him. Many, likely, argued that the right knowledge was sufficient for salvation. And so they reveled in their new knowledge, all while continuing in their old practices. But knowledge is not the greatest good. All knowledge on earth is, at best, limited and finite. Knowledge is not the highest aim of Christian growth and maturity. Knowledge caused them to "puff up", become arrogant and "hard" towards others. One commentator helpfully states, "Knowledge is proud that it has learnt so much. Wisdom is humble that it knows no more."¹ Paul presses the Corinthians toward Christian wisdom that appeals to love for others. [Knowledge is a necessary pathway to growth, but only living in godly wisdom demonstrates true Christian maturity.](#)

Paul contrasts the adverse affect of knowledge with the beneficial fruit of love; "*Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.*" Greatness and faithfulness in God's kingdom is not measured by "byte capacity" of the grey matter, but by the "bandwidth" of love for God and toward others. "Knowledge puffs up" the individual who holds it. Love builds up all those around the one who gives it. Love is the foundational principle of the Christian life because it is how we know God, and continually live in God. Love for God and others is greater than any knowledge. [True "knowledge" of God is demonstrated by genuine "love" for others.](#)

APPL [Does God's love for you and in you stir your heart to more sacrificially love others?](#)

TRANS Once Paul establishes this foundational principle, he moves to a foundational, Christian doctrine.

Second, Christians live by a faithful confession: "*there is no God but one.*"

Paul follows with a longer explanation,

"for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist."

No idol compares or competes with Jesus. "*One God*" establishes our priority for our allegiance and commandments we heed. This confession establishes the Christian doctrine of the exclusivity of Jesus Christ, a Christian's "new knowledge". [All the Christian life is a living confession that Jesus is supreme, that He alone is Lord.](#)

¹ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 124. Morris cites W. Kay, *A Commentary on the Two Epistles of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Macmillan, 1887).

Paul says that 'other gods have no real existence.' These false gods do have a type of existence, but it is not the same as our God. For the Corinthian Christian, the issue was not 'meat' but a faithful witness to God and the Lord Jesus Christ. [When a Christian anchors their life by confessing Jesus' Lordship, it clarifies our conscience and conduct for who and how we grant allegiance and worship.](#)

Right Christian doctrine is important, but not just to hold. It is more than just right knowledge. Christian doctrine is life-bearing truth to be lived out in faithful obedience. Paul contrasts the difference between knowledge that makes one hard with pride and truth that bears fruit of faithfulness. God the Father created us for His glory and gives a unique purpose to each of our lives. We are saved and redeemed through Jesus Christ, and now in Him our whole life exists. Every decision a Christian makes grows from the faithful confession "Jesus is Lord". Our "knowledge" of Christian doctrine NEVER elevates us above or separates us from others, but always leads us to humbly bow in more faithful service. Doctrine that elevates and separates gets it wrong every time. Doctrine that motivates to faithful service gets it right every time. [The new Christian "knowledge" of Jesus' supreme Lordship sets us free to live out life-giving love, and not dead rules.](#)

APPL Does your life demonstrate the confession "Jesus is Lord", ruling every part of your life, living for God's divine purpose or for your own purposes?

TRANS BUT...our confession never ignores the fact that not everyone believes as we do. This helps us understand how we can make a faithful application.

Third, Christians live by a careful application to build up others. (.9, 13)

Christians "*take care*" in the way we live to demonstrate God's love and Jesus' Lordship. Not everyone has the same knowledge that we have. Paul states that some, "*through former association with idols*", eat food as an act of allegiance and worship of idols. Association with idols weakens and defiles their conscience. "*Association*" means participation in idolatry, a kind of 'relationship' with an inanimate, non-alive object. Association with idols caused their conscience to be defiled. A person may think the practices of their life have no affect upon them, but Paul says just the opposite. [Sinful practice defiles a Godward conscience.](#)

APPL Christian, beware lest you convince yourself that your hidden sin has no affect on the rest of your life. It defiles your God-saturated conscience and prevents you from walking with God in any other area of life. You may repeat an action of past faithfulness, but you will not perpetuate a life of faithfulness in walking with God.

Corinthian Christians were still frequenting the dining halls in pagan temples. And, Paul acknowledges, the eating itself was of no problem for the Christian. But, Paul teaches that our new knowledge, because of Christ, never allows us to disregard others who do not have the same knowledge, or struggle with a weakness in that knowledge. [Christians take care to use their Christian rights to build other up.](#)

Christians know that food does not commend us to God. We cannot be separated from nor brought closer to God because of food. Relationship with God is not determined by the food we do or do not eat. We are free to eat, or not. But freedom from our knowledge should not cause us to dismiss those who believe in false idols. Christians remember that association with idols causes condemnation upon a person's conscience, even when we cannot see or know it. And, since we are not better off to 'partake of' nor hurt to sacrifice of a liberty, the point becomes "[how do my actions serve others?](#)"

Paul identifies two problems with the Christians continuing this practice. **First**, these actions encourage others to eat. And many of these have weak consciences. **Second**, when those with weak consciences eat, their new conscience is built by growing accustomed to, or comfortable with, the condemnation from their "knowledge" of eating "food sacrificed to idols". Instead of enjoying a clean conscience, they experience the pain of living in opposition to their conscience because their participation reminds them of their 'knowledge by association', instead of their new 'identification' in Jesus.

Even though they may “know” the idols are not real, their former association still condemns their conscience. In other words, the Christians partaking in the temple meals caused the weaker brothers and sisters in Christ to build a conscience that was not cleansed, but that is being “cauterized” by more participation. This cannot last long. The conscience will either need to be cleansed, or it will become numb to the pain of their continuing participation’s condemnation. [Living in opposition to one’s conscience creates internal confusion that damages even one’s own identity.](#)

Paul states that the exercise of freedom, from the Christian’s new knowledge in Christ, can actually destroy a Christian brother or sister because of this influence. And, when we sin against our brothers or sisters in this way, we sin against Christ. Therefore, he concludes, he will never participate in a liberty that causes a fellow Christian to stumble in this way.

APPL The HIGH value of Christian fellowship in community.

Sinful habits that were normal and pervasive before Christ often cause lingering confusion or condemnation once a person is “in Christ”. This doesn’t mean that a person is not saved. But, it does mean that the gospel will have to be applied specifically to that area of life in order for them to cultivate a new conscience that is in accordance with their new identity in Christ. Salvation grants a new ‘identification through relationship with Jesus’ to replace sin’s condemnation from ‘knowledge by association’ with idols. But this transformation is now always immediate, not always easy and often takes years to overcome.

Sin cauterizes the conscience through participation and creates a “knowledge from association” that causes “confusion of identification”. Instead of a person understanding that they were created for God, they believe they were created for selfish indulgence and pleasure through idolatry. HERE lies the high value of Christian community and fellowship for every Christian, especially a new believer. New life in Jesus Christ cultivates a clean conscience through participation with God’s people (fellowship of unity and purity; 1 Cor 6) that redeems our knowledge of relationship with God (spiritual growth & maturity; “truth in love”, Eph 4:15) to re-enforce our identity as a child of God (knowledge of “made new” in Christ; 2 Cor 5:17). [Christians need community that cultivates fellowship to re-enforce our identity in Jesus Christ.](#) Imagine how detrimental for our lives if fellowship actually destroys our identity, instead of cultivating it; if our community heaps more condemnation, instead of ministering the gospel to cleanse it; if our ministry actually thwarted our growth and maturity instead of helping it. [Community destroys identity when Christians do not take care to serve one another more than serving self.](#)

Ephesians 4 (.12-15) teaches that every person in the church is responsible to minister until ALL attain to full maturity in Christlikeness, so we won’t be carried away by bad doctrine, but firmly rooted in Christ Jesus. [Christian fellowship consists of ministry \(the activity of meeting needs\) and doctrine \(the new knowledge of right thinking and a clean conscience\) that aims to build up every person.](#)

Christian community must build “INTENTIONAL fellowship” to point each person to Jesus, not only in our words, but in our actions and attitudes as well. Otherwise, we only fuel past sinful propensities that infect the conscience with condemnation. When we fail to “*take care*” (BE INTENTIONAL) that our lives actually serve to help others out of love for Jesus, we hurt our brothers and sisters by causing them to stumble. [Christian community cherishes and honors the weakest among the fellowship.](#)

APPL When dealing with our Christian liberties, we must remember that when you do not gain anything by it for your Christian walk, you cannot lose anything by letting it go. A Christian liberty can as easily turn into a false idol as any other practice. We do this all the time when we use the good things God gives to us as a substitute for serving God. The greatest glory is not indulgence through Christian liberties for personal enjoyment / pleasure, but willingness to sacrifice (give up) personal rights to faithfully make Christ known. Sacrifice is never necessary to bring us closer to God. But sacrifice of personal liberties in Christ for the sake of sharing Christ with another person or building up a brother or sister in Christ is only a great gain. [Exercising a right of Christian liberty is always done with the condition that it will not cause another to stumble.](#)

MPS: Christians take care that rights of liberty never create stumbling blocks to faithful witness.

CLOSE

The more deeply immersed your life in God's love, the more generously you will bestow love on other people.

? When people look at your life, are they convinced that the only thing holding you is God's love?

The more anchored your life in Jesus' Lordship, the less you'll be swayed by a false idol's lure or moved by its authority.

? When people watch your life, is Jesus' unquestioned Lordship obvious by the way you walk and live?

The more consumed with Jesus you become in salvation, the more loosely you will hold your Christian liberties. They, too, serve the mission of God, not just the pleasures of people of God.

? Does your life demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice even your Christian liberties in order to share Christ with others?