

# [United] True Liberty, pt3: free to live as a faithful witness

1 Corinthians 10

**MPS: Christians live a faithful witness to win people to Jesus when they apply the gospel to all of life for God's glory.**

**OBJ: Every Christian can apply the gospel to live a faithful witness to win people to Jesus by four reminders.**

**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.**

**Recap** In 1 Cor 8 we began looking at Christian liberty. Christians are set free in Christ to enjoy life as God commands and provides. But in our Christian liberty, freedoms never rule us as lord and rights never justify self-indulgence, but serve to help and enable our service to the Lord in providing a faithful witness. 1 Cor 8 taught us that freedoms from Christian liberty can, and should, be sacrificed for the sake of gospel mission. 1 Cor 9 taught us that our rights in Christian liberty can be given up to pursue a greater glory. Today we culminate our consideration of Christian liberty by looking at how we apply these principles in specific situations and circumstances.

**MPS: Christians live a faithful witness to win people to Jesus when they apply the gospel to all of life for God's glory.**

**TRANS** Paul teaches Christians how to relate to culture, to non-Christians, and as well as to other Christians, especially those who are weaker in their faith, in order to apply the gospel for a faithful witness at all times in our lives. Christians take care that our freedoms never create stumbling blocks, and stand ready to sacrifice rights of liberty to serve for a greater reward in faithful witness. I want to help us have confidence in living as a faithful witness to win people to Jesus by applying the gospel to all of life for God's glory.

**OBJ: Four reminders help Christian apply the gospel to live a faithful witness to win people to Jesus.**

**TRANS** Paul begins with a strong warning to guard against sin.

**READ 10:1-13**

.1-13

*For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. 1 Cor 10:1-13*

**Reminder #1. Linger near temptation leads to sin.**

**Paul reminds them of the Israelites.** (.1-5) They had a common experience in their participation with God, led by the cloud, passing through the sea, following Moses' leadership, and eating the same spiritual food and drink. He even states that the rock from which they drank was Christ. In other words, all their activity was a participation in worship. The Israelites were accustomed to God's divine provision as He sustained their lives in the wilderness. But God was not pleased with them because of their disobedience. "Most of them", all but two, died in the wilderness due to God's displeasure and judgment on their sin. **Participation with God's people in worship is no guarantee of our personal salvation.**

**The children of Israel provide an example for Christians.** (.6-11) We see the result of their choice to worship idols, the displeasure that it caused God and the problem, ie. death, that it produced for them. They provide a perfect example that warns us to not desire evil. Though they participated in worship of God, they also participated in much idol worship. Their idolatry tested Christ, and they grumbled against God. In all their sin, their example is also an instruction for us. Christians should learn from the Israelites. [Allowing your life to be carried by the "current" of the masses is always damning, and never redeeming in and of itself. Sin never proves beneficial, but always destroys the participant and harms others associated with them.](#)

**Paul gives a strong warning against wrong thinking regarding temptation.** (.12) "*Taking heed*" means Christians never allow themselves to believe that they are in any way above any sin. Christians learn, by example, instruction and personal reflection that their heart is vulnerable to any sin without the shield of God's grace constantly guarding them.

Rather, we regard temptation with greater consciousness; knowing it only leads to sin, and is always dangerous and damaging. We confess that it constantly lurks and beckons upon our heart. We understand that what John Calvin, the middle age theologian, stated is true of us. "The human heart is a factory of idols...Everyone of us is, from his mother's womb, expert in inventing idols."<sup>1</sup> [Christians know that a 'light attitude toward' temptation yields a life entangled in sin. We "take heed" to never flirt with temptation so we don't get tripped into sin.](#)

**Then, Paul reminds us of God's faithful provision: God ALWAYS provides a way of escape from temptation.** Christians align our thinking with God's truth. We are careful not to disregard God's Word, doubt His truth, dismiss his commands, disagree with his teaching or deny His instruction. The Psalmist reminds us, "*I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.*" (Psa119:05) Also, "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*" (Psa 119:105) Rather, Christians strive to fill our mind and consume our heart in God's truth and grace so that when temptation knocks, His provision of escape will be more hopeful to us than temptation's alluring false promise. Knowing the gospel points us to God's truth and lights our thinking to His way of escape. [Trusting that God's faithfulness always remains with us, Christians set our mind and heart on Jesus to identify His way of escape and guard against temptation's allure.](#)

**TRANS** Paul's strong caution and faithful provision are immediately followed by a clear command.

**READ 10:14-22**

.14-22

*Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?*

**1 Cor 10:14-22**

**TRANS** Paul makes clear that there is only one right Christian response to idolatry. We flee temptation NOT simply to get away from it, but to run TO Christ.

**Reminder #2. Flee temptation to focus on a strong identity in Christ.**

**Christians flee idolatry.** You can't FLEE anything when you looking back to measure between acceptance and sin. The command to flee idolatry means you cease to give any attention to temptation, not to mention the sin it leads to, so that you can RUN AWAY toward your way of escape. [Looking back to and focusing on temptation can only lead to sin.](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Cited by C. J. Mahaney, "The Idol Factory", (Gaithersburg, MD: Sovereign Grace Ministries, 2001), 2.

**ILLUS** God told Lot to flee Sodom and Gomorrah and NOT look back. When Lot's wife looked back she turned into a pillar of salt. When a little boy heard this story in his class, he told the teacher, "Yeah, my mom looked back the other day while driving and turned into a power pole."

**Christians never flirt with nor give focus to temptation.** 1 Cor 8 teaches that association usually infers, and often leads to, participation. The conscience becomes cauterized to the Spirit regarding sin and temptation through participation directly and association indirectly. [You cannot ally yourself with sinful practices and align your life to grow and mature as a Christian. Giving temptation a second glance NEVER helps nor serves you well, but always prevents you from fleeing idolatry and usually ends in sinful indulgence.](#)

**Fleeing temptation means you need a new focus.** (.16-17) Our new identity in Christ becomes a consuming focus to replace our former participation with idolatry and sin. A deeper participation in Christ's atoning sacrifice establishes our lives in identity with Christ, which strengthens the reality of Christ's victory over sin for our life. [Communion with Christ and community among Christ-followers leads to a deeper, personal participation and association in Jesus' sacrifice.](#)

A Christian's new identity is strengthened by a participation and association replacement. (.20-22) Christians stop participating in and associating with idolatry and sin, and immerse themselves in communion and community to strengthen in them their new identity in Christ. Participation and association does not inherently make you something (ex. Israelites), but it does more fully entangle you in sin and strengthen an identity in your by your activity, by strengthening that sin's presence in you. And, the more you refuse participation in or association with the same, the less hold it keeps in you.

You can associate and participate with Christian fellowship and indulge in sin. This is possible. You cannot indulge in sin and commune with God. This is never possible. The more you mix your "Christianity" with sinful indulgence, the stronger the sin grows in you, the weaker Christ becomes to you, the more deceived about and deprived of truth you become, the more bitter and frustrated with God you grow, and the more discipline from God you beg for. [Fleeing temptation always includes forsaking participation and association with sin.](#)

**APPL** Christian commune with Christ and in community with His people so that what they live out will grow from Jesus living within. Identity through participation with Christ determines how we live. [Greater participation with Christ's sacrifice in communion and with Christian fellowship in community strengthens our identity as Christians.](#)

**TRANS** Here Paul explains why Christians, who though free, remain committed to flee from idolatry.  
**READ 10:23-30**

.23-30

*"All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks? **1 Cor 10:23-30***

**Reminder #3. Use Gospel-motivated obedience to live for the good of others.**

**Paul returns to his gospel-shaped filter for application.** When faced with challenging situations or circumstances, the gospel leads Christians to seek the good of others above personal desires. When we find ourselves asking or pondering "how far can I go" or "how much can I do" without sinning, we're measuring out the temptation that we want to entertain. These questions reveal a mind focused on earthly things and a heart set on selfish, self-serving consumption, and not

righteousness and holiness or gospel faithfulness. [Seeking the good of others above your own always provides the defining application principle for Christians.](#)

**Christians are free to live in liberty for God's glory, un-bound by cultural or worldly labels.** (.25-27) But open recognition of what God calls sin is a game changer. Once this is acknowledged Christians no longer partake, NOT because of the activity but because of the meaning associated with that activity. (.28) We refrain NOT for our own conscience, which is free in Christ. Rather, at this point our activity testifies to what we believe about God. Associating with idolatry creates a stumbling block for those caught in idolatry. Christians refuse to participate in any activity that associates them in idolatry. The sacrifice of liberty does not limit or change their conscience. Christians do not lose their freedom when they give them up to serve others. Rather, the sacrifice of liberty serves a faithful witness to another that explicitly points to Christ and refuses to provide any measure over which another might stumble.

The argument, "There's nothing wrong with this", in describing an activity is not an acceptable justification for participation. Whether a Christian should participate in a specific activity or not is determined by its influence and affect upon that Christian's conscience, first, and, second, upon another person. The second determinant for participation actually becomes the first consideration in application. One commentator states, "The action, which to the strong is a simple exercise of *freedom*, must not be made the means of offence to another."<sup>2</sup> In other words, what may not offend a Christian's conscience does not provide open justification for practice. Christians are never free to do whatever they wish, but bound to do as is best in providing a faithful witness in leading others to faith in Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

#### **APPL Cultivating the conscience.**

1. Be careful that your conscience is shaped by God's Word, and not by participation with idolatry. Conscience is not the 'rule-maker', but as the connection between your values and actions, it does guides your behavior. When a personal practice causes conflict with your conscience, cease that practice at least until you discover why the conflict is created and can apply the gospel.
2. Liberties, especially those that are contested in culture, should be held loosely and practiced cautiously until you know what affect they will have upon other people, not just by their practice but also by their belief and participation of that practice. If you are in any doubt, or unsure because you do not know a person well enough, then be ready to give up your liberty until your knowledge can determine how your participation will affect another person. Then, determine how you will act to serve as a faithful witness. In all situations, never allow your liberty to create a stumbling block for another person.
3. Do not violate (act in opposition to) conscience, in order to try and force it to change. If others participate in activities that conflict with your conscience and you comply, then you sin because you opposed your own conscience. (Whether the act was a sin or not.) Never allow a known liberty to cause or allow you to intentionally conflict your conscience.
4. Never exercise liberty of freedom or right, even if its is acceptable with your conscience, in such a way that knowingly causes others to stumble. This is always sin. If you participate in an activity that conflicts with another's conscience and cause them to stumble, then you sin against God by sinning against another person. You lose nothing by giving up your liberty in order to not cause another to stumble.
5. Never allow 'conflicts of conscience' to become a point of conflict in relationships. Conscience represents what is growing within. Strive to understand the heart and mind in order to apply the gospel. When conflicts over conscience arise, allow them to create a conversation for gospel proclamation, application and reconciliation.

#### **APPL Christian liberties and faithful witness.**

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<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 146–147.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 788. Thiselton states, "That which his or her consciousness yields about the self must be respected, even if it awaits more confidence through love and instruction. All this remains part of an ethic of *concern for the other*, not the supposed autonomy of 'conscience.'"

Christians filter every situation, circumstance, activity, opportunity and relationship through three questions to provide a faithful witness in Christian liberties.

1. Will this prove **helpful** for my faithful witness of Jesus, in personal obedience, to encourage faithfulness in other Christians, and to encourage other people to trust and follow Jesus?
2. **CAN** this activity dominate, control or impair my life in any way? (Focus: 'potential for' is determinant) Though something may be allowable, Christians measure its affect. Nothing is allowed in life that seeks a position of control over my life when Christ is Lord, or over the life of another when I know they are or can be dominated.
3. **DOES** this activity build others up? (Focus: 'actual influence produced' is determinant) Though something may be allowable, Christians look beyond allowance to measure actual benefit, for others first, then personally.

*For you were called [saved] to freedom, brothers.*

*Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. Gal 5:13*  
Christians use our liberties in Christ to win more people to faith in Jesus. Any other use equates to idolatry.

**READ 10:31-11:1**

.31-11:1

*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. 1 Cor 10:31-11:1*

**Reminder #4. Set God's glory as your first priority over self-pleasure.**

Christians never replace God's glory with any other defining motivation. If there is any possibility that God cannot be glorified through your life, then refuse to continue until you have determined whether that action is right, or your understanding should be redeemed through gospel application. Two simple questions help ensure that everything about your life glorifies God.

- ? Am I living for God's glory, or for mine?
- ? Am I living to make Christ known 'in all I do' and 'to all I know'?

Life-on-life discipleship, "*life...together*", is the strongest training for living to glorify God in all of life. **Is there someone(s) around you that you can imitate in order to better learn how to follow Jesus?** Christians surround their lives with people whose lives are worthy of imitation in order to faithfully follow Jesus.

**Christians live a faithful witness to win people to Jesus when they apply the gospel to all of life for God's glory.**

**CLOSE**