

November 26, 2023

"Freedom to Edify"
Lesson 4

I Corinthians 10:23-11:1

Intro

In chapter 8 of 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses the issue of eating meat that had been offered to idols on pagan altars. A worshipper brought an animal to the altar; any meat left over belonged to the priest of that altar. Whatever they couldn't eat personally was sold at the marketplace. This meat was less expensive since the priest didn't have any investment to recover. Some Christians wondered about buying this meat. If they did, were they participating in pagan worship? Were they compromising their witness for Christ?

Paul answers these concerns. In 8:4, he says that "idols are nothing". A Christian mature in knowledge about this could eat the meat without concern. But he also says "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak" (8:9). This stresses the importance of demonstrating concern for those having a weak conscience. Paul develops more about this issue in today's text.

Read I Corinthians 10:23-11:1

1. vs. 23: Paul acknowledges something the Corinthians seemed to have as a motto
 "I am free to do anything"
 Perhaps this idea came from the truth of their freedom in Christ
 Paul however adds two thoughts that don't seem to be part of their thinking
 Not everything is beneficial, not everything is constructive
 Though many things may be legal, there is a greater consideration
 What is the impact of one's actions on others?
2. vs. 24: Paul's instruction principle here is the same as he gave to the Romans and the Philippians
 Don't seek your own good, but the good of others
 If each person acts by this motto, then no one gets neglected or drops through the cracks
3. vs. 25-26: Paul here addresses the issue of eating meat offered to idols
 He says believers should eat anything sold in the market
 This is because all things belong to God, so the food sold does as well
 Paul is essentially quoting Ps. 24:1 here
4. vs. 27: Paul brings up a hypothetical situation
 An unbeliever invites you to a meal. What should you do?
 Paul says, "eat whatever is put before you"
 The opportunity is there now for the guest to influence the host toward Christ
 This is similar to the times Jesus ate with "sinners"
5. vs. 28-29a: Paul here acknowledges a counter to the hypothetical situation
 What is someone says, "This was offered to idols!"?
 Paul says the other person's conscience is more important than one's freedom
 Don't eat the meat for the sake of the other person's conscience

6. vs. 29b-30: Paul here presents the likely counter-argument about not eating the food
“Why shouldn’t I eat this? My conscience doesn’t bother me about eating it? Why am I
having to stop because it bothers someone else?”
He has already addressed this earlier in vs. 24
Don’t do anything that causes another to stumble
7. vs. 31: Paul reminds and then expands on what he has been instructing
First he reminds them of their decisions on eating and drinking
But he adds, “Do it all for the glory of God”
We don’t get faced with decisions about food offered to idols
But we are called to do everything so our actions bring glory to God
Scripture tells us that all creation was made to glorify God
See Ps. 19:1-6, Rom. 11:36, 2 Cor. 1:20 and 4:15
8. vs. 32-33: Another aspect of glorifying God is in how we treat others
Paul says, “Do not cause anyone to stumble”
The Greek word means not to cause offense and also not to take offense
They refer to stumbling in the spiritual sense, not physically
Don’t cause another to doubt their faith, or have a hard time living their faith
And Paul makes this very inclusive
This applies to Jews, to Greeks, and to the church itself
Paul’s goal is that “they may be saved”
He seeks to please others and not himself in pursuit of this goal
9. vs. 11:1: Paul lived a life dedicated to Jesus Christ
He is confident that his words and actions match Christ’s character
So he reminds his readers that his life is a good model to follow
He has been denying himself in order to reach and encourage others
The Corinthians who have seen him can do the same

Application: Paul’s main goal in the passage is to make the treatment and edification of others in the body of Christ a priority. Eating idol food isn’t an issue today, so the application is any action we might face that involves holiness, that works against holiness. Our lives are lived in public daily, so we are called to live them with a dual sense of purpose: to glorify God and to be an inviting witness to others. Our freedom in Christ calls for us to forego our “rights” for the good of others.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for the freedom in Jesus that frees people from slavery to sin. Help us to use our freedom in ways that honor You and edifies others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.