

## ***FPFWC Christian Development***



## **Christ Frees, Law Enslaves**

November 2023

Fall Quarter

**November 25, 2023**

## **Lesson #4 – Freedom to Edify**

SCRIPTURE TEXT – 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

### **ICE BREAKERS-**

1. What things should we consider when making difficult ethical decisions?
2. What overriding value should govern why we do what we do?

**Key Verse: “All things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.—1 Corinthians 10:23b**

### **LESSON BACKGROUND –**

Lesson Context: The City

The city of Corinth was one of the great centers of commerce in the Mediterranean world of the first century AD. It was located near a narrow strip of land (an isthmus) that connected two major land masses. The city had a harbor for the Saronic Gulf and Aegean Sea to the east (at Cenchrea; see Acts 18:18) and another harbor for the Gulf of Corinth and Adriatic Sea to the west (at Lechaion). Maritime traffic between Asia and Rome had a choice of routes: either the dangerous and longer route around the Peloponnesian Peninsula or the shortcut of a four-mile limestone trackway between Corinth’s two harbors. Merchants choosing the latter would pay to have their ships hauled in their entirety from one harbor to the other on this road.

Like many seaport cities, Corinth was quite worldly and eclectic in nature. Pagan temples and the idolatry they represented characterized the city (compare Acts 17:16 regarding Athens, some 50 miles to the east). The contents of 1 Corinthians indicate that many in the church there had struggled to overcome practices of their former pagan lifestyles (see 1 Corinthians 6:9–11).

Lesson Context: The Church

Having planted the church in Corinth on his second missionary journey (about AD 52; see Acts 18:1–17), Paul found it necessary to write to its members while he was in Ephesus on his third journey (AD 56; Acts 19:1–20:38; 1 Corinthians 16:8, 19). Paul was headed toward Corinth at the time (Acts 20:1–3), but Ephesus was several days away by sea travel, and the situation couldn’t wait for a personal visit. Reports had come to Paul regarding needed correctives and clarifications in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:11; 7:1; see also lesson 11).

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul had introduced the difficult issue (for that time) of eating meat that had been offered on pagan altars to idols. Meat that was left over from a pagan sacrifice, initiated by a worshipper who had brought the sacrificial

animal, was at the disposal of the officiating priests. What they couldn't eat personally they would sell in the marketplace. Such meat would be less expensive than other meat because the pagan priests didn't have any investment to recover. Some Christians wondered about the propriety of buying such meat. In doing so, were they were participating in pagan worship and thus compromising their witness for Christ?

In this regard, Paul emphasizes two points in 1 Corinthians 8. The first is the awareness that an idol is "nothing" (8:4); therefore those who are mature in knowledge on this point were free to eat such meat. Paul's second point counterbalances the first: "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak" (8:9). This stresses the importance of demonstrating concern for those having a weak conscience. Such a person might witness a fellow believer eating meat that had been offered to idols and thereby be drawn back into idolatry. Paul had more to say on this issue, and that is today's text.

### **LESSON COMMENTARY**

1 Corinthians 10:23–11:1 ((null)): Adjust Behavior to Suit Various Settings (10:23–11:1)

10:23–30. Here Paul wrote about the proper circumstances when meat offered to idols could be eaten. For v. 23, see the comments on 6:12–13. For v. 24, see the comments on 8:9–13. For conscience 'sake (v. 25) refers to the believer's conscience, but in vv. 27–29 an unbeliever's conscience is in view ("If one of the unbelievers invites you," v. 27; v. 29 indicates that vv. 27–28 are about the unbeliever's conscience). In vv. 25–30, Paul gave four guidelines regulating the eating of meat offered to idols. First, a believer, in his own home (not in the temples; see the comments on 10:6–22 above), could eat meat sold in the markets (v. 25). If he did not know it had been offered, he should just eat it and not ask questions about it, for the Lord provided it (v. 26). Second, in v. 27, a believer could eat idol's meat in an unbeliever's home, but not in a temple. Third, in v. 28, if an unbeliever informed a believer that the meat was offered to an idol, the believer should abstain for the sake of the unbeliever's conscience. An unbeliever's conscience might be harmed or his spiritual progress impeded if he felt the Christian's quasi-idolatrous action justified his own, or if he felt the believer was hypocritical or lax on his belief in the existence of one true God. Fourth, if a Christian might be condemned (judged, perhaps as a hypocrite) by an unbeliever for eating, the believer should abstain (v. 29). In v. 30, Paul gives the reverse idea to the thought of v. 29: "If I give up my freedom to partake with thankfulness, I will not be slandered concerning that for which I give thanks." To summarize vv. 23–30, Paul maintains that a believer can eat meat offered to idols, though not in a temple. But if there was any chance anyone would be harmed by eating this food, the believer was to abstain—and thus Paul goes full

circle back to chap. 8. For this approach to these verses, see Garland, 1 Corinthians, 497–99.

10:31–11:1. To do something for the glory of God is to act in such a way that people see Him in action and that His reputation is enhanced (Mt 5:16). If the Corinthians acted more like Paul (11:1) around unbelievers (10:32), many more may be saved (v. 33). Sometimes believers insist on pastimes that may actually be contrary to the Word (risqué movies, using resources to pander to creature comforts and appetites) that may make them vulnerable to evil influences, and will make them so self-absorbed that they are ineffective in serving others.

**LESSON NUGGET** – As Christians, we do have freedom. This freedom was purchased for us by Jesus Christ, so it is very precious. At no time did Paul deny the freedom of the mature Christian to enjoy his privileges in Christ. “I have the right to do anything!”—but not everything “builds us up,” and some things can lead to slavery (6:12). Some activities can cause your weaker brother to “fall into sin” (8:11–13). The strong Christian not only has knowledge, but he also has experience. He can look back and see how the Lord has dealt with him through the years. He knows that he has freedom, but he also knows that freedom involves responsibility. In other words, it is a mark of maturity when we balance our freedom with responsibility; otherwise, it ceases to be freedom and becomes anarchy and lawlessness.

***Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary***