

“Exercising Freedom or Restraint for God’s Glory”

1 Cor 10:14-11:1

8.29.21

For the past several weeks we have been looking at Christian freedom dealing with disputable matters from chapters 8-10. As a quick review, disputable matters can be summed up as non-essential issues in the Christian life, or “gray areas” in which the Bible does not spell out clear guidelines.

For example King James Version only or other translations are acceptable? Hymns or worship choruses? All spiritual gifts are active today or some have ceased? Pretrib, mid-trib or post-trib rapture?

Clothing, alcohol, movies, secular music, politics, use of money and on and on.

Cornerstone does not take a stance on gray areas. We don’t major on the minors.

But we do hold strongly to the majors- the black and white issues, the essential beliefs like: the virgin birth of Jesus, the death and resurrection of Jesus, the absolute need for Jesus, the inspiration of the scriptures.

This morning, we wrap up Paul’s teaching on freedom and restraint in the Christian life. Please turn with me to: 1 Cor 10:14-11:1, “Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵ I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶ 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? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. ¹⁸ Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? ¹⁹ What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ 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. ²¹ 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. ²² Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? ²³ “All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. ²⁴ Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. ²⁵ Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. ²⁶ For “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.” ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ 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— ²⁹ I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else’s conscience? ³⁰ If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks? ³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ³² Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ 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 Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”

Paul had great concern for his spiritual children. They were his beloved. He urges them to

Flee from idolatry.

Verse 14, “Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.” Flee. Run from it. Run from idolatry.

The word therefore reminds us that we are to look back at the previous writings to get the context. Last week, we were challenged to learn about our ancestors- the Israelites failures and ultimately physical deaths as a result of their idolatry.

For the Corinthians, remember they were surrounded by many temples. They used to participate frequently in pagan sacrifices. And though they were new creations in

Christ, they believed it was okay to participate in communion in the church as well as participate in pagan sacrifices. God sets the record straight through Paul's letter.

Paul utilized the examples of Christian communion and Israelites' sacrifices to prove to the Corinthians that they cannot participate in pagan sacrifices. First, they are reminded that

In communion you are fellowshiping with Christ and other believers.

Verse 16, "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?"

Next week we are going to go into more detail about communion because chapter 11 specifically discusses it. Here Paul references it in order to make a point about participating in religious practices.

An important word in this section of verse 14-22 is "participate" or "participation." The word in Greek is Koinonia. It means the "act of sharing in the activities or privileges of an intimate association or group." It can be translated fellowship and common union. And it is where we get the word Communion.

If you watched the kid's tv show the Electric Company growing up you might remember this scene- two silhouettes facing each other working on compound words. Out of one mouth came one word and out of another mouth came another word and then together they would say the compound word. One mouth says "Common" and the other mouth says, "Union" and together they say "Communion."

What kind of common union occurs when believers take communion? The believer is communing with Jesus Himself.

Picture Jesus standing before the table and offering you the bread and the cup. He invites you into a deep fellowship with Him as you remember the sacrifice that He made for you. You contemplate His body being brutally beaten for you. You contemplate His

blood poured out for you. Your heart and mind reflect on the forgiveness that He attained for you. You experience gratefulness and thankfulness that you are “totally accepted, deeply loved, completely forgiven and empowered to live a new life in Christ because of the cross and resurrection of Jesus.” What a special time to fellowship with the risen Christ.

When you take communion you are fellowshiping with Christ and you are also fellowshiping with other believers. Verse 17, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”

Communion is sharing one bread, in one body, as one family- the family of God.

In NT times, they would pass one loaf of bread and each person would pull a piece off symbolizing that we partaking of one Body- Christ’s body as one body- the body of Christ. One bread, one Lord, one family.

We don’t pass out one loaf mostly due sanitary reasons. Common union is there when we each remove the cups from the communion trays. And when we wait to eat the bread and drink the cup of juice **together**. Our common union in Christ supersedes any other commonality that we might experience. It is a deep fellowship with my forever brothers and sisters in Christ. A reminder that we belong together. A reminder that we are to love each other and keep the unity because we are the family of God.

The second example Paul used to make his point was sacrifices made by the Israelites. Verse 18, “Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?”

Paul is referencing the religious practices of the Israelites. When they brought their sacrifices to the altar through the priests they were participating with God.

When the Israelites gave their thanksgiving offerings, they were able to eat part of the sacrifice so they were participating in the spiritual significance of the altar of the temple. They were fellowshiping with Yahweh.

In Christian communion and in Jewish sacrifice, to share food is to establish fellowship.

But what about pagan sacrifices?

Verse 19. He writes, “What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ 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.”

In pagan sacrifices you are fellowshiping with demons.

If you have been here with us the past few weeks your mind might’ve lit up. Didn’t Paul say that idols didn’t exist in chapter 8? Yes he did. 1 Corinthians 8:4 (NLT), “So, what about eating meat that has been offered to idols? Well, we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God.” Isn’t this a contradiction?

No, he is correct in both statements. There are no other gods (lower case g). No other god exists but only God in three persons. So when people are sacrificing to an idol they are not sacrificing to a god. Here in chapter 10, Paul gives a nuance or distinction in that though there are no gods, there are demons behind the worship of idols.

To worship an idol is to worship a demon.

When the Corinthians were breaking bread and drinking the cup of communion they were fellowshiping with Christ. But when the Corinthians were drinking and eating in the pagan temples they were actually fellowshiping with demons.

Demons, evil angels are behind the worship of idols. What do we know about demons and their desires? Wayne Grudem in His excellent Systematic Theology book writes,

“Satan and his demons use lies, deception and every other kind of destructive activity to attempt to cause people to **turn away from God and destroy themselves**... They will also try to use temptation, doubt, guilt, fear, confusion, sickness, envy, pride, slander, or any other means possible to **hinder a Christian’s witness and usefulness**.”

Satan and his demons also blind unbelievers from the truth. 2 Corinthians 4:4 (NLT), “Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don’t believe. They are **unable to see the glorious light of the Good News**. They don’t understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.”

You might think, well I don’t go to pagan temples so I don’t worship or fellowship with demons. To participate in a seance, fortune telling, ouija boards and the like is to fellowship with demons. Demons who are trying to deceive you to think that what you are doing is good for you. Demons’ goals are not to make friends with you. They hate you- especially believers in Christ. They cannot stand you because you represent Jesus. Why would you want to fellowship with demons?

The Corinthians thought their connection with God was strong enough that they could dabble in idolatry and eat in the pagan temples. But Paul strongly writes in verse 21, “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.”

You cannot fellowship with God and demons.

Christian and pagan worship are radically incompatible with each other because of the completely opposite spiritual beings worshipped. You have perfect Holy God who lovingly only looks out for your best. And you have demons who hate your guts. They don’t go together.

There was a video craze recently that was funny to watch. By the way, because we do online services, we have to be very careful in using videos. I would love to show you some funny clips but with youtube copyright rules, our online service could be flagged

and stopped while streaming. It is not worth taking the risk. So I need to describe it to you.

Dog owners took their dog outside and placed it between them and then without a word both owners ran in opposite directions to see what the dog would do. Some dogs immediately ran after the owner they considered their favorite. Other dogs were perplexed with a face that read "What is going on?" for a second and then took off after one of the owners. And some dogs looked both ways and decided to not play the game and lay down- making the owners come back to them. Those were the funniest ones.

To fellowship with God and with demons is not compatible because they are diametrically opposed to each other. It would be like placing God on one side and demons on the other. And they both go in opposite directions. Which one will you go after? You cannot have both.

It is not just that God and demons are diametrically opposed. It is also provoking God to jealousy. Verse 22, "Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?"

What does it mean to provoke God to jealousy? By definition God has no needs. If He had needs He would not be God. Since God has no needs we can be sure that God is not jealous of anything or anyone. The key word is of. God is not jealous **of** us nor is He jealous of the demons.

You might be jealous of: someone's career, someone's home, someone's family, someone's education, someone's lifestyle. God is not jealous in this way.

Instead, God is jealous **for**. He is jealous for you, your praise, your devotion, your relationship. Again, not because He needs you. But because He is love. God's love is always looking out for our best. Always.

God was not happy, not pleased if the Corinthians worshipped an idol because He deserved their worship not demons. And because their worship was degrading their character and lives. They were settling for something far less than the best- God Himself.

God is possessive or jealous for the worship and service that solely belongs to Him. He seeks your worship and heart. Why give it to someone or something that is far below our perfect and loving God?

Paul moves from idolatry to practical examples of exercising or restraining your freedom in Christ. The bottom line of verses 23-30 is:

Christians seek the good of their neighbors.

Verse 23, "All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. ²⁴ Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor."

In chapter 8, Paul challenged the stronger believers to look out for the weaker brother's conscience. Here he is again emphasizing that we are not to use our freedoms to please ourselves with little care of how it might impact someone else.

Paul gave two practical scenarios that the Corinthians would face.

The first scenario was purchasing meat at a grocery store in our context- a meat market in their context. Listen to the instructions: verse 25, "Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. ²⁶ For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof."

Don't ask where the meat originated- after all all food comes from God. Instead buy it without asking questions and go home and eat it. No issues there to limit your freedom.

The second scenario had to do with eating dinner at an unbeliever's home. Verse 27, "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."

If nothing is said about the meat, then don't ask for clarification. Just eat it.

But if someone shares the source of the meat is from a temple sacrifice then Paul gives different instructions. Verse 28, "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."

The believer may have no issues eating meat sacrificed to idols. However, he needs to wonder why the person brought up that the meat was sacrificed to idols. We don't know if it was the host or another guest or even a weaker brother/sister that was present who spoke up. It doesn't matter because the wise believer will choose to restrain his/her freedom for the sake of the one who spoke up.

Leon Morris gives some good clarification on why you would abstain in this case. "The strong Christian knows that offering meat to an idol cannot really alter its character, for the idol is nothing; his conscience is clear. **But a pagan observer thinks the idol is a god, and thus sees the Christian who eats the meat as sanctioning his idolatry.** A weak Christian observer will be in danger of being harmed in the way noted earlier (in chapter 8). Whatever the status of the informer, then, the wise and kindly course for the strong Christian is to abstain from eating."

Does it seem to you that Paul was wishy washy? To eat or not eat. To drink or not drink. To go to a movie or not go to a movie. To listen to this music or not listen to this music? Was he trying to be something he was not? The answer has to do with motive. If Paul was being something he wasn't in order to look good. That is being wishy washy. But if he was being sensitive to the needs of those around him in order to not be

a stumbling block or hindrance to Christ then his motive was love. Love is not being wishy washy.

From chapter 8, I provided four questions to ask in order to know if we can exercise or refrain from certain freedoms.

- **What does the Bible say about this?**

Does the Bible condemn it? If yes then no it is not a freedom whatsoever.

- **Is my conscious clear on this?** Do I have the freedom to do this without my conscious lighting up?
- **Is this best for me?** Does it have the potential to master me?
- **Will it wound my Christian brother or sister?** Will it build them up or tear them down?

From chapter 10 we can add two additional questions to help.

- **Will it only please me, or will it glorify Christ?**
- **Will it help to win the lost to Christ or turn them away?**

How I answer these questions determines if I limit my freedom out of love. Whether you will exercise or limit your freedom ultimately is answered by the question **who are you living for?** If I am doing something to ultimately please me then I am doing it for me. If I am sacrificing or limiting a freedom for someone else, I am glorifying God.

The ultimate goal is that we would exercise or limit our freedom **for God's glory**. 1 Corinthians 10:31 (ESV), "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

If you are in a situation where there is freedom- do it to God's glory. If you are in a situation that requires limiting your freedom- do it to God's glory. It is not just the disputable matters. It is whatever you do. Let your actions reflect positively on God.

Let your actions create in others a curiosity to know the answer to “the reason for the hope you have.”

Paul ends this section with a very challenging verse. 1 Corinthians 11:1 (ESV), “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” The Corinthians did not have the New Testament in their hands. It did not exist because it had not all been written at that point in time. How were they to walk in Christ when they didn’t have His Word?

Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.

Paul was saying, I am seeking to follow Christ’s example. As I follow Christ’s example, I ask you to follow me and therefore we will both be following Christ.

Remember the Great Commission- Jesus’ last words on earth? Matthew 28:19–20 (NLT), “Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ **Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.** And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Isn’t that discipleship? Isn’t that what mentoring is all about? Bringing someone along with you as you walk with Christ? That is a big part of our vision. “Every Christ-follower a disciple; every disciple a disciple-maker.”

Wherever you are, there are people who have not read the Bible. You are the Bible lived out before them.

Wherever you are, there are people have never met Christ. You represent Christ before them.

We received a very encouraging letter from my son Mac on Friday. He is at Fort Benning, GA going through Boot Camp. While he has been in reception, dealing with paper work and waiting for his assigned unit to officially begin basic training, he and

another Christian from South Korea have taken struggling recruits to chapel each Sunday.

And they started a Bible study and 6 other soldiers joined them- one in particular that is struggling being away from home. This young man had never opened a Bible until Mac brought him along to the study.

Though they had a 3 am wake up the next morning, these soldiers met from 10-11pm studying God's Word dealing with issues like anger, pride, loneliness, trust. Follow me as I follow the example of Christ.

Who are you leading along the path of faith? Who are you loving into the kingdom?
Who are you helping walk with Christ together?

Let's pray

o.b.g.