

## Freedom to Edify

Mom, you're looking dressed up tonight," said Jaric, "Where are you going?"

"It's just a skirt and sweater," Lydia told her 33-year-old son, who was raiding her refrigerator. "I'm heading to church."

"On a Friday night?" said Jaric, putting two food containers down on the kitchen island. "It's just I've gotten used to seeing you in pants, and it's really cold outside."

"I know," Lydia smiled. "Which is why I have on my knee-high boots."

"Well, why bother?" asked Jaric.

"Because a young coworker of mine invited me to her church," said Lydia. "She's a sweet girl and a new Christian. Her church is having revival this week, and I told her I would come."

"Oh, the girl who doesn't wear pants?" Jaric asked.

"Yes, her name is Kala," added Lydia.

"Well, that's her issue," said Jaric. "That doesn't have anything to do with you."

"But she invited me to go to her church," said Lydia, "and I wouldn't go there in pants. I don't want to be disrespectful to them or her. Everything in life is not always about us, son. We have to know when to relinquish or modify our freedoms or rights to benefit and help others."

**1.** *When has someone caused you to stumble in your faith?*

**2.** *Have you ever caused someone else to stumble in their walk with the Lord? What happened?*

**3.** *How can we give glory to God in all things—even in mundane tasks such as chores, meal prep, or running errands?*

## Seeking Good

*1 Corinthians 10:23-24, KJV*  
 23 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.  
 24 Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.

*1 Corinthians 10:23-24, NIV*  
 23 "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is constructive.  
 24 No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.

While some churches that received letters from Paul had mostly believers from Jewish backgrounds, the church at Corinth was mostly made up of Gentile (non-Jewish) believers. These new Christians had lived in a world where it was acceptable for a person to worship many gods. As these church members began to live out their new life, they faced a lot of questions. If they wanted to live for and worship God alone, what customs from their old lives did they need to abandon? What, if any, could they keep?

Paul knew that some of the Corinthians differed sharply in their understanding of what it meant to live a godly life. In verse 23, he quotes a phrase that has been called a "Corinthian slogan"—that is, a phrase that people throughout Corinth would have known and used to defend their individual freedoms. Paul had quoted this motto previously in 6:12 in relation to sexual immorality. In the Corinthian mindset, it was good for a person to pursue whatever benefited himself or herself. Paul, however, brought the old phrase into a radically different, Christ-centered understanding: it is not enough for a person to simply do whatever benefits the self. Instead, God calls Christians to act in ways that seek "the good of others" ahead of their own.

**4.** *What idea did Paul quote to his readers twice in this passage?*

**5.** *What does the passage say that we should pursue instead of personal gain?*

## Eating Right

*1 Corinthians 10:25-30, KJV*

25 Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake:

26 For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.

27 If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake.

28 But if any man say unto you, this is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof:

29 Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?

30 For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks?

*1 Corinthians 10:25-30, NIV*

<sup>25</sup>Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, <sup>26</sup>for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

<sup>27</sup>If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. <sup>28</sup>But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience. <sup>29</sup>I am referring to the other person's conscience, not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another's conscience? <sup>30</sup>If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?

One of the most urgent questions in the church was, "Is it acceptable for a Christian to eat food that had been offered to an idol?" Meat from sacrifices to idols was generally handed out to worshipers or sold to local markets. At the time of Paul's writing, a high percentage of all the meat eaten in Corinth would have originally come from animal sacrifices at the local pagan temples. In most cases, eating food from an offering represented having a relationship with the god to whom the food was offered.

Meat sold in the local markets, however, may or may

not have come from the temple sacrifices. Some Christians were choosing to eat no meat at all, just to be safe. Yet Paul assured Christians they need not worry about the source of the meat that was for sale. He quoted Psalm 24:1 in verse 26 to remind the Corinthians that the Lord alone created all animals, and therefore they were ultimately okay to eat, regardless of how they arrived at the market.

Likewise, Paul said if a Christian was invited to a dinner hosted by a non-Christian, that person should eat whatever the host served. Giving and receiving dinner invitations was the key to business and socializing in the Corinthian world, and many members of the church would have been having dinners with non-believing friends on a regular basis. Hosts often bought meat for their guests from local temples, and some would even sacrifice animals specifically to prepare for guests later in the day.

So, if the host or someone at the meal said that the food at a meal had been previously offered to a pagan god, Christians were commanded not to eat it. Paul explained that this exception would be for a “weaker” fellow Christian (see 8:7) at the same meal who worried about the source of the food, since unbelievers would not care where the food came from. A stronger believer would not want to do anything to confuse the weaker believer or lead him to do something against that person’s conscience (vs. 29).

Except for that specific situation, Paul made it clear that a believer on his or her own was completely free to enjoy the gracious blessings of good food. Rather than worrying about what other people think, in most cases, the believer could eat and give thanks in his or her heart for the God who created food in the first place (vs. 30)!

**6.** *Why does Paul say Christians are free to eat anything sold in the market?*

**7.** *When does Paul say Christians are not supposed to eat food at a dinner in a non-Christian’s home?*

**8.** *What attitude did Paul describe himself having when he ate food?*

## For His Glory, For Their Good

1 Corinthians 10:31—11:1, KJV

31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

32 Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:

33 Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

11:1 Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

1 Corinthians 10:31—11:1, NIV

<sup>31</sup>So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. <sup>32</sup>Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—<sup>33</sup>even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

<sup>11:1</sup>Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

This letter assured the Corinthians that they had great freedom in earthly matters like eating and drinking. The goal of the Christian life is simple: to glorify God in all of it. But Paul made it clear that glorifying God means caring for our neighbor's understanding of Him, too. Christians are commanded to live in a way described by the Greek word *aproskopos* (ap-ros'-ko-pos)—literally “not causing to stumble” (vs. 32). A Christian's way of living should not contain any barrier that might keep others from pursuing Christ as fully as possible. All should be done with an eye to helping people know, love, and follow God better, “that they may be saved” (vs. 33), even if it means giving up certain freedoms in the short term. Ultimately, Paul's goal—and our goal—is to live a life that is worthy of imitation, because we are imitating the true leader, Jesus Christ (11:1).

**9.** *What does the text say our motivation should be in everything we do?*

**10.** *Why did Paul give so much effort to being on good terms with others?*

**11.** *At the end of this passage, who did Paul say to imitate?*

## Can I Do That?

I made it to high school without ever having a boyfriend. I understood that relationships were serious and was committed to the idea of chastity before marriage. When I was a freshman, I had been friends with this boy. We talked constantly, rode the bus together and enjoyed each other's company. But there was a problem. Joe wasn't a Christian or even religious.

Having a solid relationship with my mom, I asked her, "Can I date a guy that's not a Christian?" Among other things, she mentioned the verse about not yoking yourself with a non-believer. Ah! So, like the goody-goody Christian girl I was, when Joe asked me to be his girlfriend, I replied that I couldn't date someone who wasn't a Christian.

I'm sure I didn't handle it with the grace I could've. He may have interpreted my answer as judgmental or rude. Whatever mistakes I made in handling it, that's how it went down. Later, when one of my non-Christian girlfriends asked me about Joe, I told her what happened. She questioned my decision and wanted to know if I wasn't taking this whole Christian idea too far?

I wasn't going to marry the guy—we were both 14. How serious could it be? Would I have lost my salvation by dating him? No. Would he have caused me to stumble in my faith? Maybe. Could I have brought him to the Lord through my example? Possibly. We'll never know all the right answers or make all the perfect moves. Paul says that all things are legal but not all are good for us. So instead of "Can I do that?" the better question may be, "Should I do that?"

**12.** *When has someone remarked to you, "I didn't know Christians could do that"?*

**13.** *How do you feel about being an example for non-believers?*

**14.** *What's something in your life that you've been doing/participating in that perhaps you shouldn't be? How will you respond to the Lord's conviction?*

## Follow My Lead

Most of us have Christian friends or non-believers who regularly watch what we are doing. Whether we think about it or not, we're setting an example for them of some kind, good or bad. We should stop and think if there are any changes we need to make in that example we are presenting.

► *What example are you setting for other believers or non-believers you know or see regularly? Upon thinking about your example, what do you need to change?*

### KEY VERSE

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.

—1 Corinthians 10:23, KJV

"I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is constructive.

—1 Corinthians 10:23, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of November 27 through December 3

(See *The Quiet Hour and Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Proverbs 17:17-22—Faith-based Friendship.
- Tue.** Matthew 26:31-35—Peter's Test of Faith.
- Wed.** Hebrews 3:7-19—Hear God's Voice.
- Thu.** Leviticus 19:30-37—Faith in Action.
- Fri.** Acts 10:34-48—God Honors Genuine Faith.
- Sat.** Ruth 4:13-22—Naomi Becomes a Grandmother.
- Sun.** Ruth 1:6-18, 22—Ruth's Compassionate Faith.