

Lesson 6 9 March 2014

Christian Liberty—Governed by Love

Lesson Scope: 1 Corinthians 8, 9, and 10:16-33

Lesson Focus

In this lesson Paul addressed another issue that the Corinthians were dealing with. Eating meat offered to idols was an issue that both the Gentiles and the Jews could relate to. Numerous situations related to eating meat are explained—eating meat knowingly at a place connected with idol worship, eating meat unknowingly as a guest in another's house, and eating knowingly as a guest.

Paul gave these instructions with four groups of people in mind—enlightened Christians, new converts with very sensitive consciences, Gentiles or worldlings, and Jews.

We do not face situations identical to what the Corinthian Christians faced, but the principles that guided them in their exercise of Christian liberty will benefit us in nurturing relationships today.

Knowledge from God through the Scriptures is the foundation of Christian liberty. Love for the brethren and for lost souls, however, governs the exercise of this liberty.

The lesson focus points out that love governs the use of liberty. When we exercise true love, our knowledge can be a means of helping others to experience the blessing of Christian fellowship. This unselfish love regulates the use of Christian liberty. Daniel Kauffman wrote in *Doctrines of the Bible*, "Any privilege ceases to be such when the exercise of it becomes an injury to others."

Keep this study positive and practical. Remember this sober warning: "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" (Matthew 18:6-7).

Lesson Aim: To present principles that regulate the exercise of Christian liberty.

Theme Verses: 1 Corinthians 10:32-33. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

Lesson Text

Consecrated Purpose

1 Corinthians 8:1-4 ¹ Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. ² And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. ³ But if any man love God, the same is known of him. ⁴ As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol *is* nothing in the world, and that *there is* none other God but one.

1 Corinthians 8:7-13 ⁷ Howbeit *there is* not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat *it* as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. ⁸ But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. ⁹ But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. ¹⁰ For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; ¹¹ And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? ¹² But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. ¹³ Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

Selfless Service

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 ¹⁹ For though I be free from all *men*, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. ²⁰ And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; ²¹ To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them

that are without law. ²² To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some. ²³ And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with *you*.

Considerate Living

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 ²⁴ Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. ²⁵ And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. ²⁶ I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: ²⁷ But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

1 Corinthians 10:31-33 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.

Questions for Study

Considerate Living

1. What is the value of knowledge?
2. What is more important than knowledge?
3. In what ways might Christians cause seeking souls to stumble?

Selfless Service

4. How can we minister effectively to the spiritual needs of others?

Consecrated Purpose

5. What requirements for personal victory are found in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27?
6. How can we bring glory to God?
7. What blessings result as we follow God's plan for liberty?

Analyzing the Passage

These verses discuss varying degrees of knowledge. Some of the Corinthian Christians had a mature understanding of God and His requirements, while the understanding of other Christians was much more limited.

A "weak conscience" (1 Corinthians 8:7, 12) could be that of a Christian who is in the early stages of his walk with the Lord. It could also refer to an oversensitive conscience.

Liberty (1 Corinthians 8:9) means "authority or right."

To "sin against Christ" (8:12) is to offend a brother and cause him to turn away from Christ and His body, the church.

Offend (1 Corinthians 8:13) means "to cause to stumble and sin."

"Unto the Jews I became as a Jew" (1 Corinthians 9:20) means that Paul related to people in their circumstances and at their level of understanding.

Principles and Applications

Considerate Living

1. Arrogance destroys relationships (1 Corinthians 8:1). Attitudes about ourselves and others have a profound effect on the quality of our relationships. Selfish attitudes similar to those of the priest and the Levite who "passed by on the other side" (Luke 10:31-32) are native to us, and they require ongoing mortification.

2. Love for God and our fellow men must govern all our relationships (1 Corinthians 8:1-3). Love is foundational to our success in meeting others' needs. Love for our brethren proves our love for God and motivates us to bring out the best in others rather than focus unduly on their weaknesses.

3. A consciousness of the influence our actions have on others is necessary in exercising Christian liberty (1 Corinthians 8:4, 7). Our children are watching us, the world is observing us, and the brotherhood is counting on us to be an example of the believers. Our relationships in our homes and churches, our responses to authority, and our reactions to the circumstances of life all have potential to affect the gain or loss of someone's salvation.

4. To cause others to turn away from the church is to sin against Christ (1 Corinthians 8:8-12). This is a solemn warning against offenses in the brotherhood. The brother with a weak conscience receives tender care from Christ and merits the same from us. "He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom" (Isaiah 40:11).

5. The Christian will at times deny himself of that which is legitimate, for the good of his brethren (8:13). We must consider our spiritual life

and our brethren's spiritual lives when we make our daily decisions. A privilege is no longer a privilege—and it should not be exercised—if it becomes injurious to another.

Selfless Service

6. The law of Christ governs the Christian at all times when he is reaching out to help others with their spiritual needs (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). The divine law of love is all-important in our relationships with others. We seek to understand our brother's frame of reference and to be constructive by showing empathy. Paul describes this as being "all things to all men." However, we must never violate the principles of righteousness.

Consecrated Purpose

7. Carefulness in exercising Christian responsibilities is necessary to avoid falling away (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). In an effort to serve and help others, we give them the benefit of the doubt. We may be tempted to do the same for ourselves. But Christian liberty is never freedom to serve the flesh. Whatever our position, we must remember the admonition of 1 Corinthians 10:12: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

8. The guiding principle in life needs to be to bring glory to God (1 Corinthians 10:31-32). Our God deserves all the glory that His children bring Him, and He requires us to put His kingdom first in our lives. We must crucify the flesh and use the talents He has given us to serve His cause and not our own.

9. The good of others supersedes our personal well-being (10:33). Ministering to the needs of others is effective only as we willingly give up our own interests and follow the example of Christ when He "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:7).

Important Teachings

1. Arrogance destroys relationships (1 Corinthians 8:1).
2. Love for God and our fellow men must govern all our relationships (1 Corinthians 8:1-3).
3. A consciousness of the influence our actions have on others is nec-

essary in exercising Christian liberty (1 Corinthians 8:4, 7).

4. To cause others to turn away from the church is to sin against Christ (1 Corinthians 8:8-12).

5. The Christian will at times deny himself of that which is legitimate, for the good of his brethren (1 Corinthians 8:13).

6. The law of Christ governs the Christian at all times when he is reaching out to help others with their spiritual needs (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

7. Carefulness in exercising Christian responsibilities is necessary to avoid falling away (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

8. The guiding principle in life needs to be to bring glory to God (1 Corinthians 10:31-32).

9. The good of others supersedes our personal well-being (1 Corinthians 10:33).

Answers to Questions

1. What is the value of knowledge?

Knowledge of the Scriptures builds our faith and educates our consciences. When used in a right way, knowledge can be a means of helping others to see Christ. When we reveal a know-it-all attitude, knowledge becomes bondage.

2. What is more important than knowledge?

Love for God and our fellow men is necessary for healthy relationships. When we wound our brother's conscience, we sin against Christ.

3. In what ways might Christians cause seeking souls to stumble?

Christians could cause seeking souls to stumble by requiring them to embrace practices or traditions before they have had time to study the Scriptures and think through Christian doctrine and practice. Pointing out inconsistencies in their lives too early could discourage them and turn them away.

4. How can we minister effectively to the spiritual needs of others?

We minister to others effectively by beginning at their level (think of the example of Philip in his witnessing to the Ethiopian eunuch). Avoid a know-it-all attitude. Make them feel accepted by taking an interest in their day-to-day lives. Be sensitive to their needs and concerns. Give them a listening ear. Look for opportunities to tell them about Christ. Allow time for growth and Holy Spirit illumination before requiring major changes in their lives.

5. What requirements for personal victory are found in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27?

Diligence (1 Corinthians 9:24) is needed to reach our goal. We must lay aside the things that hinder us. Temperance is necessary. We must know who our enemy is and what his tactics are (1 Corinthians 9:26).

6. How can we bring glory to God?

Seek first the kingdom of God. Use the talents He has given us for His glory and not our own. Crucify the flesh daily. Serve others rather than follow our own interests.

7. What blessings result as we follow God's plan for liberty?

The blessings include peace in our homes and unity in the church. Souls both in our families and in the world around us will be attracted to God and salvation.

Summarizing the Lesson

"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Galatians 5:13-14).

Research Guide

1. Read verses related to liberty: Isaiah 61:1-2; John 8:31-36; Galatians 2:4; 5:13, 14; 1 Peter 2:16.

2. Read the chapter on "Self-denial" in *Doctrines of the Bible*.