

Core Study #4

Christian Freedom

Passage: 1 Corinthians 8, 10:23-11:1

Themes: Christian freedom, love

Summary:

In chapters 8-11, the apostle Paul writes concerning the freedom and rights of a Christian (we are free in Christ), but at the same time, there are limits to our new freedom. Freedom must not lead to sin. We are free to do anything, but we should always seek the good of others ch.10:23-24. As a Core we suggest you read these passages together: 8:1-13; 10:23-11:1

In these passages Paul points out that as Christians we should willingly give up our 'rights' and therefore freedoms. These rights could include cultural expectations, personal desires, even at times financial reimbursement so that the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ will not be hindered in any way by the way we live.

In 8:1-6, Paul writes about food offered to idols, a question the Corinthian believers have asked about. Paul bases his answer on love, love for one another, not on knowledge. There are many Christians who may be younger in their faith than we, or who may not have as much understanding of God and Scripture than some others. Therefore we must be careful that our actions or our understanding of God do not confuse younger believers causing them to sin. If something we or another Christians does becomes a stumbling block for another Christian or non-Christian, then it is better we do not do that action ie. Do we wear revealing clothing? Do we drink alcohol and if so are we always self controlled when it comes to the amount? Do some people take offense at our language?.

Elsewhere Paul writes that we are free from the Law (OT commandments) in the sense that we do not have to obey the Law in order to make ourselves righteous (right) with God. In the past, people tried to make themselves right before God through living as closely to the Law as they could (of course they always failed). In Christ we are already righteous in Christ and therefore free from trying to become righteous through good works (through obeying the Law). Now we obey the Law not to become right with God, but because we want to show our appreciation to God for what He has freely given to us.

There were 3 questions asked by the Corinthian church.

1. Can Christians eat meat that has been offered to an idol? (note: 1 Cor. 8:1-13 & 10:14-32). When an animal is offered as a sacrifice in Judaism, often only a small portion of the animal is burned on the altar. The rest may be taken home by the priest to be eaten or it may be sold in the market. Similarly in pagan sacrifices. Therefore, people who buy meat in the market may not know which has been offered to an idol

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and which has not. Paul advises the Corinthians to buy the meat at the market without asking questions (don't worry).

2. Can a Christian at the invitation of someone else, go to a non-believer's house to eat, even if the food served may have been offered on an idol (1Cor.10:27-30).

YES. But Paul explains why.

- a. All foods are good. God created this world and everything in it. (1Cor. 10:26,30)
- b. Do not be a stumbling block to another believer or to the non-believer (1Cor 8:9-13; 10:29). The food is nothing (8:8) but what is important is the effect eating such food may have on others (drawing them closer to or further from God). Love rather than exercised freedom or rights is to be practiced by Christians, (eg. Eating pork in front of Muslims is seen by many Muslim people as offensive. So as Christians we don't do this. Don't go to parties where people are getting drunk or high when by so doing you are communicating that you approve or even partake in these activities).

3. Can a Christian participate in pagan feasts? (1 Cor.8:10; 10:14-22)

The Apostle Paul forbids a Christian from going to a Temple and eating. Why? Whether it is a religious feast or just a social meal, these meals are in honor of a god/demon (10:20). A Christian can not honor a demon! By participating in the Lord's Supper, we are fellowshiping with Christ, we show our unity with Christ and His Church. By eating at temples, a person is fellowshiping with demons. How can we do both?

Leaders Preparation:

To prepare to lead this study you as the Core leader should read the suggested passages over a few times (if you have time read all of chapters 8, 9 & 10) before Core, noting what you feel might be the main points of the passage and keeping in mind our main theme for all of these studies: **'growing as a believer and as a UCM community' in line with John 15:8: 'This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.'**

Using your UCM Leader's Guide (pp. 22-23 or pp. 27-33), ask some observation questions:

- Ask the who, why, what, where questions if appropriate.
- Who are the main characters in these verses?
- What is going on in these verses?

Key words or phrases: Are there any words, history or cultural issues that you don't understand but may be important to the overall understanding of the passage?

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Introduction Question:

- Can you think of a time in your life when you've had to abstain from doing something for the sake of someone else?

Discussion Questions (selection to choose from):

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

- What does food offered to idols have to do with loving each other?

Few of us in contemporary Western culture are confronted with this issue. But, this is very much an important issue for many Christians in many other parts of the world today. However, the principle behind this issue (abstaining from doing a thing for the sake of someone else) is very relevant for Western Christians today.

To help you understand this issue consider when you visit a Thai restaurant in Vancouver. Near the entrance you often notice an idol with food offerings placed on it. You do not know whether the food you order at the restaurant has been offered to the idol (and therefore the demon behind the idol) or not. Should you as a Christian eat at this restaurant? Paul would suggest yes, you can eat. However, if in the unlikely event your server should mention to you that the food you are about to order has been offered to an idol, then you can no longer eat. Why? Not because doing so will harm you. But because you want to be a witness to the server that as a Christian you will not participate in worshipping another god (demons) AND you do not want to lead fellow younger Christians who may be with you at the restaurant into sin. What sin? You do not want to give them the false impression that Christ, Buddha or whomever are all one and the same. Another example would be drinking alcohol. Can Christians drink in careful moderation? Yes, but if you are in the presence of a recovering alcoholic you would not order a beer. Not because doing so would be sinful, but doing so may lead your friend to return to drinking.

- Give some examples of how the exercise of someone's freedom or rights may harm another or cause someone to stumble?
- Sometimes Christians argue, appearing to have a lot of Bible knowledge, but do not share that knowledge in a spirit of love. Can you think of some examples of this?
- Read 10:18-22. What may be some of the things in your life that are trying to displace God's rightful place?

Are there any other gods apart from the God of the Bible? Are demons real? This may seem like a theoretical argument to Western Christians, but it is a very real issue for many Christians living in Africa and Asia today. Many contemporary

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westerners have lost their sensitivity to the Spirit realm while others have an unhealthy fascination with the occult. In addition to the worship of idols and the real demons behind these idols people can create idols out of sports, possessions, girlfriends/boyfriends, school, or money.

- Why would these idols arouse God's jealousy? (10:18-22) When you think of jealousy do you see it as negative or positive?
- What does God through Paul mean when he writes, 'Everything is permissible but not everything is beneficial or constructive'? (10:23)
- How are we to follow Paul's instructions to try to please everybody in every way (10:33) while at the same time living so that we please God?

Response (selection to choose from):

- 'Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.' (10:31). What does this mean for you in light of the context of this passage as a student at UBC? Note: This is the major theme of this study.
- What rights are you willing to give up if they cause a Christian to stumble in their faith or a non-believer to turn away from wanting to following Jesus?