

Principles Of Christian Liberty – Part 4

1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1

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Let's read two verses, verses 14 and 15, to get us started because they somewhat kind of are transitional belonging to the previous section and then ushering us into the section we cover tonight. Look at 1 Corinthians 10:14. Paul says, "Wherefore,"—and whenever there's a 'wherefore,' you want to know what it's there for. He says, "Wherefore, my dearly beloved,"—he loved those believers there in Corinth—"flee from idolatry." That's really a closing exhortation to what has gone before that. Remember he said, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not"—allow—"you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." So, he wants us to " . . . flee from idolatry."

The Bible says that we should flee youthful lusts, not to flirt with idolatry, not to play with idolatry, but to " . . . flee from idolatry." You say, "Well, thank God that we don't have any idols today," and I disagree. There are so many things that come between us and God. An idol can be anything that is replacing God in your life. It can be a husband, it can be a wife, it can be children, it could be grandchildren. It could be a job, career, or hobby, sport. It could be money. It could be lust. It could be greed. Anything that takes the place of God in your life can become an idol. The Bible says, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Money becomes an idol, as we let it take the place of God in our lives.

Note verse 15. Paul says, "I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say." He's wanting us to be wise, wanting us to be discerning, wanting us to listen and flee from idolatry. Idol feasts in the pagan temples were a danger, and if they didn't exercise their liberty right, they could go back into bondage; so Paul was concerned about them. They were in a dangerous place of being overconfident that if they weren't careful in the exercise of their liberty in Christ, that three things could happen. Listen to me carefully.

First, they could fall into sin. This is verses 1-13. If they were not careful and we let our liberties take control—we don't walk in love and we don't care about the glory of God and whether we stumble other people—then we can fall back into sin. That was last week.

Tonight we're going to look at these next two things. Secondly, he was also worried that they could fellowship with demons. This is a fascinating thought. He's going to go on to say tonight that those who eat meat offered to idols and worship idols are actually partaking of the demons that are involved with the idols itself. The idols are nothing, but demons use them to bring an influence on people's lives, verses 14-22.

Thirdly, we'll see it tonight, Paul was concerned that they could stumble another believer, verses 23-11:1. So, the same thing could happen to us. We can go back into sin, we could have fellowship with demons, and we can't drink of the Lord's cup and the cup of demons, it doesn't work. Thirdly, that they could stumble another believer in the Lord, a brother or sister in Christ.

The Corinthians were saved from the worship of idols and the pagan temples, but now they're in danger of going back into their old ways.

In 1 Corinthians 8:4, when the section started, he said, “. . . we know that an idol is nothing . . .” He is warning them that their knowledge, which he said, “. . . puffeth up”—with your knowledge you get pride and self-confidence, ‘An idol is nothing. I can handle them. I’m going to go back into the temple, back into my old, sinful stomping grounds;’ and he says, ‘Be careful, but love builds up.’ So, he wraps up the whole thought of “Knowledge puffeth up,”—leads you to pride and self-dependency and leads you back into sin, but love builds up or will edify you, so the warning to flee idolatry, verse 14.

The Bible tells us in 1 John 5:21, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” Like the Corinthians we’ve been set free from the old life and all the idols of our past life, but we’re in danger of going back. I love what Charles Hodge said. Listen carefully. He said, “Going to the verge of the allowable, we might be drawn into the sinful.” Going to the verge or the border of what is allowable, we might be drawn into the sinful.

Have you ever been driving up a mountain road and it’s a very steep cliff on the right-hand side of the road. When you’re driving on that mountain road, you don’t want to see how close you can get to the edge of the cliff without falling off, right? Years ago, I’ll never forget it, my wife and I and the kids borrowed a van from the church to get all our kids and all our stuff in, and we went, instead of the beach, I’m a beach guy, I’m not a mountain guy, but I thought, Okay, this will be fun. We’ll have a little change of scenery. We went up to the Sequoias. One of my pastors was really into mountains and hiking and cabins and all. He said, “John, I’ve got the place for you to go. It’s really great. Just take the family with you.” So, we load up the van.

We’re going up to the Sequoias, and on the way up there was a dirt road. Now, when you’re going up a big, high mountain, the Sequoias on a dirt road, it can be pretty dangerous. There was no shoulder, no railing, just a steep cliff—hardly wide enough for the van. We got about halfway up this road and we found out the hard way that this is a logging road. Logging trucks were coming down the road. We got about halfway up, and these big, giant trucks full of logs were coming down. The etiquette is that I’m going up, so I have to back up. I had to put it in reverse and back this van down the mountain and not go off the cliff. I certainly didn’t say, “Honey, watch this. I’ll see how close we can get without killing the whole family.”

We need to be careful when we’re living the Christian life that we don’t actually say, “Let me see how far I can push it. Let me see how close I can get to sin. Let me see how close I can get to my old life without falling off and crashing.” We want to be careful and flee the dangerous lusts that we lived in before we were saved.

Write down 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 where Paul warns us, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath . . . light with darkness”—or—“ . . . Christ with Belial?” You cannot serve the Lord and serve the world all at the same time. So, Paul says eating involves fellowship and wants to illustrate this in three ways. Let me break this down for you.

First of all, in taking notes, he says in verses 16-17, the ordinance of the Lord's supper is a picture of when you're eating that you become one with the Lord, you become one with other believers. The point that he's trying to make by using this illustration, and he's going to use several here—three specific ones—is that eating will actually picture you in fellowship or in communion. So, in verses 16-17, he talks about the ordinance of the Lord's Supper.

Look at it with me, verses 16-17. He says, "The cup of blessing"—he's speaking about what we call Communion or the Lord's Supper. Notice the very descriptive terms he uses, "cup of blessing." Why is that? Because the "cup" symbolizes the blood of Christ, the death of Christ on the cross, and it reminds us of all the blessings and the benefits that we have in our salvation. When we drink the "cup," it reminds us of our forgiveness of sins, it reminds us of the new covenant, it reminds us of the new heart God has given us, and the blessings that it brings. That's why it's called the "cup of blessing," and we bless the Communion cup because we are thankful to God. We bless God for all the goodness that He brings to our lives.

Just a little footnote for you Bible students—I just found it interesting—is that he reverses the order in the Communion service which the bread is first and then the cup is second. You might have noticed that whenever we celebrate Communion we first partake of the bread. Jesus first took the bread, broke it, and said, "Eat this bread. This is My body broken for you." Secondly, He then took the cup and drank after they drank and said, "This cup is the new covenant of My blood." Interestingly here, and again we don't know for sure why, some feel because the cup, speaking of the blood of Christ, is where we start with our salvation, and Paul included it first. It's interesting he reverses the order here. But he's talking about becoming one by drinking the cup and celebrating what Jesus did on the cross. He says, ". . . is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" Notice these rhetorical questions, verse 16, that he's asking. So, when we take the cup of blessing, and we bless God, ". . . is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?"—so we're entering into fellowship, the communion with Christ.

Then, verse 16, he mentions, "The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" He's speaking of there being only one loaf of bread in the next verse, so there's that unity. We drink the cup, we eat the bread, and we come into communion with the Lord, and it's a picture of our communion with the Lord through what He did for us on the cross.

In the oriental mind of the Bible days, for sure, whenever you ate with someone, it was a picture of you becoming one with them. If you ate with someone, you became one with them. This is why a Jew would never eat with a Gentile because they didn't want to become one with a Gentile. The picture is of unity and oneness with the Lord.

In verse 17, he says, "For we being many are one bread,"—he speaks of diversity, where there's many others, I circled the word "many" and circled the word "one," in verse 17. So, there's many believers, but we're really one in the Lord. We're like one loaf, and we're also one body, ". . . for we are all partakers of that one bread." The point in verses 16-17 simply is that he's going to be warning us about eating meat offered to idols, not getting involved in the demonic influence that was there, and he says, "When you're taking Communion, you're in communion and oneness

with the Lord.” We get some insight to Communion there, but he’s not going to really give us instructions about the Lord’s Supper until we get to chapter 11, and there’s some marvelous teaching on that when we get there. Basically, he’s saying in that text there that we are going to become one with the Lord when we break the bread and drink the cup.

Now, the second illustration, verse 18, is the Old Testament priest and the sacrifices, how they ate the sacrifice and became one with the Lord. He says, “Behold”—or look—“Israel after the flesh”—which means the nation of Israel or the Jewish people ethnically—“are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?” So, they eat the meat that was offered to the Lord and become one together with the altar.

The third illustration, verses 19-20, is that actually in the pagan’s temples, their sacrifices were offered to idols, and they became one with them and become demonically influenced.

This is really kind of a fascinating text, and even Bible scholars admit it’s a challenge sometimes to interpret and to make clear. But look at verses 19 and 20, the pagans and their sacrifice to idols because that’s really where he’s headed, where he’s going to make his application. He says, “What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing?”

He’s pointing out what he’s been saying all through this section—that an idol is nothing, it’s just a piece of wood, it’s just a piece of stone. It has eyes, but it cannot see; has a mouth, but it cannot speak; has ears, but it cannot hear; has a nose, but it cannot smell; has feet, but it cannot walk; has hands, but it cannot deliver. Intrinsically, it’s just a piece of wood; it’s just a piece of stone. But yet there’s going to be, when you’re worshipping an idol, he’s going to say, in some kind of mysterious way demonic influence in that idolatry. Idolatry leads to demonic influence, so it’s very dangerous to worship idols. He’s basically saying, verse 19, “The idol is nothing. I haven’t changed my view. I haven’t changed my concept here,” “. . . or that which is offered in sacrifice”—the meat itself, there’s nothing intrinsically bad or wrong with it. It’d be okay to eat it.

Verse 20, “But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice,”—‘Gentiles’ there speaks not only of the non-Jews, but again, unbelievers—the non-Christian, the unsaved—“they sacrifice to”—demons. The word “devils” in my King James translation is not the best translation because there’s only one devil, Satan, but there are multitudes of demons. It’s speaking of demonic activity. He says, “. . . the things which the Gentiles sacrifice”—these pagan, unsaved, unregenerated, unbelieving Gentiles in their pagan temples, sacrifice to these idols. They’re sacrificing to demons, “. . . and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils”—demons. He’s saying this because they were actually in danger, we use the word backsliding. He says, “Basically, you’re in danger of backsliding by going back to these temples and partaking of the meat offered to idols and worshipping with them thinking, Oh, it’s okay. I can handle it, no problem.” He says, “No, you’re actually being influenced by demonic activity.”

Which, by the way, as a footnote, verse 20, it supports the idea that not all religions are the

same and worshiping the same God just in different ways or giving Him different names. You hear sometimes people say, "Well, all religions lead to God. All religions are okay. They're all worshiping the same God, they just give Him a different name or describe Him differently." No, they are worshiping demons. They worship idols, they're worshiping demons. They aren't worshiping the true and the living God.

I want you to notice that he says here in verses 21-22, the conclusion is that mutual fellowship with God and demons is impossible. Mutual fellowship with God as a believer and also worshiping idols and getting involved in demonic activity is completely incompatible. Here's the conclusion, verses 21-22, "Ye cannot"—which is a very, very powerful phrase in the Greek. It means that it's actually impossible. It's mutually exclusive. "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of"—demons—"ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table,"—that's a reference to Communion. It uses the word "table" there because that's where you would sit to eat and have Communion with the Lord and with one another. He says, ". . . ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils." You can't be a devil worshiper and a worshiper of God in the same time. It doesn't work. Fellowship with God and demons is impossible.

I put alongside verse 21, John 14:6. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Jesus said what He meant and meant what He said. There's only one way to God, and that's through Jesus Christ.

Notice in verse 22, "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?"—the answer is, yes! If I go worship in a pagan temple and eat meat offered to an idol and I participate in idol worship, he says—"are we stronger than"—God—"he?" Verse 22 speaks of God being jealous, and the idea of "stronger than God" means that God will actually rise up and there'll be chastening and judgment from the Lord. But the idea that God is jealous is a biblical concept. Exodus 20:5, He is ". . . a jealous God . . ." In the jealousy here, it is in God's case not sinful. God is not sinfully jealous, which sinful jealousy is a self-centered, self-focused jealousy. This is what we would call a righteous jealousy or righteous indignation. A good illustration is that of a husband and wife. A husband is doing the right thing when he's jealous of his wife's affection. If he finds out that his wife is flirting with another man, should he be happy about that? Should he be concerned about that? So, righteous indignation says, "No, that's not right. That's not good."

You should be jealous of your marriage. You should be jealous of your spouse because you want them to have only affection for you, and it turns around the other way, too. If a wife has a husband that is giving a woman too much attention that is not his wife...let me just say this, by the way. This is a footnote. If you're married, you should have eyes only for your spouse. A very dangerous thing, by the way, is, "Well, we're just good friends." If you're a man, married to your wife, you don't have good female friends. You don't hang out with them by yourself. You don't get involved with them. It sometimes starts with a friendship and leads them to infatuation and can lead to sexual immorality. But you do right to be jealous, to be jealous of their love.

God is jealous of His bride. We, as Christians, are the bride of Christ. If we start worshiping pagan idols, and we go back to our old life and we have other gods come into our life, God is

jealous over us. He's the Redeemer, He's our Saviour, and it's a righteous jealousy that God has over us. It's so very, very important.

The second main division, verses 23-11:1, we see the danger of stumbling another. Now Paul is really going to wrap up our subject, and it's all about the danger that I can stumble another. I'm living in danger when I say, "It's nothing. I have liberty. I can go to the pagan temples. I can eat the meat. I can worship the false gods. It's not going to affect me. It's just a piece of stone, no big deal." Be careful. Be careful that you don't give your love and affection to someone other than God. God's jealous of you. Be careful you don't fall back into sin.

You know, backsliding is a very real thing. We need to, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." Just because you've been a Christian for a long time does not guarantee that you can have a good finish, a good end. You can fall and make shipwreck of your faith, so be vigilant. Be careful.

Now, in verse 23, we actually see here that we're in danger of stumbling others when we turn from the Lord. He says, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient"—or profitable—"all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not." What does he mean by "all things are lawful for me"? This could've been a maxim that they were saying, and they were using it as an excuse of, "I can do whatever I want, everything's lawful." It doesn't mean the things that God says very clearly are sinful or lawful. It doesn't mean adultery is okay. It doesn't mean lying's lawful. It doesn't mean carte blanche everything is lawful. It means everything that's in this category of "a gray area" that God hasn't spoken about is lawful. But two things: It's not necessarily profitable; secondly, it's not necessarily something that will build me up. He's coming back to these points.

Before you exercise your liberty, which could take you into bondage, which could bring you into worshipping demons and backsliding and also could stumble someone else, ask yourself, "If I exercise my liberty in this area"—I go to that party, I go to that theater and watch that movie, if I hang out with these people, if I do what I used to do—"can I be brought into bondage?" Is it profitable, verse 23, and is it building up. Is it edifying to me? Will it build up my walk with the Lord. Edification over gratification, verse 23, is the first point—edification over gratification, verse 23. Does it edify; does it build up. If I read that book, will it build me up in the Lord or will it tear me down? If I watch that movie, will it build me up or tear me down? If I listen to that music, will it build me up or tear me down? You say, "Pastor John, you're ruining everything for me." If God's speaking to you, be careful. If I hang out with these people, I go to that place, I hang out in this spot...

I remember when I was a baby Christian all my friends were still unsaved. I got saved, and I thought I could go to the parties with my little Bible, "Hi, guys! I'm a Jesus freak." The first few times I tried to do that, I stumbled and fell. I remember coming back to my bedroom at home and got on my knees and began to just weep before God and say, "God, I can't do it. I can't live the Christian life unless You give me the strength and the ability," but I had to break the ties. I had to cut the rope. I had to get rid of my old lifestyle, my old friends, the old parties we used to

go to, and break away from that and go seek the Lord with God's people, spend time in His Word.

I've called verse 23, edification over self-gratification. Is it expedient, is it profitable. Does it edify. Does it build up. Then, verse 24 is others over self. Write that down: Others over self. That needs to be our focus—others over self. "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth." These are the principles he's driving home. Don't live for your self-gratification at the expense of, "Well, I don't care what others think or say, how it affects them, I'm going to do what I want, when I want, how I want." You're supposed to be living for others, not for yourself. That's what he means by don't " . . . seek his own, but every man"—should seek—"another's wealth."

A great cross-reference for verse 24 is Philippians 2, known as the kenosis passage where Jesus, "Who, being in the form of God, thought"—equality with God not something to hold on to, but He emptied Himself—"and took upon him the form of a servant, and . . . became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." So, just because Jesus gave Himself a humble place, "God . . . exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: 10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

The illustrations are important. Don't seek your own, seek other's wealth, how it affects others. Then he gives some illustrations. The first is in verse 25. If you go to the meat market to buy some meat. He says, "Whatsoever is sold in the shambles"—that means the marketplace—"that eat, asking no question"—I love that—"for conscience sake"—that is, the conscience of other people. "For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." The first illustration of verse 24, I hope I haven't thoroughly confused you or lost you. The illustration of verse 24 is, verse 25, when you're going into the meat market, don't worry—you can buy the meat, you can eat the meat, just don't worry about it. It's nothing. But notice he says, " . . . asking no question for conscience sake." That's kind of an example of: What you don't know won't hurt you. So, when you go into the market, this is not really a big deal to us because we don't go into the market to buy meat and say, "Excuse me, was this meat offered to idols?" They're like, "What're you talking about?"

If you go to In-N-Out and ask for a double-double, "But I want the meat that has not been offered to an idol." They'll think you're crazy. So, don't ask any questions, just eat because hey, the Lord provides the food. When he says, "For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof,"—he's taking that from Psalm 24:1 and it reminds us of Psalm 50:10 where it says He owns " . . . the cattle upon a thousand hills." It all belongs to the Lord, " . . . and the fulness thereof." It's made for our blessing.

The second illustration is in verse 27, that of a private dinner—someone invites you over to dinner. What he's doing here, as we come up to the wrap up on this section, is he's getting very specific going back to the question of, should we eat meat offered to idols. So, he says, "Well, if you buy it in the market, just don't ask questions. Just scarf it down and thank the Lord that it

all belongs to God. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. Enjoy your hamburger.” In verse 27, but if somebody invites you over for dinner, now that “somebody,” verse 27, I think this is fascinating, is a non-Christian. “If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast,”—“Okay, come on. We’re going to have a party. Come over to my house. We’re going to have a big feast. We’re going to roast some beef”—“and ye be disposed to go”—you want to go—“whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake.”

The “conscience sake” is not for the sake of the Christian who’s eating the meat but for the conscience of those that are there watching you eat the meat. So, the first picture is that of the market place. The second is that of an unbeliever inviting you over to dinner. Let me just say this. It is okay, if you’re a Christian, to go over to dinner at an unbeliever’s house. You’re not going to get cooties. Remember when Jesus went to the house of Zaccheus, the little man who climbed the tree? I’ve always loved that because Jesus invited Himself over for dinner. It’s scriptural. Just invite yourself over for dinner. He also said, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in”—and eat with you. It’s biblical.

Jesus goes to Zaccheus’, and what did everyone say? “He’s gone to be the guest with a man that is a sannah!” He probably said, “A sinnnnah! He’s going to get cooties.” Sometimes we wonder, Should I go to this wedding? Should I go to this party? Should I go to this dinner? Should I go over to this heathen’s house? Go, but be a blessing. Shine your light. Don’t go and be contaminated, you go and have an influence on them. So, at the private dinner he says, “Go, whatever is placed on...you’re the guest, put the steak on your plate, serves it and go, “Excuse me, excuse me! Was this meat offered to an idol?” So, “ . . . asking no question for conscience sake”—don’t ask questions, just eat it.

The religious dinner is in verses 28-30. This was the real issue going to the pagan temples, participating in pagan rituals, worshiping idols, and the meat offered to them. “But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols,”—so, you know it’s been offered to an idol —“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?”

Now, he’s saying if you go into a religious setting, you’re living very dangerously, and you could stumble someone else. Their conscience could convict them and bother them, and it could bring them to a place of being in bondage and being stumbled. So, watch out.

In concluding the long section on Christian liberty, 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1, Paul’s going to get issue here in closing, three commands. I want you to note them. The first is in verse 31, do everything for God’s glory. This is the big wrap up. First, do everything for God’s glory. That’s a great way to live your life. He says, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

The second thing that we're to do is, "Give none offence,"—which means don't cause anyone to stumble—"neither to the Jews,"—which is, by the way, unbelieving Jews, non-Christians, Jewish people—"nor to the Gentiles,"—the unbelieving, unsaved Gentile world—"nor to the church of God"—so it pretty much covers all your bases. Don't cause anyone to stumble. So, first, do live for God's glory, verse 31; do not stumble others, verse 32; and verse 33, "Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit"—Paul's describing his own life—"but the profit of many, that they may be saved." So, I don't live for myself. I don't seek my own pleasures. I live for others so that they can come to know Christ, and that they might be saved. So, do everything for the glory of God, that's how we ought to live. Amen?

Let my life bring glory to You, O God, and then make me a blessing, verses 32-33. May my life be a blessing to others, not stumbling others. The third command, in closing, is in 1 Corinthians 11:1, that is, follow Paul's example. So, do everything for God's glory, don't stumble others, and follow Paul's example.

Look at 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Be ye followers"—the word means imitators or mimics—"of me, even as I also am of Christ." Paul said, "You can follow me because I'm following Christ." If Paul's not following Christ, you don't want to follow Paul. If you're following Christ—listen to me, believer—if you're following Jesus Christ, then others can follow you because you're following Christ. They can follow your pattern. They can follow your example, and we need to be examples to other believers—pray the way I pray, worship the way I worship, study God's Word the way I study God's Word, serve the Lord the way I serve the Lord. Paul is a great example for us to mimic or to follow because he is a follower of Christ.

Warren Wiersbe, in wrapping these thoughts up, says, "All things are lawful, but will they lead to freedom or slavery. 2) Will they make me a stumbling block or a stepping stone. 3) Will they build me up or tear me down. 4) Will they please me, or will they glorify Christ. 5) Will they help me win the lost to Christ or turn them away." These are important questions that we need to ask when we're serving the Lord and we're asking ourselves about issues that are "gray" in a matter of Christian liberty. Let's pray.