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The Limits of our Freedom in Messiah 8: 1-13



One of the questions that **the Corinthian believers** asked **Paul** in **their** letter to **him** centered around **eating food that had been offered to idols**. That specific problem still exists in parts of the world for believers saved out of idolatrous religions. Even for the rest of us, however, the basic problem that confronted **the Corinthians** faces all of us. How far does our freedom in **Messiah** go in regard to behavior not specifically forbidden in Scripture? They are neither black nor white, but gray. Such issues in one age or area may not be the same as those in other times or places; but believers in every age and every place have had to deal with the gray areas of our faith.

The first major council of the early Messianic community (see the commentary on **Acts, to see link click Bs – The Council at Jerusalem**) was called primarily to deal with such issues. Some Jewish believers insisted that all male Gentile converts be circumcised, while others were afraid to socialize with believing Gentiles, especially over a meal, for fear they would break Jewish kosher mitzvot. Gray areas. The council decided that Gentiles didn't need to be circumcised, but that they should **abstain from things polluted by idols, from fornication, and from what is strangled from blood (Acts 15:20).**

Our liberty in **Messiah** is a central truth of the B'rit Chadashah. **If you obey what I**

say, Yeshua said, **then you are really my disciples, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:31-32). Now ADONAI is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of ADONAI is, there is freedom (Second Corinthians 3:17). It is for freedom that Messiah has set us free (Galatians 5:1 NIV).** But our **freedom** doesn't mean that we can do anything we want. We are never **free** to sin. When exercising our **freedom**, we need to avoid things that in themselves are not sinful, but might lead others to sin. **Peter** reminds us: **Act as free people, but do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bond-slaves for God (First Peter 2:16).**

Two common extremes are often followed in regard to these gray areas. One is legalism, and the other is license. Legalism believes that every act, every habit, every type of behavior is either black or white. Legalists live by the rules (like the Pharisees), rather than the Spirit. They classify everything as either good or bad, whether the Bible mentions it or not. They develop exhaustive lists of do's and don'ts (like the Oral Law). Doing things on their good list and avoiding things on their bad list is their idea of spirituality, no matter what the inner person looks like (like whitewashed tombs). Their lives are controlled by their lists of do's and don'ts, not **Spirit** controlled. Legalism stifles **freedom** in **Messiah**, stifles the conscience, stifles **the Word of God**, and stifles **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh**.

License is the opposite extreme. It is like legalism in that it too has no gray areas – but neither does it have much black. Almost everything is white. Everything is acceptable as long as it is not strictly forbidden in Scripture. They believe that our **freedom** in **Messiah** is virtually absolute and unqualified. As long as your own **conscience** is **free** . . . you can do as you please. This seems to have been the philosophy of the group **Paul** addresses here. They probably agreed with **him** that believers should **always maintain a blameless conscience before both God and men (Acts 24:16 NASB).** But beyond that, they wanted no restrictions.

But **Paul** teaches that it can also be wrong to offend the **consciences** of fellow believers when they are less mature (**weak**), and when what we are doing is not necessarily in our service to **the Lord**. In answer to the specific question about **eating food offered to idols**, **Paul** gives a general and universal principle in **Chapter 8**, **he** illustrates it in **9:1** to **10:13**, and then he applies it in **10:14** to **11:1**. The principle is: **Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not cause others with a weaker conscience to stumble (8:9).** Before we exercise our freedom in **Messiah** in a given area not forbidden by Scripture, we need to think about how it will affect others, especially fellow believers.[213]