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Using Freedom for God's Glory

10:23 to 11:1

Using freedom for God's glory DIG: What were some of the limits Paul said needed to be placed on the freedom of believers? What is the difference between tolerating differences and condoning wrong behavior? Why is it crucial for believers to love and accept one another? In light of this passage, what does it mean to "do it all so as to bring glory to God?" How did Jesus model the approach He expects us to follow?

REFLECT: Think for a few moments about what freedom in Messiah means to you. What new freedoms have you enjoyed since you became a believer? In what ways do you think your freedom in Messiah is different from any other freedom you have experienced? Based on Paul's teaching, what should always be your primary concern in making lifestyle choices? Think of one person this week to whom you can show greater sensitivity and love.

Whatever we do, do it all so as to bring glory to the Lord.

Our **freedom** is always defined by **Messiah**. Since **He** gave **it** to us as a gift, **He's** the best person to tell us how to use **it**. **He** may ask us to use **it** in ways that surprise us. Those actions may not seem like **freedom** when they involve saying no to our desires and saying yes to **Messiah's** will for our lives. Some of our greatest moments of **freedom** come when we choose *not* to exercise our **freedom** in order to help someone else.²⁷⁶

Paul is now ready to conclude this matter of **eating** food that was **sacrificed to idols**. In this section, **he** deals with the secondary issue of whether the prohibition against participating in banquets in pagan temples also applies to "leftover" **meat** that was **sold in the city meat market**. Not that virtually all the ancient **meat** sold for human consumption in the Greco-Roman world came from pagan sacrifices; there were no general slaughterhouses or packing plants for cattle, sheep, or pigs.²⁷⁷

A. The principles for using our freedom in Messiah: In **verses 23-30**, Paul gives us **four basic principles** to guide us in using our **freedom** in **Messiah** for **God's glory**.

1. Edification over gratification (10:23): Our **freedom in Messiah** is important, but there are some things that are not wise. **Paul** repeats the slogan that was apparently commonly spoken among the **Corinthian** believers: **"Everything is permitted," you say? Maybe, but not everything is helpful.** He counters this with the same argument **he** made earlier in **6:12b**. **"Everything is permitted?" Maybe, but not everything is edifying** to other believers **(10:23)**. Desiring the spiritual benefit and **edification** of ourselves and others is a hallmark of maturity in a believer. **Paul's** supreme purpose in ministering to believers was to promote their **edification (Second Corinthians 12:19)**. **His** advice to all believers is that everything we say be **for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear (Ephesians 4:29; First Thessalonians 5:11 NASB)**. When we are faced with a decision about a practice we should first ask if we have a right to do it. If it is not forbidden in Scripture the answer is yes. But our next question should be, is it **profitable, edifying, and upbuilding** for ourselves and for others? If the answer to both questions is yes, then we can do it to **God's glory**. If the answer to either question is no, we should refrain from doing it because it will not bring **glory** to **Him**.²⁷⁸

*Dear Wise Heavenly **Father**, Sometimes it is hard to know how to handle a sinful situation, but I praise **You** that I can follow the principles of how **You** discipline. **You** are the perfect balance of love and anger at wrong. **You** are neither a sugar daddy who gives in to whatever your child wants, nor are you a mean and angry **father**. **You** are patient, urging sinners to come to you and gently rebuking your erring child. Yet you are wise and discerning when you correct. **You** wisely base the severity of **Your** discipline on the severity of the sin. When the situation calls for it, you discipline with great strength and power as when **You** sent the Northern Kingdom of Isra'el into Assyria captivity and then later the Southern Kingdom of Judah you sent into 70 years of Babylonian captivity.*

Your goal in discipline is never to hurt, but to produce the fruit of **righteousness**. **Now all discipline seems painful at the moment - not joyful. But later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those**

*who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:11). Thank **You** for being such a wonderful example of patience and yet also you have a holy hatred of wrong. Please help us to remember when we see a wrong situation, that what is important is not our putting them down, but our correcting the issue in a way that will bless and honor **You**. Honor to **You** is always the important issue. Please guide as we see wrong to help us know how we can guide the person to move in the right way rather than to just get mad at them and punish them. May we remember what **You** have said. **Never take your own revenge, loved ones, but give room for God’s wrath - for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine; I will repay,” says ADONAI (Romans 12:19) and For we know the One who said, “Vengeance is Mine; I will repay,” and again, “ADONAI will judge His people” (Hebrews 10:30).***

*Please help us in all we do to do it to **Your** honor. When we correct, may we be patient like **You** and correct lovingly, not in mean anger. Thank **You** for **Your** perfect example of loving and purposeful correction to produce the fruit of **righteousness**. I want to follow **Your** ways in all I do, including lovingly correcting others. Love **You** always! In **Your** holy **Son’s** name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

2. Others over self (10:24): This repeats this same principle in different words, putting it in the form of a third person imperative: **No one should seek their own good, but the good of others (10:24)**. In two later instances (**Romans 15:1-3** and **Philippians 2:4-5**), **Paul** bases such a stance on the example of **Messiah**, which is precisely how **he** concludes this present argument below (see **The pattern of our freedom in Messiah** below). Later in the letter **he** will use the same formula as part of **his** description of **love (13:5)**. For **Paul**, the death of **Messiah**, in which **He** gave **Himself “for us,”** is not only **God’s** offer of pardon for sinners, but also the only proper model of discipleship. Hence **“freedom”** does not mean “to seek what pleases me,” not even “my own good;” rather, it means to be **free in Messiah** in such a way that we can truly seek to **build up** and **edify** others.²⁷⁹

3. Freedom over legalism (10:25-27): Having set out the basic principles, **Paul** is now ready to apply them to the issue of purchasing or **eating meat sold in the market. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience.** It would be difficult, if not impossible to know for certain whether a particular piece of **meat** had, or had not, been offered to an idol. **Paul** sees no point in raising the issue. **Paul’s** attitude was

revolutionary. **He** took seriously the truth that **an idol** is nothing. This refusal to ask questions shows it did not matter to **him** whether a piece of **meat** had been offered to an **idol** or not.²⁸⁰ After all, **market** food comes from plants and animals that have been created by **God** and belong to **Him**. **Paul** supports this by quoting **Psalms 24:1**, “**For the earth and everything in it belong to the LORD**” (10:25-26). **This passage is used by the rabbis to support the contention that a blessing must be said over every meal. Since the earth and everything in it belong to the LORD, one must bless God for one’s food; otherwise, it is as though one were defrauding the Almighty.** By this citation, therefore, **Paul** is almost certainly reflecting the **Jewish** use of this text for **the blessings** over meals, especially since **he** refers again to **blessing God** in the final rhetorical question in **verse 30** below.

But what **Paul** does here is full of irony toward **his Jewish** heritage, whether intended or not. **The rabbis saw the text as the reason for thanking God for their food.** But **Paul** now uses the text to justify **eating** anything **they** wanted, even food forbidden by **his** own Jewish heritage of only **eating** kosher, since **God** is the ultimate source of all food – even food sold in **the market**. For that reason, it can be **eaten** with thanksgiving. The clear implication is that nothing “contaminates” food as such along the way. Apart from **Paul’s** radical statements on **circumcision (Romans 2:25-3:1; Galatians 5:6 and 11, 6:11-15; First Corinthians 7:19)** it is hard to imagine anything more un-Jewish in **the apostle** than this.²⁸¹

Paul goes even further. Not only can believers purchase any food for sale in **the market**; it is within the realm of **freedom in Messiah** to associate with unbelievers and have dinner with them in any other place besides the temple of **an idol**.²⁸² **If some unbeliever invites you to a meal, and you want to go, eat whatever is put in front of you without raising questions of conscience (10:27).** **Paul** did not expect **his** readers to cut themselves off completely from the fabric of all social relationships because they were absolutely necessary to survive in the ancient world. In **his** day, people could not merely go off on their own and expect to survive. Patronage bound freed slaves to former masters, plebs to patriarchs, tenants to landowners; and their relationships established the means of the exchange of honor and personal obligation. Therefore, **Paul** allowed believers to circulate in pagan society. But there were limitations.²⁸³

4. Consideration over condemnation (10:28-30): But the situation changed **if** another invited guest, a weaker **brother** or **sister** (ie. "**someone**"), **says to you, "This meat was offered as a sacrifice."** The entire argument up to this point has been concerned with the exercise of our **freedom in Messiah** with reference to offending the weaker **brother** or **sister**. In addition, in **Chapters 8-10, Paul** says nothing whatsoever about the exercise of our **freedom in Messiah** with respect to pagans. Therefore, context dictates that this "**someone**" is a weaker **brother** or **sister**.²⁸⁴

Here, mature believers must use their **freedom in Messiah** in a truly loving way: **Then don't eat it, out of consideration for the person who pointed it out and also for conscience's sake (10:28).** Their **freedom** lies in the ability to choose between **eating** and **not eating** as long as they are guided by mature knowledge and true **love**. **However, I don't mean your conscience but that of the other person.** The food's history matters only when it matters to **someone** else. The mature believer knows that **idols** do not exist, that there is no **God** but **One**, and that all food ultimately belongs to **Him**. In this sticky situation, however, it is not what the mature believer knows that counts, but the weaker **brother** or **sister** believes.²⁸⁵

You say, "Why should my freedom be determined by someone else's conscience? If I participate by God's grace (Greek: *charity*, which may be understood as *by grace*, because it is what **the grace of God** means that the mature believer can give thanks for such **meat** and **eat it**), **why am I criticized over something for which I myself bless God" (10:29-30)?** What the mature believer **eats** does not matter; however, that **he** avoids giving offense does! But, when all is said and done, a believer is free to **eat** at a private home without being judged.



B. The purpose of our freedom in Messiah (10:31-32): Paul was now ready to summarize this entire three-chapter unit (**Chapters 8 to Chapter 10**), and draw

his discussion on the **meat sacrificed to idols** issue to a close. **Well, whatever you do, whether it's eating or drinking or anything else, do it all so as to bring glory to God (10:31).** To do something for **the glory of God** means to reflect **God's glory** in the way we live our lives. When **others** look at us and how we live, they should be able to see that the standards we live by are different from those in the pagan world around us. They should be able to see **Yeshua** living in us. **Paul** deals with this concept in more detail later in **Second Corinthians 3:18 to 4:6 and 15-18.**²⁸⁶ However, it is obvious that some of the believers in **Corinth** were taking **their freedom in Messiah** to extremes. **They** were in danger of using grace as an excuse to sin. **Paul** needed to show **them** that if the exercise of spiritual **freedom** led to **others** being misled or harmed, **they** needed to change **their ways.**²⁸⁷

There is much confusion today when it comes to ignoring the simple truth that **the LORD** is far more interested in building your character than **He** is anything else. We worry when **ADONAI** seems to be silent on specific issues such as, "What career should I choose?" The truth is, there are many different careers that could be in **God's** will for your life. What **YHVH** cares about most is whatever you do, you do it to **His glory.** **He** is far more interested in what you are than what you do; **He** is much more concerned about your character than your career, because you will take your character into eternity, but not your career.²⁸⁸

Another way of saying this same principle is that we should appear **blameless** (Greek: *oroskopos*) - before **Jews, to Gentiles, and to God's Messianic Community (10:32).** Here, we see **God's** threefold division of humanity. Non-Messianic **Jews** are mentioned, pagan **Gentiles** (literally "Greeks"), and **God's Messianic Community,** consisting of **Messianic Jews** and **Messianic Gentiles.** Some draw an inference from this verse that a **Jew** who gets saved is no longer a **Jew.** The reasoning is that just as when a **Gentile** come to faith **in Messiah** he leaves his paganism behind, so then, when a **Jew** comes to faith **in Messiah** he leaves his "legalistic Judaism" behind; that in **the Church** both lose their former identity - **there is neither Jew nor Gentile (Galatians 3:28), Messiah has made us both one and has broken down the middle wall of separation which divided us, created from the two groups one new person (Ephesians 2:14-15)** for whom **neither being circumcised nor being uncircumcised matters - what matters is being a new creation (Galatians 6:15).**

Though it is true that **Jews** and **Gentiles** are equally in need of salvation, and in

this regard there is no difference between **them**, nevertheless salvation does not wipe out **their** identity as **Jews** and **Gentiles**. **Paul** referred to saved **Gentiles** as "**Gentiles**" (**Romans 11:13** and **Ephesians 2:11**), and to saved **Jews** as "**Jews**" (**Galatians 2:13-15**). **Paul** also spoke of **himself** as a **Pharisee** (**Acts 23:6**), which implies, of course, that as a believer **he** still considered **himself** to be Jewish. **God's Messianic Community, His Church**, consists of saved **Jews** who remain **Jews** and saved **Gentiles** who remain **Gentiles**.²⁸⁹

Were **Paul's** arguments in these chapters effective enough in persuading **the Corinthians** to abandon their participation in **idolatrous** associations? The painful visit (see the commentary on **Second Corinthians Ao - Paul's Painful Visit**) and continued encouragement (see the commentary on **Second Corinthians Bi - Do Not be Unequally Yoked with Unbelievers**) suggest not. Such complex issues that require such enormous self-sacrifice are not solved overnight.²⁹⁰

C. The pattern of our freedom in Messiah (10:33-11:1): The final element of **Paul's** conclusion makes a reference to **his** own personal life. In **8:3**, **he** stated that **he** would not **eat meat** if by doing so he would cause a fellow believer to sin. In **9:19-23** **he** demonstrated how **he** became **all things to all people so that by any means he might save some**. Now **he** recites another version of the same principle: **Just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not looking out for my own interests but for those of the many, so that they may be saved (10:33)**. **Paul** always lived with an eye on what **others** around **him** (especially new believers) might be thinking. **Love** for **others** must always temper our **freedom in Messiah**.²⁹¹

Then **the apostle** goes even further with **his** example. **He** is not content simply to live **his** life as an example for **the Corinthians** to emulate; **he** actually instructs **them** to literally become **imitators** of **him**. **Try to imitate me, even as I myself try to imitate the Messiah (11:1)**. Lest we think that **Paul** thinks too highly of **himself**, **he** actually stresses that **he himself** is an **imitator** of **Messiah** and **His** lifestyle. That must always be the overriding goal in our lives - not to use some other human being as our model but to use the perfect, sinless **Messiah**. It is not too much to say that **Paul** is here instructing **the Corinthians** to **imitate him** only to the degree that **he imitates Messiah**.²⁹²

With the conclusion of **Chapter 10**, **Paul** puts a period to the discussion of **meat sacrificed to idols** and moves on to a variety of questions relating to how **men** and **women** should conduct **themselves** in the church's **worship services**.