

Christian Liberty & Living for the Glory of God

Key Text:	1 Corinthians 8-10
Key Verse(s):	“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.” (1 Corinthians 9:24)

Background to the Study

As in any church, those at Corinth were in different stages of growth. Many were truly “babes in Christ.” Others were slow to abandon their pagan ways. Because of this, they did not know the answers to questions that arose and they needed guidance. Paul offered that guidance – a sort of “how to” manual; gentle when appropriate, but in many cases up front and to the point. In earlier chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul addressed individual issues. In chapters 8–11, he widened the focus to the responsibilities believers have to the whole church.

Chapter 8 centres on Christian liberty. Paul began with knowledge, warning that it can lead to pride, and that love must come first. True knowledge of God comes through loving Him, not just collecting facts. He then tackled a dispute about eating meat offered to idols. Such meat often ended up in temple “restaurants” or the marketplace. Paul gave two principles for deciding if an action is permissible:

1. Is it scripturally acceptable?
2. Could it cause another believer to stumble?

Since idols are nothing, eating the meat wasn’t sinful – but for those rescued from idol worship, it was deeply troubling. Out of love, Paul urged the Corinthians to consider the weaker believer, even saying, *“I will eat no flesh while the world standeth”* if it would cause someone to fall.

Chapter 9 shows that liberty is subject to a higher law. Paul defended his apostleship and his right to material support from the church, yet chose not to use it so as not to hinder the Gospel. Dedication, he said, takes priority over personal rights. He adapted himself to Jews, Gentiles, and the weak – without compromising truth – to win people to Christ. He ended with the image of an athlete training with discipline to win the prize.

Chapter 10 closes the discussion on liberty with a warning from Israel’s history. Paul recalled their idolatry, sexual immorality, complaints, and testing of God – all of which brought judgment. He urged the Corinthians to beware of temptation, flee idolatry, and be guided by thankfulness and what is spiritually beneficial. He addressed whether to eat meat sacrificed to idols, attend pagan feasts, or buy meat from the market.

Paul's aim was to lead them to maturity under grace – free from legalism, but not from God's moral standard. The ultimate example to follow is Jesus Christ, whose sacrifice and love set the measure for every action.

Testimony from Our Day

Picture it: a perfect winter's day. The snow is crisp, the slopes are flawless, and the world's best skiers are lined up at the Winter Olympics. Years of training, discipline, and sacrifice have brought them to this moment. The crowd holds its breath as each athlete launches down the course, chasing gold. Some glide with breathtaking skill. Others, with just one wrong move, see their dream slip away – and for some, there will never be another chance.

The Christian life is a lot like that. We're in a spiritual "Olympics," and the world is watching how we run our race. We have teammates – fellow believers – and we need to be careful not to trip them up or cause them to stumble. The key is persistence, obedience, and staying committed to the course God has set for us.

That course won't always be smooth. There will be steep climbs, sharp drops, and obstacles that look impossible to get past. If we get distracted by what's going on around us, we can veer off track. If we lose heart because the race feels too long or too hard, we might be tempted to quit. But we don't have to.

When we call on the Lord, He gives us the strength and stamina to keep going – right to the finish line. This race isn't easy, and the conditions won't always be in our favour. But with God as our trainer and coach, the prize – eternal life with Him – is guaranteed for those who follow His course and run His way.

A Closer Look

Question 1	From I Corinthians 8, what guiding principle can we use when deciding whether or not to do something? In what way should we apply Paul's advice concerning stronger and weaker brothers to our lives? (1 Corinthians 8:12-13).
Question 2	What support did Paul give for his authority to be called an Apostle? Why do you think Paul needed to defend himself? In what ways can we imitate Paul's sacrificial leadership? (I Corinthians 9:1,2,4-6,18,22,24-27)
Question 3	To what two athletic events did Paul compare the Christian walk? (1 Corinthians 9:24-26) What disciplines does an athlete have that can be applied to our Christian walk?
Question 4	Name the transgressions of the Children of Israel that Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 10:7-12. Why is it important to remember lessons from the past?
Question 5	When Paul says believers should "seek another person's good," what do you think he means in practical terms? How do I balance personal freedom with responsibility to others? (I Corinthians 10:23-24,31-33)
Question 6	What everyday things you do could take on a whole new meaning if you did them "for God's glory"? (I Corinthians 10:31)

Take Home

We need to be careful not to trip up a fellow believer whose faith is still growing, or to live in a way that makes someone question their walk with God. When we truly love others, our personal freedoms take a back seat to building up a brother or sister in Christ.

It's easy to get caught up in everyday life and forget the lessons God has already shown us. That's why Paul reminded the Corinthians – and us – to look back at the example of the Israelites. Their mistakes are recorded so we can learn from them and avoid making the same choices.