

Decision Making and the Will of God, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 4: What Will Be the Impact? All Things Lawful, Not All Helpful

1 Corinthians 10:23–33

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson advances the believer from the question of permission to the question of impact. Having asked whether a course of action is biblical and what motives drive it, the wise believer now asks what the choice will actually do, to himself, to others, to his witness, and to the glory of God. Doctrinally, the lesson takes up Christian liberty and its limits. Paul affirms real freedom in Christ (“all things are lawful”) and then immediately governs it by love and edification (“but not all things build up”). The teacher should help students see that in matters where God has left His people free, the deciding question is not merely whether a thing is allowed, but whether it helps, builds up, serves the neighbor, and glorifies God.

This lesson requires a careful, balanced hand at a boundary the whole study must guard. On one side is legalism, which binds rules and scruples where Scripture leaves matters to Christian liberty (Romans 14). On the other side is license, which wields freedom selfishly and never counts its cost to others. Paul refuses both. He will not let the Corinthians turn liberty into a weapon, and he will not impose new laws on free consciences either. The teacher must model the same balance: honoring genuine Christian freedom while teaching that love, edification, and the glory of God rightly shape how that freedom is used. Be careful not to bind where God has left us free, and equally careful not to loosen what God has bound.

Beyond the doctrine, this lesson is aimed at forming a loving, others-centered decision maker. The Corinthians' problem was not first a problem of knowledge but of love; they had truth about their freedom but used it without regard for their neighbors. The deeper formational aim is to raise up believers whose instinct in any choice is to ask not only “Can I?” but “What will this build, and whom will it serve?” Send students home freer, not more burdened, but with a freedom newly enlisted in the service of love and the glory of God.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul writes, “All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up” (v. 23). How does Paul move the question beyond what is merely permitted? What is the difference between asking whether something is lawful and asking whether it is helpful or builds up?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by recovering the setting. “All things are lawful” was almost certainly a Corinthian slogan, a banner the church waved to defend its freedom. Paul does not simply deny it; in the realm of things truly indifferent, he grants a measure of truth to it. But he refuses to let it stand alone, because by itself it is a half-truth that becomes an excuse. Twice he completes the slogan: lawful, but not all things are helpful; lawful, but not all things build up. The believer who stops at “lawful” has stopped at the lowest possible bar.

Draw out the two new standards Paul introduces. “Helpful” asks whether a thing actually does good, whether it benefits and serves rather than merely being permitted. “Builds up” is the language of edification, of construction; it asks whether a choice strengthens, matures, and benefits people, oneself and others, in Christ. These are higher and far more useful questions than mere legality. A great many things are permitted that do nothing to build, and some that quietly tear down.

Help students feel how this raises the floor of decision making. It is entirely possible to live a technically lawful life that is nonetheless wasteful, self-indulgent, and unedifying. The question “Is it allowed?” can be answered yes while the choice still drains us, distracts us, or weakens others. The mature believer learns to ask the better question: not only whether he may, but whether it helps and builds. That shift turns mere permission into genuine wisdom.

Anchor the point that this is not a new legalism. Paul is not adding rules; he is adding love and discernment. He leaves the believer free, and then invites him to use his freedom well. The standard of edification is not a fence of prohibitions but a positive aim: choose what builds. That aim will rule out some lawful things and reshape others, all without binding the conscience where God has not.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- “All things are lawful” as a Corinthian slogan Paul completes rather than simply repeats
- The higher standards of helpfulness and edification beyond mere permission
- The possibility of a technically lawful life that builds nothing
- Edification as a positive aim, not a new fence of rules
- Christian liberty honored, then enlisted in the service of what builds up

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between asking ‘Is it allowed?’ and ‘Does it build up?’
- Where have you settled for ‘lawful’ when a better question was available?
- How can we raise the standard to edification without slipping into legalism?

Question 2

Student Question:

Think of something you are completely free to do but that may not be helpful or building you up. Why is it easy to settle for “it’s allowed” instead of asking whether it is actually good for you? What is one such thing you sense you should reconsider?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This first self-examining question turns Paul’s standard inward. Everyone has lawful habits that are not especially helpful, ways of spending time, money, or attention that break no command yet build nothing. The aim is not to manufacture guilt over things that are genuinely free, but to invite honest reflection about whether some of our freedoms are quietly working against us.

Help students see why “it’s allowed” is such a comfortable resting place. It requires nothing of us. As long as a thing is permitted, we can keep doing it without examination. But Paul’s question, does it build up, asks us to weigh the actual fruit of our choices, and that is more demanding. Some lawful patterns, hours of mindless scrolling, certain entertainments, habits of consumption, are permitted but slowly dull our hearts and crowd out better things.

Then call for one honest reconsideration. The point is not a long list of prohibitions but a single, Spirit-prompted area where a student senses that “allowed” is not the same as “good for me.” Encourage them to bring it under Paul’s better question this week, asking not whether they may, but whether it helps and builds, and to act on what they find.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Lawful habits that build nothing and may quietly work against us
- “It’s allowed” as a comfortable resting place that avoids examination
- Weighing the actual fruit of our freedoms rather than only their permissibility
- One Spirit-prompted area to bring under the question of edification

Discussion Prompts

- What lawful habit of yours may not actually be building you up?
- Why is ‘it’s allowed’ such an easy place to stop?
- What is one freedom you sense you should reconsider this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says, “Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor” (v. 24). How does this single principle reshape the way a Christian makes decisions? Why is love for our neighbor, not just our own preference, central to weighing the impact of a choice?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Center students on the radical reorientation in this verse. The natural default of every human heart in a decision is to seek its own good: what do I want, what suits me, what is best for me? Paul overturns that default in a single sentence. “Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.” The Christian weighs a choice not only by its effect on himself but by its effect on others, and deliberately puts their good in view.

Show how this principle reshapes the whole process. Self-interested decision making asks one question: how does this affect me? Love-shaped decision making adds a second, equally serious question: how does this affect the people around me, my family, my brothers and sisters, my neighbors, the watching world? This does not erase the self; Paul is not commanding self-neglect. He is dethroning self-interest from its place as the only consideration that counts.

Connect this to the heart of the gospel, because it is more than ethical advice. This is the very mind of Christ, who “did not please himself” (Romans 15:3) but gave Himself for others. To seek the good of one’s neighbor in a decision is to imitate the One who sought our good at infinite cost to Himself. The teacher can help students see that love-shaped decision making is not a burden added to the gospel but the gospel taking shape in our choices.

Make it practical without making it impossible. Seeking the neighbor’s good does not mean every decision must be agonized over or that we may never choose what also benefits us. It means the good of others becomes a real and weighty factor, consciously considered, rather than an afterthought. Often the most loving choice and our own truest good turn out to be the same; love simply refuses to leave the neighbor out of the calculation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The reorientation from seeking our own good to seeking the neighbor’s good (v. 24)
- Adding the question of impact on others to the question of impact on self
- The mind of Christ, who did not please Himself, as the pattern (Romans 15:3)
- Love-shaped decision making as the gospel taking shape in our choices
- The neighbor’s good as a real, weighty factor, not an afterthought

Discussion Prompts

- How would your last big decision look different if your neighbor’s good were a serious factor?
- Why is seeking only our own good the natural default, and how does the gospel reverse it?
- Where do the neighbor’s good and your own truest good actually line up?

Question 4

Student Question:

Recall a recent decision you made thinking mostly about yourself, what you wanted, what was convenient for you. How might that choice have looked different if you had genuinely asked how it would affect the people around you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question gives students practice in the very reorientation verse 24 commands. Most of our decisions are made on a quiet assumption of self-interest, and we rarely notice it because it feels so normal. Inviting students to revisit a recent choice and ask the neighbor question exposes how often other people simply never entered the calculation.

Help students do the imaginative work concretely. Take a real decision, a purchase, a use of an evening, a commitment made or declined, and replay it with the neighbor in view. How would it have affected a spouse, a child, a struggling brother, a neighbor in need? The point is not to conclude that the choice was necessarily wrong, but to notice whether love had a seat at the table at all.

Then move toward formation rather than mere regret. The aim is to build a new habit of asking the second question before deciding, not after. Encourage students to take one upcoming decision and deliberately weigh its impact on others before they act, trusting that this is how the mind of Christ is gradually formed in the way they choose.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The quiet default of self-interest in most decisions
- Replaying a real choice with the neighbor in view
- Noticing whether love had a seat at the table at all
- Building the habit of asking the impact question before deciding, not after

Discussion Prompts

- In a recent decision, did the people around you factor in at all?
- How might that choice have looked different with their good in view?
- What upcoming decision could you deliberately weigh by its impact on others?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul tells the Corinthians to limit their freedom for the sake of another person's conscience (vv. 27-29). What does this teach about how we should treat believers who are weaker or more sensitive in conscience than we are? Why does Paul make their conscience, and not only our own, a factor in our decisions?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Set the scene Paul describes. A believer is invited to dinner and served meat that may have come from a pagan temple. Paul says, eat what is set before you and raise no questions of conscience; the meat is just meat. But if someone points out that it was offered in sacrifice, then for the sake of that person's conscience, abstain. The freedom is real, but love can lead the free person to lay it down so as not to wound a more sensitive conscience.

Draw out the principle about the weaker brother. Paul elsewhere develops this at length (Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8): the believer who is strong in conscience, who understands his freedom, must take care not to use that freedom in a way that damages a believer whose conscience is weaker or more easily troubled. Love does not flaunt its liberty; it considers how the exercise of freedom will land on a brother who is not yet free in the same way.

Explain why the other person's conscience matters, not just our own. We can be entirely right about our freedom and still be wrong to use it, if using it would embolden a weaker believer to act against his own conscience and so wound his walk with God. Paul is not making the weak brother the permanent lawgiver for the strong; he is making love for the weak brother a genuine factor in the strong believer's choices. The strong are to bear with the scruples of the weak rather than trample them.

Guard the balance carefully here, because this is a place legalism loves to creep in. Limiting our freedom for a weaker conscience is an act of voluntary love in a particular moment, not the surrender of the truth that we are free. Paul never tells the strong to adopt the weak brother's scruples as binding law; he tells them to love him enough to forgo a liberty when its use would harm him. The aim is a church where the strong protect the weak, not one where the most easily offended quietly rule everyone else.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Voluntarily limiting a real freedom for the sake of another's conscience (vv. 27–29)
- The strong taking care not to wound the weaker brother (Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8)
- The other person's conscience as a genuine factor, not only our own
- Bearing with the scruples of the weak rather than trampling them
- The balance: love forgoes a liberty without surrendering the truth that we are free

Discussion Prompts

- Who in your life is weaker or more sensitive in conscience, and how does your freedom land on them?
- What is the difference between loving a weak brother and letting the easily offended rule the church?
- When have you seen liberty used in a way that hurt someone, or laid down in a way that helped?

Question 6

Student Question:

Where might one of your freedoms actually wound or stumble someone who is younger or weaker in the faith, perhaps a new Christian, or your own children watching you? What would love lead you to do about it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question brings the weaker-brother principle home to people the student actually knows. Abstract agreement that we should not stumble the weak is easy; identifying the specific person who watches our liberty is harder and more useful. New believers, young people, and our own children are constantly reading our choices, and a freedom exercised carelessly in front of them can do real damage.

Help students think concretely about influence. Children absorb their parents' attitudes toward money, entertainment, alcohol, speech, and worship far more from what they see than from what they are told. A young or new believer may imitate a mature Christian's liberty without sharing the maturity that holds it safely. The question is not whether we are free, but whether the visible use of our freedom is building up or quietly endangering those who follow our example.

Then call for love's response. Sometimes love will lead a free person to set a liberty aside, at least in certain company, for the sake of someone watching. This is not legalism imposed from outside; it is love freely choosing the good of another over the exercise of a right. Encourage each student to identify one such relationship and one concrete way to let love, rather than mere liberty, govern their example this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The specific people who watch our liberty: new believers, the young, our children
- Influence carried more by example than by instruction
- Liberty imitated without the maturity that holds it safely
- Love freely setting a liberty aside for the good of someone watching

Discussion Prompts

- Who is watching and imitating your use of freedom right now?
- Where might a liberty of yours endanger someone younger or newer in the faith?
- What would love lead you to do about it this week?

Question 7**Student Question:**

Paul gathers everything into one command: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (v. 31). What does it mean to do even ordinary things to the glory of

God? How would asking “Does this glorify God?” change a decision you would normally make on autopilot?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Lift up the sweeping scope of this verse, one of the most comprehensive commands in all of Scripture. Paul takes the most ordinary activities imaginable, eating and drinking, and places them under the highest possible aim, the glory of God. Then he widens it to cover everything: “or whatever you do.” Nothing is too small or too routine to be done for God’s glory, and nothing is exempt from the question.

Define what doing something to God’s glory means. To glorify God is to act in a way that displays His worth, reflects His character, and aims at His honor rather than merely our own pleasure or convenience. It does not require that every meal be turned into a religious ceremony; it means living the whole of life, including its ordinary moments, with a Godward orientation, so that even small choices are offered up as part of a life that honors Him.

Show how this single question can govern a decision. “Does this glorify God?” is broad enough to direct any choice and searching enough to expose self-serving ones. It cuts beneath the bare question of permission and even beneath the question of impact on others, asking the ultimate question: does this choice aim at the honor of God? A decision made on autopilot, by habit or appetite, looks very different when it is brought consciously under this aim.

Help students use this as a practical, freeing tool rather than a crushing burden. The question is not meant to paralyze every step with anxiety, but to reorient the heart so that, over time, choosing for God’s glory becomes natural. Encourage them to take one routine, autopilot decision this week and consciously ask whether and how it can be done to the glory of God, letting that question reshape it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The comprehensive scope of “whatever you do” under the glory of God (v. 31)
- Glorifying God as displaying His worth and aiming at His honor, not merely religious ceremony
- “Does this glorify God?” as a single question able to govern any choice
- Bringing autopilot decisions consciously under a Godward aim
- The glory of God as a freeing orientation, not a crushing burden

Discussion Prompts

- What does it look like to do an ordinary thing, like a meal or a purchase, to God’s glory?
- Which routine decision would change if you asked whether it glorifies God?
- How does this question reach beneath both ‘Is it allowed?’ and ‘How does it affect others?’

Question 8

Student Question:

Is there an area of your life, a habit, a way you spend time or money, where you have honestly never asked whether it glorifies God? What would it look like to bring that area under this command this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question asks students to find the unexamined corners of life, the areas running on habit that have never been brought under the question of God's glory. Almost everyone has them: a way of spending money, a use of leisure, a pattern of speech, a relationship, that has simply never been held up to this light. The aim is to invite the Godward question into one such corner.

Help students locate the area without dread. The point is not to assume that everything unexamined is sinful, but to recognize that an entire region of life can drift along on autopilot, untouched by the aim Paul commands. Often these are not scandalous areas but ordinary ones, exactly the eating and drinking Paul names, where habit has quietly replaced intention.

Then move toward one concrete application. Bringing an area under this command might mean reshaping a spending habit, redeeming a use of time, or simply pausing before a routine choice to ask how it might honor God. Encourage students to choose a single area this week and consciously submit it to the glory of God, trusting that a life is transformed not all at once but one surrendered corner at a time.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Unexamined corners of life running on habit rather than intention
- The Godward question never yet asked in some ordinary area
- Recognizing drift without assuming everything unexamined is sinful
- Submitting one concrete area to God's glory this week

Discussion Prompts

- What area of your life has never really been held up to the question of God's glory?
- Why do whole regions of life drift along on autopilot?
- What would it look like to bring that one area under this command this week?

Question 9**Student Question:**

Paul says, "Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved" (vv. 32–33). How should the impact of our choices on our witness and on the lost factor

into our decisions? At the same time, how do we keep this love from collapsing into mere people-pleasing or into binding rules where God has left us free (Romans 14)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, because it gathers the whole passage into its highest purpose and requires a carefully balanced hand. Paul widens the circle of impact to its fullest extent: our choices affect not only ourselves and our fellow believers but also outsiders, Jews and Greeks, and the watching world, and ultimately they bear on whether people are drawn toward Christ or pushed away. “Not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.” The salvation of others is in view in the way we use our freedom.

Teach the evangelistic weight of this. Paul ordered his liberty so as to remove needless obstacles between people and the gospel. He would gladly forgo a right rather than let it become a stumbling block that kept someone from Christ. For the believer, this means a real factor in decision making is the effect of our choices on our witness: does the way I use my freedom commend the gospel to outsiders, or does it needlessly discredit it? Our reputation is not about vanity; it is about not putting a barrier between a lost person and the Savior.

Now guard the first boundary: this is not people-pleasing. Paul, who says here that he tries to please everyone, elsewhere insists that if he were still trying to please man, he would not be a servant of Christ (Galatians 1:10). The difference is the aim. People-pleasing seeks to be liked and avoids all discomfort; gospel love accepts discomfort and even opposition for the truth, while removing every needless personal offense so that the only stumbling block left is the cross itself. We adjust our liberties, not our message. Paul gave no needless offense, yet he preached a gospel that offended the proud everywhere he went.

Now guard the second boundary, which the question raises directly: this love must not collapse into legalism that binds rules where God has left His people free. Romans 14 is the essential balance. There Paul refuses to let either the strict or the free pass judgment on the other in matters of liberty. Limiting our freedom out of love is a voluntary act of love in particular situations; it is not the manufacture of new universal laws. We must be careful, therefore, on both sides: never loosening what God has bound by calling sin a liberty, and never binding what God has left free by turning a loving, situational restraint into a rule for all.

Bring the whole lesson to rest in this balance. The wise believer holds liberty and love together. He refuses license, which uses freedom selfishly and wounds others, and he refuses legalism, which binds consciences God has freed. Between those ditches runs the narrow, joyful road Paul describes: a free people who gladly order their freedom for the good of many and the glory of God, so that nothing in their lives needlessly stands between a soul and salvation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The widest circle of impact: outsiders, the church, and the salvation of many (vv. 32–33)

- Ordering our liberty to remove needless obstacles to the gospel
- The difference between gospel love and people-pleasing (Galatians 1:10): we adjust our liberties, not our message
- Guarding against legalism that binds where God leaves us free (Romans 14)
- Never loosening what God has bound, never binding what God has left free
- Liberty and love held together between the ditches of license and legalism

Discussion Prompts

- How does the way you use your freedom either commend or discredit the gospel to outsiders?
- What is the difference between gospel love that removes needless offense and mere people-pleasing?
- How do we limit our freedom out of love without turning that restraint into a law for everyone?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across 1 Corinthians 10:23–33. Paul takes a people in love with their freedom and teaches them to love their neighbors more. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this passage. What is the single truth here that you most need to carry into your next decision?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question gathers the lesson and asks each student to name one concrete way Christ is forming them through it. Resist generalities. “I want to be less selfish” is a fine start, but press toward the specific: less selfish in what decision, expressed how, beginning when. Paul’s vision of freedom enlisted by love is meant to land in a real choice this week.

Walk back through the movement of the passage as a prompt. Paul raised the question from lawful to helpful and edifying, reoriented the believer from his own good to his neighbor’s, taught the loving limitation of liberty for a weaker conscience, set everything under the glory of God, and widened the circle of impact to the watching, perishing world. Invite students to ask which of these truths their heart most needs before the next decision they face.

Close by recentering on transformation. The aim of this lesson is not to load students with new restrictions, but to form a free people who instinctively ask what their choices will build and whom they will serve. Encourage each one to carry a single truth into the week, returning to it in prayer, so that liberty and love grow together in the way they decide.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Freedom enlisted in the service of love, not loaded with new restrictions
- Asking what a choice will build and whom it will serve
- The glory of God as the governing aim of every decision
- Carrying one concrete truth into a specific choice this week

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this passage does your heart most need before your next decision?
- Where is a choice this week waiting to be weighed by love and the glory of God?
- How can this group pray for and encourage you in that one specific step?