

Decision Making and the Will of God

Lesson 4: What Will Be the Impact? All Things Lawful, Not All Helpful -- 1 Corinthians 10:23-33

A man stands in a store holding something he is completely free to buy. There is no command against it, no sin in the object itself, nothing in Scripture that forbids it. By every measure of mere permission, the answer is yes. And yet a wiser question begins to form in his mind, a question that permission alone cannot answer: not "Can I?" but "Should I?" Not "Is this allowed?" but "What will this actually do, to me, to the people who watch me, to the brother whose faith is fragile, to my witness before a watching world?" That second question is where the wisdom of this lesson lives.

The Corinthians had a slogan they were rather proud of: "All things are lawful." They loved their freedom in Christ, and in many ways they were right to. The gospel had set them free from a mountain of religious scruples and man-made rules. But they had turned a precious truth into a careless excuse, using their liberty as a license to do whatever they pleased without a thought for anyone else. So Paul takes their own slogan and gently, firmly, completes it. "All things are lawful," yes, "but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up."

With those few words Paul raises the whole conversation to a higher floor. The question is no longer simply whether a thing is permitted, but whether it helps, whether it builds up, whether it serves the good of others and the glory of God. He even reaches into the everyday matter of food bought at the market and shows how love for a neighbor's conscience can lead a free person to gladly limit his own freedom. "Let no one seek his own good," he writes, "but the good of his neighbor." Freedom, it turns out, was never given so that we could please ourselves. It was given so that we could love.

This lesson asks us to weigh the impact of our choices, and it walks a careful line. On one side lies a joyless legalism that binds rules where God has left His people free. On the other lies a selfish license that wields freedom as a weapon and never counts the cost to anyone else. Paul steers between them with a single, soaring principle that gathers up the whole matter: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." That sentence is large enough to govern every decision you will ever make. The wise believer learns to hold his liberty in one hand and love in the other, and to ask, before he acts, what this choice will build.

Group Discussion: Think about the difference between asking "Is this allowed?" and asking "What will this build?" Why is it so tempting to stop at the first question? As a group, talk about how Christian freedom can be misused, and how love sometimes leads a free person to gladly set a freedom aside for the good of someone else.

Personal Reflection: Consider a choice you are weighing, something you are free to do. Beyond whether it is permitted, what will it actually build, in you, in your family, in those who watch your life? Is there a freedom you may need to limit out of love this week? Bring that honestly before God.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:23–33

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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)?

10. 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?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Romans 14:13–21, refusing to put a stumbling block in a brother's way, since the kingdom is righteousness, peace, and joy; 1 Corinthians 8:9–13, taking care that our liberty does not wound the weak conscience; Galatians 5:13, called to freedom, yet through love serving one another; Philippians 2:3–4, counting others more significant and looking to their interests; 1 Corinthians 6:12, all things lawful, but not all helpful, and refusing to be enslaved by anything

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