

PREFACE

Once more, in the passage before us, we are confronted with a way of living—a pattern for life—diametrically opposed to the ways of the society in which we presently live. Today’s culture is based on the individual’s (or the group’s) right to have his way—to the extent that the rights of another (or another group) must be destroyed if it gets in the way. We are living in the era of “I have my rights, and I *demand* my rights.” But it is actually worse than that. In this era the watchword is “I have my way, and I *demand* my way.” And it doesn’t even stop there; it has now progressed (actually digressed) into “I have my way, I *demand* my way—and I demand that *you* adopt my way.”

Nothing could be further from a biblical way of living—and especially espoused by the apostle Paul in our text. This has been a running theme throughout his letter from the beginning. Follow along with me:

v1:10	be of like mind; stop erecting barriers between you
vv3:1-3	you are still behaving like the rest of the world
v4:6	I want you to work <i>together</i> , as fellow servants
v4:16	(after describing their selfless serving of others in vv10-13)
v6:7	(after reprimanding them for suing each other)
v8:1	far more important than knowledge is love for each other
v8:13	my brother’s spiritual health is more important than my liberties
v9:12	we gladly forfeit our rights for the sake of the gospel of Christ

Read 1 Corinthians 10:23-33.

For myself, I need look no further than my mom for an earthly example of this philosophy. One illustration has always stood out. I was too young at the time to remember the details now, but at some point during my childhood Mom was having some mental or emotional problems, solutions for which were sought at the Iowa City hospital. During the counseling she was receiving the doctor told her that for her own good she must start thinking more of herself than her family. This counsel was not just rejected by her, but she quite soon thereafter returned home, and back to selflessly serving not just her family, but anyone in need. To think of herself first, before others, was to her a hateful philosophy.

v23

All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.

Paul's counsel and strict commands since the beginning of this chapter have been addressed to our fellowship with other believers. Now in this next paragraph he speaks to what our behavior should be toward those outside the church. The previous was focused on the situation introduced in Chapter Eight—i.e., eating in an idol's temple—while the next paragraph focuses on situations on the street and as a guest in someone's home. And he begins by repeating something he said in Chapter Six, there in the context of the believer's physical body, and a different set of "rights."

Read 1 Corinthians 6:12.

The NIVs and ESV remind us (by the insertion of quotation marks) that, as in Chapter Six, Paul is quoting back an axiom cited by the Corinthians themselves, which Paul agrees with—in principle. In general both passages are making the same point: "Truly Christian conduct is not predicated on whether I have the *right* to do something, i.e., whether it is to my own benefit or not, but whether my conduct is *good*, meaning ultimately helpful to those around me" (Fee). But in v23 he adds a twist at the end. Let's quickly note the differences between the two passages:

- The operative words in the first sentence of the verse are identical: "lawful" = permitted, allowed, and "profitable" (in the negative) = to bring together (for good). In the first, however, he adds the words "for me." The KJVs include "for me" in 10:23, but the oldest manuscripts do not have that in the Greek. (The NIV2011 of v23, while not necessarily inaccurate, is more paraphrase than translation, and almost embarrassingly so.)
- Paul changes the last phrase from "I will not be mastered by anything," to "not all things edify." The first (6:12) seemed to suggest that by claiming the right to visit prostitutes, that right would result in handing over to a whore mastery of one's body. In 10:23, however, Paul's switch to edification is explained in the next verse.

v24

Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.

This sentiment points directly back to the beginning of this treatise on food sacrificed to idols.

Read 1 Corinthians 8:1.

Personal rights, that which is lawful, that which is permissible—these have little standing in whether a course of action should be pursued. Of far greater importance is whether that course will build up or tear down another—and here, specifically, whether that course brings glory to God and the gospel of Christ. The standard is not be “rights,” but love for (in this case, the soul of) another.

The word translated “neighbor” in the NASB and ESV is *heteros*, which simply means “other”—someone other than oneself. If Paul here was referring to someone in the church, I think he would have used, instead of *heteros*, *adelphos*—brother or brethren.

Note: In 1611 the KJV’s insertion of “wealth” in “another’s wealth” may have been understood to mean, as intended, “well-being.” Today, however, that word sends us entirely in the wrong direction.

How might this injunction be applied in this context? Paul offers two illustrations: the first in the common marketplace where one is purchasing food for one’s table (vv25-26); the second when one is sitting down to a meal in a friend’s house (vv27-30).

vv25-26

Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience’ sake; for the earth is the LORD’S, and all it contains.

By quoting Psalm 24 in v26, the apostle immediately supplies the rationale behind his command in v25. Setting aside for just a moment that *all* of Scripture is God-breathed, in Psalm 24 it is David speaking, and in Psalm 50, penned by Asaph, it is God Himself confirming this.

Read Psalm 50:10-12.

Cattle, sheep, goats, chickens, and fish are not religious. If they are handled by priests who dedicate their flesh to an idol (demon), it’s not their fault.

There is physical and documented evidence that the marketplace in the first century had an intimate relationship with the local temples and the leftover food from their sacrifices. Some have concluded that in practice the (pagan) priests were the city’s butchers, supplying not only the meat for the sacrifices, but meat for the shops in the market.

This is not hard to imagine. Since the handing down of the Mosaic Law, the Levitical priests were the ones who knew how to butcher an animal properly according to that law. Even in Orthodox Jewish society today rabbis oversee, through the on-site supervision of a *meshgiach* (who may also be a rabbi) the ritual slaughter by a God-fearing Jew all meat certified as kosher. So everyone knew that *most* of the meat in the market of the first century came from one temple or another.

It is not the animal but the belief system that renders something unclean or restricted. If that meat or food is set apart from that belief system—and the Christian shopper is unaware of the connection—then no offense has been committed against a holy God who, after all, created “every beast of the forest.” We are reminded of Peter’s dramatic dream prior to meeting the centurion Cornelius.

Read Acts 10:9-16.

What does Paul mean by the phrase “for conscience’ sake,” used here and twice more (v27 and v28)? As the setting changes in the second illustration, how Paul uses this word (*syneidesis*) changes as well. Opinions vary, but I agree with Fee and Garland that in v25 Paul is saying that in this setting conscience should not be a factor at all; that “this matter lies outside the concerns of conscience altogether” (Fee).

Since it is improbable that any of us will find ourselves in a situation of purchasing meat sacrificed to idols, how are we to apply this to our walk with Christ today? Perhaps we can take our cue from something John MacArthur writes.

MacArthur: The third principle for using Christian liberty to the Lord’s glory is that of following liberty over legalism. To some degree this principle counterbalances the previous one [v24]. The true welfare of others should be our first concern, but their standards should not rule everything we do. As much as possible we should keep from offending the...consciences of fellow believers, but we should not go to the legalistic extreme of making great issues out of everything we do.

It may not be the best illustration, but what comes to mind is something that occurred many, many years ago when my older brother was in Little League—or may be he was just at a game; like I said, a *very* long time ago, in the fifties or early sixties. One of our uncles, who was a G.A.R.B. pastor, was visiting at the time and was sorely exercised that my brother was wearing shorts to the game. He was doing a lot of frowning, and later had something to say to our mom, his sister.

Should my brother have asked our uncle for his list of acceptable clothing articles before dressing for the game? At the first scowl from our uncle, should he have raced home to change? No to both. My brother was under no constraints to bow to the absurd legalities of our uncle’s belief system. And by doing so, by compromising his Christ-paid liberty, the Lord would not have received one more ounce of glory from the situation. Remember what Paul wrote to the Galatian church.

Read Galatians 2:3-5.