

## **Are there Limitations to Christian Freedom?**

Scriptures: 1 Cor. :1-13; 10:14; 23-24

Paul has used a total of three chapters in 1 Corinthians, chapters 8 to 10, to deal with the problem of Christians eating of sacrifices for idols. Here involves a very important question in the backdrop: Should our freedom be limited by those unenlightened Christians concerning controversial and ambiguous issues? As a matter of fact, similar arguments often appear in present day churches, such as:

Can Christians drink, smoke or dance?

Can Christians play mahjong with their families?

Can Christians join their clients at night clubs as part of their business?

Can Christians wear rather sexy attires?

Can Christians be trendy or even avant-garde in fashion?

Can Christians watch violent movies?

Can Christians practice Qi-gung or Tai-ji?

There is no written restrictions to the above acts in the Bible. These grey issues can be innumerable. How should we make our decisions? Actually the Bible has given us two principles to help us in our discernment.

### **1. Do not make others stumble**

In the ancient Corinthian church, many were used to worship idols before they came to know the Lord, and eating the sacrifices was part of the idol worship ceremony for those idol-worshippers. Now they had believed in the Lord and abandoned idol worshipping. But they still had a guilty feeling when eating food that had been sacrificed to idols. Paul referred to these Christians as weak in conscience. To these weak Christians, Paul says, we should be considerate. Something alright to you may not be alright to others. For those weak Christians, they would be tempted and stumble when they do such things. We should be considerate to these brothers and sisters.

Paul says in 8:1, "Concerning food sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes one conceited, but love edifies people." Yes, freedom is good; but love is more important. When you love someone, you want to edify him/her, and do not want to do anything that would destroy him/her. If I use my freedom so as to make others stumble, I would rather abandon this freedom for the sake of love.

What does it mean to make others stumble? This can be quite scary, as making others fall is offending Christ. Do not worry, brothers and sisters. If others do not agree with you and criticize you, that is not making others stumble. Jesus also has many Pharisees and scribes

opposing him. Christians cannot expect every people to agree with them. "Making others stumble" means setting obstacles to hinder the spiritual growth of others, and even making others fall into temptations and sin. If you apparently know that some kind of actions would make our weak brothers and sisters stumble, or would at least tempt them and hinder their growth, and yet you still boast of your own freedom, then it is arrogance and lack of love. God forbids.

## 2. Do not give Satan an opportunity

Concerning the eating of sacrifices, Paul says, "Therefore my beloved, flee from idolatry."(10:14) Fleeing from idolatry is not giving Satan an opportunity, not leaving him a chance to tempt us.

In those days, the Corinthian temples were places for social gathering and amusement. Unbelievers would go there for their entertainment. Paul reminds us, take care when you use your freedom of entertainment. Do not return to the old ways. Enjoying life is a good thing, and we have this kind of freedom. But do not be entangled by it and turn entertainment into our idol. Modern people have many kinds of formless idols, such as sleeping, shopping, working, doing exercises, watching TV..... Once you indulge in anything that is originally neutral, and allow it to fill your heart, that may become your idol.

To conclude: We have freedom to do whatever that is not restricted by the Bible. But for those grey issues, we have to consider whether that would cause others to stumble or to give opportunity to Satan.

Questions for discussion:

1. Paul teaches us to be considerate to those weak in faith. Has it happened to you that you have done something that to you is not a problem, but may be a problem for others, and that may hinder the growth of others or tempt them to fall?  
Have you criticized some rather liberal Christians, who have done something not restricted by the Bible but is offensive to you?
2. Have you ever abuse your freedom and give Satan an opportunity? What is it? Please share this struggle?