

Serving, Not Stumbling: How Love Shapes Christian Freedom

1 Corinthians 8:1–13 (ESV)

Student Devotional

This 5-day devotional is all about **freedom and love**—two things that can either work beautifully together or collide in ways that cause harm. The Corinthians thought they had this figured out. They *knew* idols weren't real, so eating food sacrificed to idols? No big deal. But Paul had a different perspective: **what we know isn't as important as how we love.**

Sometimes, what we *can* do isn't the same as what we *should* do. True Christian freedom isn't about proving we're right; it's about choosing what's best for others. As you go through these devotionals, ask yourself: *Am I using my freedom to serve others—or just to serve myself?*

Day 1: What's More Important—Being Right or Being Loving?

Scripture:

“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” (1 Corinthians 8:1, ESV)

Think About It:

Have you ever been in a debate where you were 100% right, but you walked away feeling like you lost? That's because *how* we communicate matters just as much as *what* we say.

The Corinthian believers were so focused on what they *knew*—that idols weren't real—that they missed something bigger: their “right” to eat idol-sacrificed meat was actually hurting fellow believers. Knowledge can make us prideful, but love builds people up. Paul isn't saying knowledge is bad; he's saying it has to be **shaped by love** or else it just makes us arrogant.

The real question isn't “*What do I have the right to do?*” but “*How does this affect the people around me?*” Love always trumps being right.

September 1 – **September 7,**
2025

Pray It:

Jesus, help me value love over pride. I don't just want to be right—I want to be kind. Give me the wisdom to use what I know in ways that encourage others, not tear them down.

Do It:

Next time you're in a conversation where you *know* you're right, pause and ask: *Am I using this knowledge to build up or just to prove a point?* Find a way to shift the focus toward love.

Day 2: Just Because You Can Doesn't Mean You Should

Scripture:

“All things are lawful,’ but not all things are helpful.” (1 Corinthians 8:9, ESV)

Think About It:

Freedom is awesome. But have you ever used your freedom in a way that actually backfired?

Think about this: You have the right to eat an entire cake in one sitting. But will that help your body? Probably not. You have the right to stay up all night binge-watching your favorite show. But will that help you crush your responsibilities the next day? Nope.

That's what Paul is getting at here. Some Corinthians thought, “*Hey, we're free in Christ! We can eat whatever we want!*” But they weren't considering how their actions affected others. Our choices should always ask this question: **Does this help someone else grow in faith, or does it just serve me?**

Pray It:

God, thank You for the freedom I have in Christ. Help me use it wisely—not just for myself, but in a way that strengthens those around me.

Do It:

Think about an area of your life where you might be using your “freedom” without considering how it impacts others—maybe the way you talk, what you watch, or how you spend your time. Ask yourself: *Is this helpful?* If not, what could you change?

Day 3: Don't Be Someone's Stumbling Block

Scripture:

“Be careful that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.” (1 Corinthians 8:9, ESV)

Think About It:

Imagine a friend is trying to quit sugar, and you invite them over and set a giant chocolate cake right in front of them. You might not *force* them to eat it, but you're definitely making it harder for them.

That's what Paul is talking about with Christian freedom. The Corinthian believers didn't think twice about eating food sacrificed to idols, but for someone new in faith—someone who used to worship those idols—that action could send them spiraling back into their old life.

Paul's point? **Our choices don't just affect us.** The way we live can either encourage people or discourage them. Real maturity isn't about pushing your freedom—it's about *protecting* someone else's faith.

Pray It:

Lord, help me be more aware of how my actions impact others. I don't want to make it harder for someone to follow You—I want to be the kind of person who makes faith easier.

Do It:

Think about a habit or activity you engage in that might make another believer struggle. Maybe it's a social habit, a conversation topic, or a type of entertainment. Ask yourself: *Could this trip someone up in their walk with Christ?* If so, consider adjusting how or when you do it.

Day 4: What Would You Give Up for Someone Else's Growth?

Scripture:

“If food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.” (1 Corinthians 8:13, ESV)

September 1 – **September 7,**
2025

Think About It:

This is a bold statement. Paul basically says, *“If eating meat causes someone to struggle in their faith, I’d rather never eat it again.”*

Think about that level of love. Paul was willing to **give up something he enjoyed** if it meant helping someone else grow spiritually. That’s next-level Christianity—not just *doing* the right thing, but **willingly sacrificing our rights for the sake of others**.

Would you be willing to **stop** watching a certain show, listening to certain music, or doing something you enjoy if you knew it was negatively affecting someone else’s faith? That’s the kind of love Jesus calls us to—a love that values people over personal preferences.

Pray It:

God, give me a heart that values people over my own comfort. Help me love others enough to adjust my own choices for their good.

Do It:

Identify one area where you could put someone else’s needs ahead of your own—maybe being more mindful of what you say, how you act, or what you participate in. This week, intentionally choose love over preference.

Day 5: The Ultimate Example—Jesus Gave Up Everything for Us

Scripture:

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45, ESV)

Think About It:

Jesus **had all the rights**—He’s the Son of God. He could have demanded service, glory, and power. Instead, He gave it all up to serve and save us. If anyone had the right to say, *“I’ll do whatever I want,”* it was Jesus—but He chose sacrifice over self-interest.

That’s the kind of love we’re called to. Loving others well means sometimes giving up our “right” to something for the sake of someone else’s faith. If Jesus—God in the flesh—was willing to do that for us, how much more should we be willing to do that for each other?

September 1 – **September 7,**
2025

Pray It:

Jesus, thank You for sacrificing everything for me. Help me follow Your example, choosing love and service over my own preferences.

Do It:

Think of one way you can **intentionally serve** someone this week—maybe it’s through encouragement, generosity, or just showing kindness where it’s not expected. Let that be your act of worship.

You’re Ready for Class!

Over these five days, you’ve seen how **freedom and love work together** in the Christian life. Paul reminds us that **maturity isn’t about how much we know—it’s about how much we love**. True freedom isn’t just about exercising our rights; it’s about using our freedom to build others up. Come to class ready to share: **How has this challenged the way you think about your own choices?** Let’s keep learning together how to serve—not stumble—each other in love!

Before We Gather

- What are some ways we see personal freedoms conflicting with love and unity in the church today?
- How does biblical knowledge sometimes lead to pride rather than love? How can we guard against this?
- Why is it important to recognize that some believers may struggle in areas where we feel complete freedom?
- How can we apply Paul’s principle of “choosing love over liberty” in our modern church culture?
- When was a time you realized that your personal freedom in Christ could negatively impact someone else’s faith? How did you respond, and how might you handle it differently now?
- Think about a “gray area” in Christian living (e.g., entertainment, social habits, or personal preferences). How can you apply Paul’s principle of prioritizing love over liberty in that area this week?
- Who in your life might need more encouragement and grace rather than correction?
- What is one way you can intentionally build them up in love this week?