

1 Corinthians Part 3

A 50 Minute Teaching Script

BIG IDEA Christian freedom and spiritual gifts must be governed by love and used to build up the gathered church.

BEFORE CLASS Write on the board: When can exercising a Christian freedom become unloving? Under it write: How does love govern Christian freedom, the Lord's Supper, and spiritual gifts in the gathered church?

0:00-5:00 Opening question prayer and connection

Good morning. In Lesson 10, Paul told the Corinthians that they did not belong to themselves. Christ had bought them at a price, so their bodies and relationships belonged under his lordship.

Chapters 8-14 apply that same truth to Christian freedom and gathered worship. The subjects look scattered: idol food, apostolic pay, Communion, head coverings, spiritual gifts, tongues, prophecy, and orderly worship. Paul keeps returning to one test: does this build up Christ's people in love?

Our opening question is: When can exercising a Christian freedom become unloving? Allow several answers. Then point to the controlling question: How does love govern Christian freedom, the Lord's Supper, and spiritual gifts in the gathered church?

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, you gave yourself for one body. Free us from using knowledge, rights, or gifts to make ourselves important. Teach us to seek another person's good, receive your grace with humility, and use what you give us to build your church. Amen.

5:00-17:00 Freedom shaped by love

Summarize chapters 8-10. Some Corinthians argued that idols were nothing and that food could not bring them closer to or farther from God. Their theology was partly correct. Their use of it was loveless.

Recent converts could still connect sacrificial meat with the gods they had worshiped. If a confident believer ate inside an idol temple, a vulnerable believer might follow and be drawn back into idolatry. Paul calls that conscience weak because it has not yet learned to separate ordinary food from former worship. He is not describing anyone who happens to dislike another Christian's choice.

Paul addresses three settings. Participation in an idol's religious feast is forbidden. Marketplace meat may be eaten without anxious investigation. Food in a private home may also be eaten, unless someone identifies it as sacrificial; then love may choose not to eat for the sake of that person's conscience and the gospel witness.

Paul says the idol itself is nothing, yet pagan sacrifices are offered to demons. Idolatry has real spiritual seriousness. We should not speculate that every modern object of misplaced trust is literally a demon. The point is clear enough: flee any worship, loyalty, or trust that belongs to God alone.

Chapter 9 gives Paul's own example. He had genuine rights to hospitality, marriage, and financial support, but he sometimes surrendered support so that money would not obstruct the gospel. When Paul became all things to all people, he adapted his habits to the people he served wherever Scripture permitted. He changed his practice, not his gospel or ethics.

Chapter 10 warns against presumption through Israel's wilderness generation. Israel possessed great covenant privileges, yet many fell through idolatry and rebellion. Religious privilege does not make sin safe. God supplies a way through temptation, so Paul does not tell believers to flirt with idolatry. He tells them to flee.

Now ask the reader to read 10:23 through 11:1. Notice the questions Paul gives us. Is this beneficial? Will it build another person up? Am I seeking someone else's good? Can I do it for God's glory? Will it help or hinder the gospel? Does it reflect Christ's self-giving pattern? Christian freedom asks more than, 'Can I?' It also asks, 'Should I, and whom will my choice help or harm?'

17:00-26:00 The Lord's Supper and one body

Ask the reader to read 11:17-26 and then verses 33-34. The Corinthian meal displayed the same class divisions that marked the city. Wealthier Christians could arrive earlier, eat generously, and occupy the best spaces. Working believers and the poor arrived later to little or nothing.

That behavior contradicted the meal. The bread and cup proclaim that Jesus gave himself for his people. The Corinthians remembered Christ's body while humiliating members of Christ's body.

When Paul warns against receiving the meal in an unworthy manner, he is describing their manner of participation. He is not saying that some Christians have finally made themselves worthy. None of us earns a seat at the table. Christ invites sinners who come in faith and repentance.

Self-examination asks whether we recognize what the meal proclaims and whether we are treating Christ's people as one body. Awareness of sin should lead us to confession and to Christ's grace, not convince a repentant believer to stay away.

26:00-39:00 Many gifts and the way of love

Ask the reader to read 12:4-13. Notice the repeated words: different gifts, service, and workings, but the same Spirit, Lord, and God. The Spirit gives diversity, and the Spirit also creates unity.

Verse 7 gives the purpose: each manifestation is given for the common good. Gifts are not trophies, personality labels, or proof that one Christian matters more. The Spirit distributes them as he determines.

Paul's body illustration attacks two errors. The foot cannot say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong.' The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I do not need you.' No believer is unnecessary, and no believer is self-sufficient. Public visibility is not the same thing as spiritual importance.

Verse 13 says every believer was baptized by one Spirit into one body. Paul is describing the Spirit's work in joining believers to Christ and his church. He is not dividing the congregation into Christians who possess the Spirit and Christians waiting to become fully spiritual.

Now read 13:1-7 and verse 13. This is not primarily a wedding reading. Paul places it between chapters 12 and 14 because the Corinthians were exercising gifts competitively. Tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith, generosity, and sacrifice amount to nothing without love.

The description of love is painfully practical in church life. Love does not envy someone else's gift, boast about its own, dishonor another member, insist on its own preference, keep a record of every slight, or delight when an opponent fails. Gifts serve for this age. Love endures.

39:00-43:00 Intelligibility and order

Ask the reader to read 14:26-33a and 39-40. Paul's question is not which gift creates the most dramatic experience. His question is what strengthens the gathered church.

Tongues spoken publicly require interpretation. Prophecies must be weighed. Speakers remain responsible for self-control. Outsiders should be able to recognize that God is among his people rather than conclude that the church has lost its mind.

Christians disagree about whether miraculous gifts continue today. We do not need to settle that debate this morning. Paul's rules bind both sides: no gift is compulsory, no gift makes someone a superior Christian, public speech must strengthen others, and worship must remain intelligible and orderly.

Two difficult texts belong in the leader notes rather than taking over the lesson. Head coverings communicated modesty and honor in Corinth; the enduring concern is worship that honors God, one another, and our embodied sex without needless scandal. Paul assumes women pray and prophesy in 11:5, so the command for silence in 14:34-35 is best read in relation to a particular form of disorder, not as universal silence. ECO ordains women and men, while Christians who hold complementarian readings should be treated as brothers and sisters rather than opponents of the gospel.

43:00-48:00 The Gospel Then and Now

The Corinthians used knowledge, rights, wealth, and visible gifts to distinguish themselves from other believers. Churches today can turn freedom into self-assertion, Communion into routine, gifts into status, and worship preferences into contests.

The gospel creates a different church. Christ surrendered his rights and gave himself for one body. Therefore, his people surrender legitimate freedoms when love requires it, welcome one another at his table, honor every member, and use every gift to build others up.

Ask: Which Corinthian problem most closely resembles churches today: individual rights, social division, worship preferences, platform-seeking, spectacular gifts, or disorder? Follow with: What would it look like for our congregation to measure worship and ministry by whether they build others up?

48:00-50:00 Summary homework and prayer

Here is the lesson in one sentence: Christian freedom and spiritual gifts serve their proper purpose only when love uses them to build Christ's body.

Before next week, read 1 Corinthians 15-16. Mark what Paul says happened to Christ, what will happen to believers, and why resurrection makes present service worthwhile.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for joining us to Christ and to one another by your Spirit. Give us knowledge that serves love, freedom that seeks another's good, and gifts that strengthen your church. Make our worship clear, humble, and centered on Jesus Christ. Amen.