

## Sermon Summary | Sunday 3rd May 2026 | 1 Corinthians 8

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul begins a short series on God's guidance in the grey areas of life: those decisions where the Bible does not give a simple one-line command. These are not questions about obvious sin, but about ordinary discipleship: what we watch, how we use social media, whether we drink alcohol, where we go, what we recommend, and how we use our freedom as Christians. Paul's first guiding question is this: will this hurt another Christian?

The specific issue in Corinth was food offered to idols. Some Christians knew that idols were not real gods and that there is only one true God. Therefore, they reasoned, they were free to eat such food. Paul does not simply deny their theology. In one sense, they are right. But they are right in a dangerous way, because they are using knowledge without love. Knowledge can puff up. It can make us feel superior, dismissive, and careless towards those who do not see things as we do. Love, by contrast, builds up.

So Paul changes the question. The Corinthians want to ask, "What do I know?" or "What am I allowed to do?" Paul teaches them to ask, "Whom am I loving?" and "Will this build up?" Christian freedom is not the right to revolve around myself. It is freedom from self-rule so that I can belong to God and love others. In those areas of life where the Bible doesn't give us a 'yes'/'no' answer, love asks not only whether something is permitted, but how it may affect a brother or sister in Christ.

Paul then re-centres the whole discussion on the gospel. There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. Guidance is not merely a decision-making technique; it is a matter of worship. The deeper question beneath many of our choices is: who is Lord? Freedom does not mean having no Lord. It means belonging to the right Lord. We are not trying to discover how much we can get away with while still technically being Christian. We are asking how lives made by God, for God, and redeemed through Christ can be used for him.

Paul then turns to the weaker believer. A weak conscience is not the same as a controlling preference or mere dislike. It is a conscience that does not yet have the strength to act freely without feeling that it is sinning against God. For some Corinthian Christians, eating idol food still felt like returning to idolatry. Paul takes that seriously. Food does not commend us to God; we are accepted in Christ, not through cultural habits, lifestyle preferences, or perfectly judged decisions. But love must take care that freedom does not become a stumbling block.

The emotional centre of the chapter is Paul's phrase: "the brother for whom Christ died." The vulnerable Christian is not to be measured by their maturity, usefulness, or whether we find them easy. Their worth is measured by the blood of Christ. To wound their conscience is not merely to upset a sensitive person; it is to sin against Christ, who is united to his people and died for them.

This does not mean surrendering every freedom whenever anyone dislikes it. There is a difference between annoying a preference and damaging a conscience. Paul is not giving manipulative people a veto over the church. He is calling mature Christians to protect vulnerable Christians. The anxious conscience should be cared for, but also strengthened by truth. The careless Christian must learn that strength is not the ability to exercise freedom, but the willingness to limit freedom for love.

Above all, Paul points us to Christ. Jesus had all rights, yet he did not cling to them. He came down, took flesh, bore shame, and died for the weak. He did not say, "Their weakness is not my problem." He made our weakness his burden. The cross changes how we choose. Christian freedom is real, but love governs how we use it.

### Questions for personal reflection

1. In the grey areas of my life, do I tend to ask only, “Am I allowed?” or am I also asking, “Will this build up, and whom am I loving?”
2. Is there any freedom, habit, speech, recommendation, or example of mine that may be wounding or unsettling a brother or sister for whom Christ died?