

# SPECIAL FOCUS: INTERDEPENDENT INDEPENDENCE

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## INTRODUCTION

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Every day we make choices. We choose where we want to live and what to eat. We decide how to interact with family, friends, and strangers. Since the creation of the world, God has granted mankind the freewill to make choices. Since the fall of man, it has been evident that our choices impact others. This session will help us put others first and make decisions that glorify God and have a positive impact on others.

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## Writer Bio

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# INTERDEPENDENT INDEPENDENCE

Leader pages on pp. 120-123

**THE POINT:**  
LET YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO OTHERS DRIVE HOW YOU EXERCISE YOUR RIGHTS.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 10:23-33

<sup>23</sup>“Everything is permissible,” but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible,” but not everything builds up. <sup>24</sup> No one is to seek his own good, but the good of the other person. <sup>25</sup> Eat everything that is sold in the meat market, without raising questions for the sake of conscience, <sup>26</sup> since the earth is the Lord’s, and all that is in it.

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<sup>27</sup> If any of the unbelievers invites you over and you want to go, eat everything that is set before you, without raising questions for the sake of conscience. <sup>28</sup> But if someone says to you, “This is food from a sacrifice,” do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who told you, and for the sake of conscience. <sup>29</sup> I do not mean your own conscience, but the other person’s. For why is my freedom judged by another person’s conscience?

<sup>30</sup> If I partake with thanksgiving, why am I criticized because of something for which I give thanks?

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### MEMORY VERSE

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<sup>31</sup> **So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.** <sup>32</sup> Give no offense to Jews or Greeks or the church of God, <sup>33</sup> just as I also try to please everyone in everything, not seeking my own benefit, but the benefit of many, so that they may be saved.

### KEYWORDS

**The good of the other person (v. 24)**—Believers must describe their actions with the aim of benefiting others, especially where this can lead to salvation for unbelievers.

**A sacrifice (v. 28)**—(Greek, *hierothutos*) literally means “meat devoted to a divinity.” This sac-

rifice refers to meat left over from an offering to an idol. It was eaten in a pagan temple or sold in the market.

**For the glory of God (v. 31)**—In this context, people who wish to do every thing for the glory of God cannot succeed if they act in disregard of others.

# WHAT CAN I DO WHEN MY RIGHTS CLASH WITH OTHERS?

There is an interdependence that exists in our world that we cannot ignore. We know from history that our choices affect others.

During the Civil Rights era, countless leaders sacrificed comfortable, simple lives for the benefit of others. Harriet Tubman risked her freedom to go back into slave territory and deliver others to freedom. During the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a community of African Americans inconvenienced themselves by refusing to ride buses seeking change. Where would we be if these individuals chose to look out for themselves and their own comfort?

When we consider the needs of others, we will live in ways that make an eternal difference. By living out the gospel for others to see, we show God's love and draw them closer to a relationship with God. The apostle Paul spoke about how we can live lives that make an eternal difference. This is indeed a better way to live, and it will lead us to support others and honor Christ.

## Pursue Good for Others // 1 Corinthians 10:23-24

As Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, he used language they were familiar with. "Everything is permissible" was something the people would've heard on the streets of Corinth. It was a part of the Corinthian way. Corinth was set in Greece, and as an important port city, it was a gateway for many people, viewpoints, and sinful activities. As a gateway and an entryway for many sins, everything was accessible for this city. The attitude of the people, then, was that they could do anything.

Paul acknowledged that, yes, they had access to everything, but not everything would help them live life. It's true for us too. Some of the things that are accessible to us are not going to bring us life; rather, they will lead to bondage instead of freedom. "Not everything is beneficial" or "builds up." For example, I can choose to drink sugary soft drinks with every meal. In fact, I can drink them whenever I want to. Yet, if this is the pattern in which I live, it will



## THE POINT: LET YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO OTHERS DRIVE HOW YOU EXERCISE YOUR RIGHTS.

not enable me to live a full, healthy life. I will gain weight, have heart issues, and experience other negative effects to my health. Soft drinks are allowed—they are permissible—but they are not in my best interest—they are not beneficial.

We also need to do what is beneficial to others. When Paul spoke to the church in Corinth about not seeking their “own good, but the good of the other person,” he was saying, to use my illustration, sometimes you need to serve your brother water and not a soft drink! Humans are prone to think of themselves first and others second. Paul reminded the church that the kingdom of God is different than the kingdom of this world. In God’s Kingdom, we think of others above ourselves. This is not a normal posture for us. We want to be first. We want our own way, yet Paul called for us to humble ourselves and allow the focus to be on “we,” not “me.”

### HOW DOES A KINGDOM FOCUS CHANGE THE WAY WE SEE OUR RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS?

We must see things through a new lens. It is as if we have been viewing the world with less than perfect vision. When we put on the glasses of the kingdom of God, our focus changes. Sometimes “good” is not simply saying no to sinful things. That certainly is important, but we also might need to say no to some good things in order to say yes to something better: helping our brothers and sisters in Christ. Let’s not lay traps with our lives and choices. We set aside our rights—that which is permissible—for the sake of others. This is a paradigm shift for sure, but when we surrender our lives to Jesus, we abandon our earthly standard for a new kingdom normal.

## Partake Without Offense //

### 1 Corinthians 10:25-30

Don’t offend others unnecessarily. This sounds easy enough, but if this is not an intentional step, we will without a doubt offend others unintentionally and needlessly. Paul continued with his theme of putting others before himself, but now he did so with a very practical example, one the Corinthian believers could likely experience.

The Jews among the Corinthian believers were familiar with the restrictions the law placed on them regarding what they



## DIGGING DEEPER FOOD OFFERED TO IDOLS

In ancient times, pagans provided food to sustain their deities through food sacrifices. Food sacrifices were often separated into three parts. One portion was sacrificed during the ritual. Another was given to the priest or temple servants. The worshiper used what remained in one of two ways. First, it could be eaten as a meal. Second, the meat could be sold at the local market. In today’s passage the history of the food would be known by some but not by others and not all food sold in the marketplace would necessarily have been previously associated with idolatry. Otherwise there would be no point in asking questions in order to determine the food’s history. Paul advised the Corinthians to, “Eat everything that is sold in the meat market, without raising questions,” which affirms that he had no issue with food per se.

### How does this information illustrate putting others first?

could or couldn't eat. However, because of the new covenant in Christ, those restrictions no longer applied (Mark 7:18-19; Rom. 14:14), and they were free to "eat everything that is sold in the meat market." They were free to eat all food because the Lord made it all. This was a big deal, especially for those brought up in the Jewish tradition that separated clean food from unclean food.

Paul now took this freedom and placed it in the context of a dinner invitation. If an unbeliever invited you to his home for dinner, it was all right to go and to eat the food that was prepared. However, if someone announced that the food was part of a sacrifice, the scenario changed. Nothing was wrong with the food itself, but the believer should still abstain for the sake of the other person's conscience. Someone might argue that the Christian could "set the record straight" by eating the meat anyway, proving it was just meat. However, by doing so, the Christian might be sending the message that idolatry is OK.

### IS THE IDEA OF LETTING GO OF FREEDOMS EASY OR A STRUGGLE FOR YOU? WHY?

So again, while "everything is permissible" (v. 23), the believer is to abstain to avoid misleading or offending the other person. We may need to set aside our freedoms to avoid being a stumbling block to someone else. We may have a "right" to eat, but we also have a responsibility to love and support the other person. Our actions can make or break the growth of a new believer or the progress of someone coming to Christ.

## Protect Your Witness //

### 1 Corinthians 10:31-33

What Paul had been saying to the church in Corinth can be summarized with this: Do what gives a witness for Christ. When Paul wrote,



"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God," he encouraged the church at Corinth and the church today to allow every aspect of our lives to honor and glorify Jesus. Paul was not trying to overwhelm us but to encourage us. Wherever you are and whatever you are doing, make sure you keep your kingdom lenses on.

Many of us live segmented lives. We live one way at work, one way at home, one way in traffic, and one way around our Christian friends. Our lives at home are for the glory of God. How we carry out our work is for the glory of God. How we respond to traffic on our commute home is for the glory of God.

### HOW CAN THE GLORY OF GOD SERVE AS A FILTER FOR HOW WE LIVE OUR LIVES?

Even as we seek to "do everything for the glory of God," we also seek to "give no offense to Jews or Greeks or the church of God." Times will come when what we do to bring God glory will offend others. For example, sharing the gospel of Christ certainly brings glory to God but it can also be a stumbling block, foolishness, and even an offense to others (1 Cor. 1:23). Nevertheless, the call to glorify God is to fuel all our actions.

## THE POINT: LET YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO OTHERS DRIVE HOW YOU EXERCISE YOUR RIGHTS.

It may seem odd, then, that Paul said, “I also try to please everyone in everything.” In fact, it sounds contradictory to what he wrote to the Galatians: “For am I now trying to persuade people, or God? Or am I striving to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10).

We must understand Paul’s desire to please everyone within the context in which he said it. Paul had been addressing the freedom we have in Christ. Paul willingly set that freedom aside if his actions might offend or cause someone to stumble. He wanted to please them—not offend them—in order to point to Christ. We please the King when we love people in this manner.

The people of the kingdom of God speak on behalf of the King and represent His goodness to others. We may not always get this right. That’s why grace is so beautiful. I do believe that if we put the bullseye of our lives on glorifying God in everything that we do, we represent Him in a way that truly pleases Him. Don’t let the bigness of this calling overwhelm you; just focus on what you must do next and view it through the lens of the kingdom.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Elisabeth Elliot was a missionary that demonstrated putting the needs of others first. She and her husband, Jim Elliot, served as missionaries in the Ecuador jungle. In 1956, Jim and four fellow missionaries planned to bring the gospel to the Auca Indians, known as the Huaorani. When they landed on the remote beach, they were stabbed to death by the Huaorani. Jim was killed. As a widow and single mother, Elisabeth pressed through her pain to document their story in the book *Through Gates of Splendor*. In 1961 she did the unimaginable, and she and her daughter returned to the jungle to live among the people that killed her husband. She learned their language, worked on a Bible translation, and shared the love of Christ while developing friendships and relationships to lead them to the Lord.

**How does Elisabeth’s life encourage you to put others first in sharing the gospel?**

## LIVE IT

### How can you impact others for Christ without giving up your own freedom?

When we pause to examine our days, we can identify patterns. Where do we go regularly? How often do we visit a department store, the neighborhood gym, or a local gas station? Within these patterns, God has intentionally placed people in our lives so that we can serve as living examples of Christ.

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- **Take an inventory.** For the next week, notice the people in your family, in your community, on your job, and at your church whose paths you cross. Make a list of their names.
- **Examine the list.** Identify individuals on the list that do not know Christ. Also, name believers that could use encouragement? Ask God to guide you to pray for one or two of the people on your list.
- **Pray and make an impact.** Ask God for an awareness of how your behaviors and choices impact them. Intentionally plan to put their needs above yours to be a witness for Christ.

# DAILY READINGS

## 1. DON'T GET WEARY // GALATIANS 6:9

“Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up.” This means putting the needs of others ahead of your own, which is not an easy task. As a school teacher, I get to know children and create lessons to meet their needs. Everything I do in the classroom is about helping them to grow and learn. It's an exhausting sacrifice that leaves me spent on a daily basis. But it's worth it because at the end of the year I am blessed to see their growth. God calls each of us to serve, but sometimes we grow tired. When we do, we should reflect on Galatians 6:9, and trust that God's Word is true. Then look around to see what God has done. You will see the difference your service has made in the lives of the people you serve or in your own life.

**Believe that in due time you will experience a harvest.**

## 2. SERVING FOR THE GOOD ALL // GALATIANS 6:10

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith.” This verse implies that opportunities to do something good for someone may be few and far between, especially in our culture when people are so divisive. Therefore, we should be intentional about looking to see “all” of the people around us. While we may never choose to be friends with them, know that from this group, God could call you to do something special for them or even to share your faith.

**Look for the opportunity to work for the good of all people that God brings your way.**

## 3. SERVING WITH HUMILITY // GALATIANS 6:14-15

“But as for me, I will never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The world has been crucified to me through the cross and I to the world.” The apostle Paul encourages us to

humbly serve others and keep Christ first. Think about the reason God places specific people in our lives—to promote God's Word, to bring glory to His name, and to make an eternal difference in another person's life. We may be tempted to seek your own gain and our personal motives may try to come forward, but keep serving with humility.

**Spend time praying that God will help you keep the main thing the main thing.**

## 4. THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT // GALATIANS 4:6

“And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba, Father!” When we are given a gift, all we have to do is receive it. After receiving a gift, a thank you is always in order. When we become Christians, God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit. What a precious gift He has given to His sons and daughters! We don't have to wonder whether we have Him or wait for Him to come. He is in our hearts, working on our behalf, drawing us close to our Abba Father.

**Acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life and thank God for this gift.**

## 5. DECISION FATIGUE // ACTS 8:29

Have you ever heard the phrase, “decision fatigue?” It is a term used to explain how overwhelmed we can get when we have to make too many decisions. If we tried to count the number of decisions we make in a day, I would guess it would run into the thousands before lunch. Making decisions can be confusing and exhausting. One day the disciple Philip had assistance making a decision. “The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go and join that chariot.’” The Spirit simply told him where to go. Often we struggle making decisions, asking ourselves, “How do I know what to do?” As believers, we should remember that we have the Holy Spirit at work in our lives, and like He did with Philip, He will show us the way to go.

**Let's walk close to God daily in prayer, so we can recognize the guidance of the Spirit.**



# In Christ: Experiencing True Freedom

BY CHERISE BOPAPE

When Burger King launched its 1974 slogan: “Have It Your Way,”<sup>11</sup> it stuck. Lasting for decades, the slogan’s longevity proved that people like individuality. As far as burgers are concerned, it showed we crave the freedom to make our own choices. We like to be in control.

In our democratic society, we have freedoms that allow us to choose everything from burger toppings to U.S. presidents. But our approach to personal and political liberties shouldn’t flow through to our Christian lives.

Even believers get this twisted. Some of us approach Christianity like we’re ordering

burgers. “I’ll take peace and love, but hold the long-suffering and self-control.”

Other Christians won’t even look at the menu. They remove themselves from the public eye. This group avoids temptations that often accompany being in community and in relationships with others.

Neither of these mindsets is healthy. So how can believers experience true freedom? We must realize we are called to a higher standard. We are made for relationship. And, we have a new identity in Christ that affords us all the freedom we need.



### **Called to a Higher Standard**

All burger chains sell burgers, but not all burgers are held to the same standard. We expect a burger from a fine-dining restaurant to be presented differently than one from a fast-food joint. It should be more palatable. But sometimes the whole experience gets skewed.

Likewise, there should be a notable difference between a Christian's life and a nonbeliever's. Christians should maintain a higher standard of living, one that uplifts God and represents Him appropriately.

But are we studying God's Word and praying for guidance? Do we rely on the Holy Spirit's conviction when we encounter gray areas for which the Bible doesn't offer a clear solution? You wonder, should I drink a glass of wine during a wedding toast? Should I read the romance novel my book club selected? Is it OK for me to get a tattoo?

Sadly, we sometimes go for convenience. Instead of seeking God's help and waiting on Him, we go for the "fast food." We look at what others around us are doing. We see their successes, take their advice, and act as if we're bound to their preferences and convictions. Perhaps we even rely on ourselves, our college degrees, or our titles.

That's when our Christian experience and our idea of freedom gets skewed. Our witness is tainted. Then, our lives aren't as palatable. We forget that we are chosen, royal, and holy (1 Pet. 2:9) and that "our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20). In other words, we're like a fine dining experience masquerading as a fast-food combo.

The standard is high. What are we doing to measure up?

### **Made for Relationship**

Whether we eat on the go or at a formal table, dining with others is comforting. After all, we were made for relationship; God knew it wasn't good for us to live alone (Gen. 2:18). But, sometimes that means we'll have to make some concessions for the sake of others in our presence. Certain restaurants, cuisines, and price points may be off-limits.

The same is true for other areas of our lives. To keep from being offensive, and to preserve our Christian witness, we may need to set aside our own privileges and freedoms. In so doing, we exhibit sensitivity and love. We honor Christ. We also keep a pathway open for the gospel to be shared with our unbelieving guests. Essentially, we make room for God's saving work to occur.

But if our view of freedom is bent toward a monasterial mindset, we miss opportunities to tell others about Christ and make Him known to others. We also don't get the benefit of seeing God at work in other's lives. This stunts our Christian growth. So, in this regard, our false perception of freedom really binds us instead.

### **True Freedom in Christ**

Some Christians try to find freedom by worshiping God in seclusion. Other believers may practice Christianity by finding freedom in doing their own thing. They cling to Scriptures that are comfortable and easy to obey.

But true freedom can only be found in Christ. The freedom God gives is like a good burger. It doesn't leave us empty; it satisfies.

That means we don't have to hang on to the old lusts and desires that kept us in bondage. We have a new identity in Christ. Our minds are renewed, our lives are transformed, and our eternity is fixed. We are set free from the power of sin, and the death penalty it brings. Now that's freedom!

When we discover what true freedom is, we realize that although "Have It Your Way" is a great slogan for burgers, a better slogan exists for believers who want to honor God: "Have Your Way."

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