

## **Small Group Study Guide**

### *The Freer Group Exercises Freedom in Conscience with Love* 1 Corinthians 8-10 and Romans 14

**Introduction:** Over the past couple of weeks we have been looking at how Paul addresses one of the questions of the Corinthian church (“Is it okay for a Christian to eat meat sacrificed to an idol?”) to learn how we are to handle our own issues that tend to separate us into two groups that we have been calling the “weaker brother” group and the freer group. Last week we looked at this issue from the “weaker brother” perspective. This week we will look at it from the freer group perspective. May the fruit of this three week study be a greater sense of unity in our church as we make an effort to live in ways that truly build each other up in love.

1. Take a look at the headings in your Bible at the start of 1 Corinthians 8. What does it say? Is that a good heading for 1 Corinthians 8-10? Why or why not?
2. Is this section just about liberty or is there something deeper going on in these chapters? Explain.
3. Read 1 Corinthians 8:9, 10 and Romans 14:2, 13. How does Paul describe the “freer” group in these verses?

#### **Read 1 Corinthians 8:9-13**

4. What instructions does Paul give to the freer group?
5. In what ways can the freer group’s liberty become a stumbling block to the weaker brother/sister?

#### **Read Romans 14:1-3; 13-23**

6. What instructions does Paul give to the freer group?
7. What does it mean to “regard with contempt” the one who is weaker (v. 3)?

8. As you consider what Paul tells the freer group in 1 Corinthians 8 and Romans 14, what general principles should govern our behavior when it comes to dealing with weaker brothers/sisters?
9. What are some practical ways that you can apply these principles?

### **Read 1 Corinthians 10:30-31**

10. What does this passage say to the freer group?

In Lowell's sermon he did a fictional dialogue between himself (a freer person) and a weaker brother. In the dialogue the weaker brother's conscience was harmed when he followed Lowell's example of drinking a beer with a meal during a dinner at a restaurant. The weaker brother ordered a beer because he saw Lowell order one. The weaker brother, however, felt guilty about what he had done afterwards. The dialogue was the account of their interaction after this meal. In the early part of the dialogue, Lowell commits that he will no longer drink a beer in his friend's presence because of love and his desire to edify his friend. But later he talks about another way in which he wants his example to edify his friend:

**Lowell:** I ordered a beer because I wanted one. I ordered a beer because my conscience allowed it. I ordered a beer because I could do so in accordance with 1 Corinthians 10:30-31.

**Friend:** So you drank a beer just in reference to your own liberty, for your own enjoyment – not thinking of others who might possibly be there? Where's the edification in that?

**Lowell:** Not necessarily. You see I want my general example to edify you in another way too. I want you to see me leading a full, joyful life in Christ Jesus. I want you to eventually share the same knowledge that I have: namely that the Lord Jesus has given us incredible and joyful freedoms. . . The Church desperately needs examples of Christians living life to the fullest. . . Fear of offending someone can paralyze you. We can turn into the lowest common denominator church. Christianity is not vanilla. Maybe Christianity is, but Jesus Christ isn't. We need to make this thing fly. We need to sing at the top of our lungs. We don't do our weaker brothers or sisters any favors by leaving the freedoms of Christ unopened in its gift box. When they grow enough to be able to enjoy those freedoms too, we will have taught them by our tepid example that those freedoms don't really exist – that Christianity is the dour, joyless religion that they always feared it would be.

11. So, how does the freer group balance the command to not make the weaker brother/sister stumble (1 Cor. 8:13) with living out the freedoms they have in Christ (1 Cor. 10:30-31)? In other words, how can they truly live "life to the fullest" and not make Christianity "vanilla" and yet still show love and respect to those who are weak in conscience?