

1 Corinthians 10:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.

Analysis

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not—Paul quotes (and qualifies) a Corinthian slogan. **All things are lawful** (panta exestin, πάντα ἔξεστιν) likely reflects their claim to Christian freedom—we're not under law but grace; therefore, all things are permissible. Paul used similar language (6:12) and doesn't entirely reject it—Christians do have freedom in Christ.

However, he adds crucial qualifications: **but all things are not expedient** (sympherei, συμφέρει, "beneficial/advantageous/helpful"). Freedom exists within love's constraints—what's technically permissible may not be beneficial for you or others. The second qualification—**but all things edify not** (oikdomei, οἰκοδομεῖ, "build up")—introduces corporate concern. Christian freedom must serve communal edification, building up the body rather than gratifying self.

This verse transitions from theological argument (vv. 14-22) to practical ethics (vv. 23-30). Even if eating idol-food were theoretically permissible (which Paul has argued it's not when done at idol temples), the principles of benefit and edification would still apply. Christian liberty isn't license to do whatever you want; it's freedom to serve love's demands, which often means self-limitation for others' sake.

Historical Context

Corinth's culture prized personal autonomy and individual rights. The church absorbed this, claiming freedom in Christ justified attending temple banquets, consorting with prostitutes (6:12-20), and disregarding weaker believers' consciences. Paul redefines freedom: it exists not for self-gratification but for loving service that builds up the community. True freedom considers impact on others, not just individual rights.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What "lawful" freedoms might you need to limit for the sake of what's beneficial or edifying?
2. How can you distinguish between legitimate Christian liberty and selfish license?
3. In what areas does modern individualism tempt you to prioritize personal rights over communal edification?

Interlinear Text

πάντα μοί ἔξεστιν ἀλλ' οὐ πάντα συμφέρει· πάντα[·]
All things for me are lawful but not All things are All things
G3956 G3427 G1832 G235 G3756 G3956 G4851 G3956

μοί ἔξεστιν ἀλλ' οὐ πάντα οἰκοδομεῖ
for me are lawful but not All things edify
G3427 G1832 G235 G3756 G3956 G3618

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 6:12 (Word): All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

1 Corinthians 8:9 (Parallel theme): But take heed lest by any means this liberty of your's become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.

Ephesians 4:29 (Parallel theme): Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 (Parallel theme): Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

Romans 14:15 (Parallel theme): But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.

1 Corinthians 14:17 (Parallel theme): For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.

1 Corinthians 14:26 (Parallel theme): How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

1 Corinthians 14:12 (Parallel theme): Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

1 Timothy 1:4 (Parallel theme): Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do.