

1 Corinthians 8:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But take heed lest by any means this liberty of your's become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.

Analysis

But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock (πρόσκομμα, proskomma, "obstacle, offense")—Paul's warning is sharp. The noun proskomma denotes something that trips someone, causing them to fall. Your exousia (ἐξουσία, "right, liberty, authority") can become another's proskomma (stumbling stone).

To them that are weak (τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν, tois asthenesin)—the "weak" aren't second-class Christians but those whose consciences are more sensitive on disputable matters. Love requires the "strong" to voluntarily limit liberty. This is Christian freedom's paradox: true liberty is freedom from needing to exercise all rights, enabling freedom for serving others (Galatians 5:13, "by love serve one another"). The "strong" believer proves strength not by asserting rights but by surrendering them for others' sake.

Historical Context

In Greco-Roman culture, the "strong" (educated, socially elite) despised the "weak" (uneducated, lower class). Stoic philosophy prized apatheia (freedom from emotional responses) and disdained those controlled by superstition or weak conscience. Paul subverts this: Christian maturity means using strength to serve weakness, not dominate it. This inverts worldly power dynamics.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What Christian liberties might you need to limit because they cause weaker believers to stumble?
2. How do you distinguish between respecting a weak conscience versus enabling legalism?
3. Where are you flaunting freedom to prove your maturity rather than using strength to serve others?

Interlinear Text

βλέπετε	δὲ	μήπως	ἢ	ἐξουσία	ὑμῶν	αὕτη
take heed	But	lest by any means	G3588	liberty	of yours	this
G991	G1161	G3381		G1849	G5216	G3778
πρόσκομμα	γένηται	τοῖς	ἀσθενοῦσιν			
a stumblingblock	become	G3588	to them that are weak			
G4348	G1096		G770			

Additional Cross-References

Galatians 5:13 (Parallel theme): For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

1 Peter 2:16 (Parallel theme): As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

2 Peter 2:19 (Parallel theme): While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

1 Corinthians 10:24 (Parallel theme): Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.

1 Corinthians 10:32 (Parallel theme): Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:

1 Corinthians 8:12 (Parallel theme): But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.

1 Corinthians 8:10 (Parallel theme): For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols;

1 Corinthians 9:22 (Parallel theme): To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.