

# 1

“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.” 1 Corinthians 10:23

## The Words of the Text Opened

These words that I have read to you are the conclusion of Paul’s answer to certain questions that the Corinthians (it seems in writing) had proposed to him. What those questions were you may read from the beginning of the seventh chapter to part of this tenth chapter. I shall only touch upon them a little. In the beginning of the seventh chapter they had written to Paul and asked him this question: Is it lawful for a man under the gospel to marry? It seems that they thought the profession of the gospel such a holy thing in old times (otherwise than professors do now) that they thought it a kind of defilement to that spiritual and glorious profession to marry. That was one question. Another question is found in chapter 7:4: Being married, might they live with their husbands and wives as before? Paul answers that. They ask him again whether a believer, being matched to an unbeliever, might turn away his wife and leave his house? He answers that. Then the servants who were believers, and their masters unbelievers, wrote and asked whether they, in conscience, should seek their freedom? He answers that also.

So there are divers questions from that place to the end of the chapter, such as whether it was lawful for people to marry in the time of persecution, or for people who were once married to marry any more? He answers those. In the eighth chapter they have other sorts of questions, greater than these: Is it lawful for believers to eat flesh offered to idols? That was a great question, for in those countries the

gospel was among infidels, and those who were without worshipped the devil in idols and sacrificed meat to them; and this meat, when it had been sacrificed, was carried to the market and sold. Now they questioned whether they, knowing that that meat was offered to an idol, might eat of it? Paul answers that; and in the ninth and tenth chapters illustrates it, and so comes to sum up all his answers in these words: "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient," that is to say, "Most of those things that you have proposed, if not all, are lawful. I do not say that they sin if they marry; they do not sin; and as for meat offered to idols, an idol is nothing in the world. All these things are lawful, and an abundance of things more, but all things are not expedient."

It is as if he should say, "I wonder why you Corinthians should ask so many questions, whether this or that is lawful. You may do lawful things and yet damn your souls forever. I will not hide the liberty of the gospel from you; it is lawful to eat meat offered to an idol, for an idol is nothing; and to marry is lawful, so long as it is in the Lord. Yet in the New Testament you should look higher than that which is lawful and unlawful; you should look to see what is expedient, and what edifies, and those things that do not edify (as most of these things do not, though they were lawful in themselves) you must not use them." For, he says in the verse following, "Let no man seek his own [things], but every man man another's wealth." So that I say the words are the sum of Paul's answer to the Corinthians to these questions: You may find the particular answers to every one of these questions if you peruse the former chapters.

So that, to come to the words, they have in them these two things:

First, there is a concession. They ask if these things were lawful? Paul grants that they may be lawful. It is lawful to marry; it is lawful for a believer to keep his unbelieving wife; it is lawful for a servant to abide with his master, though he