

## **XVII. The Last Word on Christian Liberty**

May 14/16, 2013

1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1

**Aim:** To use our Christian liberty in whatever we do to glorify God and to love our neighbor.

The Corinthians were embroiled in a fierce debate on meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Paul responded to this debate by dividing the question into two parts. First, should the Christian ever eat this meat? Secondly, should the Christian attend banquets where meat is sacrificed to idols? Paul's response to the first question is, 'It depends.' If someone felt free to eat of this meat, he should not hesitate to do so except when his eating caused another Christian to stumble. In other words, he should be willing to refrain from eating in the presence of another Christian who might be troubled by it (8:9-13). Paul went to great lengths to encourage the Corinthians to develop this mentality. He used his own willingness to sacrifice as a positive example of this attitude (9:1-27); he used the nation of Israel as a negative example of it (10:1-13).

### **A. Flee From Idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14-22)**

In this passage, Paul turns to deal with the second part of this issue: should a Christian attend banquets or ceremonies where these idol sacrifices were made? To this, he issues a resounding 'No!' When it comes to idolatry, the only appropriate response for a Christian is to flee.

The present passage completes his pastoral advice about going to temples. Earlier he had admonished them not to attend the dining rooms attached to the temples where meals were eaten from food sacrificed earlier to the god of the temple (8:7-13). Now he tells them in the most direct terms to avoid temple attendance altogether, indeed, to 'flee from' such religious services.

These idol feasts were a popular and prominent part of their culture. They were one of the primary social outlets of the day, and any suggestion that they should be given up was bound to meet with much disfavor.

#### **1. The Command Against Idolatry (10:14-15)**

<sup>14</sup>Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. <sup>15</sup>I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.

Paul first assures his fellow believers, his brothers and sisters in Christ, that he is speaking to them as one who loves and cares for them. The Corinthian Christians were deeply loved by their former pastor, who was the spiritual father of many of them. They were his 'beloved,' in spite of their many problems.

Paul's love emerges from his appeal to 'my beloved ones,' which follows his stern warnings of Israel's tragedy at the hand of her God. 'Flee' translates a Greek word (*phuegō*) from which we derive the word 'fugitive,' one who desperately escapes from life-threatening danger or an enemy. He says the same about fornication (6:18). Both idolatry and sexual sin are dangerous enemies from which the believer must take flight immediately.

Israel in the desert had been addicted to this sin of idolatry, and the Corinthians are now surrounded by it; Israel suffered at the hand of God because of their fixation, and the church

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 17

must beware of the same trap: they must not attend meals held in celebration of the gods, to do so being a species of idolatry from which they must flee.

The command of verse 14 is the practical conclusion of the preceding warnings about the power and subtlety of temptation. God can be trusted to provide the way out, but can Paul's readers be trusted to take it? To 'flee' implies speed and a determination to put as much distance between you and what is after you as is possible. Idolatry is such an all-devouring monster that there can be no compromise solutions.

Because idolatry is worshiping something other than the true God in the true way, it is the most serious and contaminating of sins. It strikes at the very character of God. Those who worship an idol declare that the Lord is not the only true God and that other 'so-called gods' (8:5) are worthy to share His glory and honor. They testify that the Lord is deficient, that He is not all-wise, all-powerful, and all-sufficient. If we do not have the right view of God, nothing else can be in the right perspective.

Idolatry includes much more than bowing down or burning incense to a physical image. Idolatry is having any false god—any object, idea, philosophy, habit, occupation, sport, or whatever that has one's primary concern and loyalty or that to any degree decreases one's trust in and loyalty to the Lord. Idolatry has many forms. *Libeling the character of God* is idolatry. *Worshiping the true God in the wrong way* is idolatry. *Worshiping any image* is idolatry. *Worshiping angels* is idolatry. *Worshiping demons* is idolatry, and is closely associated with worshiping images, behind which are often demons. *Worshiping dead men* is idolatry. *Supreme loyalty in our heart to anything else other than God* is idolatry. *Covetousness* is idolatry. *Inordinate desire or lust* is idolatry.

So Paul appeals to them not only as friends, but also as 'sensible people.' He is giving his teaching for them to reflect on its rightness. He knew that he had to win their minds to the truth otherwise their wills would not be sufficiently stirred up so as to change their behavior.

Paul follows up his flat warning, 'Flee from idolatry,' with some solid and sensible reasons. He considered these reasons to be so inescapable that the Corinthians themselves would be forced to side with him.

### 2. The Principle of Participation (10:16-18)

#### a) From the New Testament (10:16-17)

##### (1) Individual Participation (10:16)

<sup>16</sup>*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?*

First, Paul points out that participation leads to fellowship. Paul uses a form of the word *koinōnia* a total of four times in this passage (v. 16 – twice, v. 18, v. 20). The word *koinōnia* refers to the fellowship of those who have things in common, to participate with, or to have a partnership. A prime example of Christian fellowship is the Lord's Supper. When we properly share in Communion we spiritually participate in fellowship with Jesus Christ and with other believers. It is much more than a symbol; it is a profound celebration of common spiritual experience. To 'bless' almost carries the meaning of being thankful.

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 17

While the Christian is engaged in the Lord's Supper, he is enjoying fellowship or communion with Christ, and he is also enjoying fellowship or communion with his brothers and sisters who share his love for Christ. In other words, there is a spiritual reality behind the Lord's Supper. While partaking of the elements, the believer is, at the same time, fellowshiping with that spiritual reality – Jesus Christ Himself.

Paul's argument hinged upon the view that to participate in a religious event is to identify with the object worshipped in the event. The two rhetorical questions of verse 16 make the point with great clarity. Paul begins where they are, in the Christian celebration of the Lord's Supper. Paul's point is that this constitutes not just a remembrance but 'a participation in the body of Christ.' The word used is *koinōnia*, referring to the sharing of the same values and concerns among partners in any enterprise. The experience of the one affects that of all the others. To eat the bread and drink the cup of blessing at the Lord's Table is not a meaningless act, but an expression of that faith in His atoning sacrifice that joins us to Him, in saving grace. The bread and wine remain unchanged, simply bread and wine, but the partakers, in eating and drinking, identify their interest and involvement in the death of Christ on their behalf.

### (2) Mutual Participation (10:17)

*<sup>17</sup>Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*

Secondly, participation leads to identification. Those who participate in the Lord's Supper, even though they may be many in number, become 'one bread and one body' (v. 17). Our participation in the Lord's Supper clearly marks us out as belonging to the Christian realm, and anyone who sees our participation would be justified in assuming we are followers of Jesus Christ.

They are 'one body' of believers because they share in 'one loaf' broken at the Lord's Table. The members of the assembly find a profound unity at the Table of the Lord. So, argues Paul, how can some of the members fracture that unity by going to an idol-temple and worshipping the god?

'Partake' (*metechō*) signifies association with others rather than eating alone in a sort of religious restaurant where visitors come and go. Because of the quality of a partnership which is, so to speak, 'vertical – between the congregation and Christ – and 'horizontal' – among the members of the church, the Corinthians may not allow themselves any other bond.

When we come to the Lord's Table, we do so as His people, not as individuals in isolation. We join with all our fellow believers everywhere who make up the body of Christ. There is therefore a mutual participation. We belong to one another because we each belong to Him. That is the fellowship (*koinōnia*) principle and explains why the Lord's Table can only be open to those who believe, who participate by faith in the benefits of His death.

### b) *From the Old Testament (10:18)*

*<sup>18</sup>Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?*

Paul makes the same point from the Old Testament sacrificial system. By the 'altar' Paul most likely means the Lord God of Israel Himself *to whom* the sacrifice had been offered. The priests who offered the sacrifices were allowed to take a portion of the meat for their own use, identifying themselves with the worship of Yahweh.

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 17

Verse 18 shows us that exactly the same principle applied in Old Testament Israel and was expressed in the fellowship of the sacrificial system. The animals offered according to the law of God were the means by which sinners could draw near to a holy God, in fellowship and acceptance. In some of the offerings, parts of the sacrifice were designated for the priests; other parts could be eaten by the worshippers. But in its significance this was no ordinary food like that which might be cooked at home. The participants knew that they were entering into fellowship with God, that their friendship with the covenant Lord was being sealed, just as many other expressions of trust and promise were confirmed in that culture, by eating a meal together.

### 3. The Implication with Idols (10:19-20)

<sup>19</sup>*What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? <sup>20</sup>No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons.*

With the principle of participation now clearly established, Paul applies it to the vexed question of sacrifices offered to idols and meals in pagan temples. Elaborating on 8:4, it follows that idolaters never sacrifice to the gods because they do not exist. However – and this is where some Corinthians have not been so clever, it does not follow that if there are no gods apart from God in Christ, there are no spiritual personalities present in the temples. Demons are the spiritual force behind all idolatry. There is never a god behind an idol, but there is always a spiritual force; and that force is always evil, always demonic.

The idol is nothing and means nothing in itself, but behind it there lurks something much more sinister – the devil and his demonic agents waiting to snare and destroy the unwary. Since idolatry is the prime expression of sinful man's refusal to worship and serve his Creator, the powers of evil are as inseparable from the pagan feasts as the grace of God is inseparable from the Lord's Supper. The participation principle applies, so that attending a pagan temple banquet and being involved in worship at an idol shrine, are not neutral activities. In fact they constitute fellowship with demons, which can never be acceptable for a believer. The two are diametrically opposite. This, then, is the force of the participation argument. How can we possibly live to the glory of God if we allow the slightest foothold to the devil, in any part of our lives?

Paul brought up the subject of the Lord's Supper because it perfectly parallels what takes place in the worship of idols. Even though idols are not really gods, there is still a spiritual reality at work in idolatry; the reality of demons. These demons are at work in that they both instigate the idolatry and influence the worshippers. Demons exist and they are present in the temples of the gods as they priests offer sacrifices and the people eat the sacrifices. They worship demons. So anyone who participates in idol worship is flinging open the door and inviting demonic influence into his life. This ought to show us that worship is not something to be taken lightly. There are only two kinds of worship: true and false. True worship brings us into contact with the reality of God; false worship brings us into the realm of Satan.

Paul teaches that participation in a religious meal is an identification both with other worshippers and with the object of their worship, whether obviously, as with the Lord's Table and the Jerusalem temple and altar, or obscurely, as with idolatrous sacrifices. Therefore it does matter where the Corinthians choose to eat, and what they eat.

Paul's point is abundantly clear. If people are identified by what they participate in, the Corinthians would certainly be assumed to be idolaters if they put in an appearance at an idol

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 17

temple. Many of us have grown exceedingly careless at this point. We want to be identified with Christ, but we also want to go to places and do things that automatically identify us with the world.

### 4. The Conflict of Idolatry (10:21-22)

<sup>21</sup>*You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.* <sup>22</sup>*Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?*

Deuteronomy 32:15-21 (LXX) is recalled, in which Jeshurun, an affectionate name for Israel, was condemned by Moses for sacrificing to ‘demons’ who were not God (vv. 17, 21; cp. Ps. 106:36-37). The ones they worshiped were not divine but they were real. Paul insinuates that some Corinthians are guilty of emulating their fatal sin and warns that they cannot continue along this double route. In practice, he displays a preference for neither Christ nor His adversaries, which means that Jesus is relegated to the status of a demon. The tension is intolerable.

They thought they could do both: worship God and participate in idol offerings. Jesus made it clear that you cannot ‘serve two masters’ (Mt. 6:24). Most likely they thought the emblems of the Lord’s body and blood would somehow protect them like a magical charm from spiritual harm. But Paul is saying that the demons are strong, more powerful by far than you. Go to the temple, eat and drink the sacrifices, and you run the real risk of being captured by the demons. They are not stronger than the demons; do they really think they are stronger than God?

Not only is this logically inconsistent and therefore intellectually foolish, but it will provoke God, as the Israelites did, and call out His wrath against such presumption. We have already been reminded of examples of His awesomely destructive power against which no human defenses stand any chance at all.

Paul concludes this paragraph by saying fellowship and identification lead to provocation. The Christian is one who belongs to God. He is entitled to our affection, and He will not tolerate us sharing with another what belongs exclusively to Him. If we truly belong to the Lord and try to give our allegiance to another god, we are, in effect, entering into a state of war with God. We are wise to avoid provoking Him by staying away from all things that compete with Him for our loyalty.

Idolatry is inconsistent, demonic, and offensive to the Lord, God has holy jealousy because he will have no competition. To reinforce his point, the apostle recalls Deuteronomy 32:21, which heralds the judgment awaiting Israel in a not dissimilar situation: because they provoked Yahweh with their idols, God proposed to distress them through other people’s aggression. The Lord deals strongly with idolatry because nothing is more offensive to Him than idolatry, which is the most detestable sin of unbelief. Does the idolater foolishly think he is more powerful than God? God will not allow idolatry to go unpunished, and no one can escape.

To apply this principle to our lives, in our very different cultural context, is not so difficult. At its most basic level it is a call to all who name Christ’s name to have nothing to do with any of the manifestations of demonic activity with which our culture sadly abounds. But we also need to be on our guard against the more subtle inroads of Satan’s power in the other false gods of our time – the greed of gambling and materialism; the addictive power of sex, drink, and drugs; the ruthless quest for power and status; all of which ruin millions of lives. If we cultivate any of

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 17

these idol shrines, in the secret chambers of our hearts, how can we pretend to live to the glory of God?

### B. Seek Clean Consciences (1 Cor. 10:23-30)

#### 1. Repetition of the Principle (10:23-24)

<sup>23</sup>“All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. <sup>24</sup>Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.

Paul returns to what was probably one of the catchphrases of the freedom party in Corinth, ‘All things are lawful for me.’ We have already seen Paul’s reaction to this blanket justification in 6:12, namely that, whilst not challenging its assertion head-on, he has qualified its application with two other controlling criteria: Is it beneficial? Does it master me? This changes the debate from a focus on what can or cannot be done, to a discussion of the values and benefits of the choices freedom can legitimately conduct, but here the focus is on careless idolatry.

The statement of 6:12 recurs in verse 23, but in a modified format, the first person singular dropping away. Paul is not discussing what he may in theory do or not do, but is concerned with what is helpful for others. In that he has a right to surrender his rights (9:12), the principle is now applied to his readers.

The apostle explains earlier in this letter that his use of this phrase in relation to Christian liberty means all things not specifically identified in Scripture as sinful. His use of ‘all things are lawful’ always refers to questionable practices, the gray areas of Christian living that are not specifically forbidden in the Bible.

The basic meaning of ‘edify’ (*oikodomeō*) is ‘to build a house,’ and, by extension, the term refers to the literal or figurative building of anything. It is often used in the New Testament to describe the spiritual growth, or upbuilding, of believers. Whatever contributes to spiritual growth constitutes what is ‘profitable,’ or beneficial, helpful, advantageous, or useful. Only things that are profitable are able to ‘edify.’ Those two present active indicative verbs basically convey the same truth.

Paul reminds his readers that it is much more important to ask the question, ‘What’s right with it?’ than the more familiar, ‘What’s wrong with it?’ To this he adds another, more social, consideration: Does it build up? Clearly, the apostle has not only the individual believer’s own edification in view, but also that of his fellow Christians within the local congregation at Corinth. Verse 24 stresses this point. For the Corinthians it was ‘*me* first,’ but for Paul it was ‘*others* first.’ Our primary concern should be for the ‘good’ of our ‘neighbor,’ a principle contrary to basic human nature. This is the distinctive use of his freedom that marks the Christian life-style as different from that of the world around him.

What is the pressing need of those who already know God? Paul says it is to be edified. And what does it mean to be edified? It means to build up in the faith, to grow up in Christian maturity and stability.

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 17

### 2. Application of the Principle (10:25-30)

#### a) In Private (10:25-26)

<sup>25</sup>Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. <sup>26</sup>For “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.”

Paul first takes up the question of the Christian eating in his own home. He says the Christian should feel free to buy and eat any meat available in the market. Paul’s word *makellum* (‘meat market’, from the Latin *macellum*) has been found inscribed on the remains of a shop in the main public square (*agora*) in Corinth. This would have been one of the shops Paul has in mind as he writes.

By ‘conscience,’ Paul means the believers’ theological understanding, based on the teaching of the gospel, as it issues in ethical living. Even though some of this meat may have been used for idol sacrifices, the Christian need not feel any moral compunction about eating it. Instead, he should simply look upon this meat as part of the bounty provided by the Lord and should thankfully receive it.

This indicates that a Christian is not to be involved in detailed research over such matters, to try to uncover any suspicion of evil. In a fallen world it will always be there, usually in large measure, but such an attitude will tend to make the investigator increasingly negative in attitude to both the people and the things of the world around him.

Paul’s present advice seems at odds with the judgment of James at the Jerusalem Council where a ban was placed on *eidōluthutos*, ‘idol-sacrificed meat’ (Acts 15:29; 21:25). It is by no means clear whether the prohibition of the Jerusalem Council was restricted to such food eaten at the pagan temples or whether it also included eating idol-dedicated food in one’s own home. Whatever the circumstances at the time Paul did not apply the Jerusalem Councils prohibition to eating at home. In this case, then, Paul upheld the Corinthian’s view that liberty should apply.

The earth and every part of the earth comes from and belongs to the Lord, including the meat in the butchers’ shops in Corinth. In recalling Psalm 24:1, Paul shows that an enduring principle ought to apply at Corinth. Because retailed meat derives ultimately from the Lord, it is His. After idol meat is sent to the market, it is just meat like all other meat. It is food that the Lord provides from ‘the earth,’ and can be eaten with a clear conscience and with thanksgiving.

Paul shows that he has capitulated to a legislation far higher than that of Moses and his interpreters. Whereas the rabbis employed Psalm 24:1 to bless God for food declared clean, the apostle introduces it to justify eating without prior investigation.

The quotation from Psalm 24:1 reminds us of the important strand of world-affirming thankfulness in Paul’s world-view, rather than the world-negating criticism into which so many Christians seem to fall. We also need this corrective. As we delight in God, we delight also in the wonder, beauty, and variety of the world that is his handiwork. We rejoice in the myriad diversity of human achievement, in which the Creator’s power and ingenuity are revealed in spite of the taint of human pride and rebellion.

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 17

### b) *In Public (10:27-30)*

#### (1) Your Conscience (10:27)

<sup>27</sup>*If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience.*

Paul next turns to consider the Christian eating in an unbeliever's home. Paul says he shouldn't bring up the issue of the meat's origin. Freedom in Christ is a privilege to be forfeited only when it clearly may offend another person. In passing, we note that Christian believers, unlike Jews, were free to mingle socially with unbelievers and to visit their homes for a meal. This is the necessary apostolic justification for Christians to be socially involved in normal human ways within our society: playing our part, seeking to be salt and light, and bearing our witness to Christ.

#### (2) Their Conscience (10:28-30)

<sup>28</sup>*But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—<sup>29</sup>I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? <sup>30</sup>If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?*

But if someone else brings it up (either another Christian or the unbelieving host), the Christian who felt free to eat this meat should simply refrain from doing so in this situation. Why? To avoid throwing a stumbling-block in the path of the other Christian or the unbelieving host. Paul says, 'Although it is the same meat I eat privately without any pangs of conscience, I'm not going to eat it in this situation. Why not? I am not going to let my liberty to eat this meat become a topic of conversation and condemnation! I'm not going to allow the liberty I appreciate and enjoy be reproached and condemned!'

If the Christian is specifically informed, then the whole scenario is changed. Even though he himself is fully convinced that 'an idol is nothing,' he must not eat the food, since his participation would be at best ambiguous, and would actually contradict and compromise his witness to the one true God and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Lord. Politely, but firmly, he must refuse the food, so as to show that he does not knowingly and willingly have any participation in, or fellowship with, idols. We are to modify our actions for the sake of others, but we are not to modify our consciences. The legalism of a weaker brother should not make us legalistic, only gracious.

It is not on account of his own conscience that the Christian will decline to eat but only out of consideration for the impact of his or her behavior on the unbeliever. Unbelievers typically held that the gods did exist and on that account they sacrificed to them in their temples. Under no circumstances does Paul want Christians to be stumbling blocks to faith by confirming unbelievers in their idolatry.

Such a refusal is an act of love towards his pagan host. It makes clear to him how distinctively different the Christian gospel is, with its exclusive devotion to Christ, in comparison to all expressions of man-made religious substitutes. He will be challenging his friend with the exclusive claims of Christ, and, if he is being observed, he will not be risking harm to a weaker brother's conscience.

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 17

In the same way, the Christian should not eat in front of another Christian with a less robust conscience in this scenario. The argument is that nothing will be gained if an action, right enough in itself, sends a member of the church with an attitude problem into a frenzy of complaint. A meal must not become a cause of war.

It is the unbeliever's response that governs the two concluding questions that Paul poses in verses 29 and 30. What is the advantage of using my freedom (to eat food offered to idols, provided it is not in a pagan temple) in such a way that another person's conscience judges and condemns my action? The unbeliever might well conclude, from what he sees as the Christian's inconsistency, that Christianity is no different from any other religious system. There is the very present danger that the unbeliever will denounce the Christian for his compromise and double standards. That can only serve to hinder the progress of the gospel. So it is better not to partake at all in the meal than for an act of freedom and thanksgiving to be denounced as hypocrisy (v. 30).

'With gratitude' translates *charity*, which can mean 'by grace.' The apostle contrasts in verse 30 the appreciation of the humble believer and the grudging behavior of the fault-finding brother who sees in God's provision no more than idol food. We should not cause our freedom to be slandered by expressing it in ways that offend a weaker brother. We should 'give thanks' for the food and for our liberty and then express our liberty by choosing not to eat the food that offends the brother. How can we be thankful to the Lord for something a Christian brother or sister is going to stumble over?

### C. Use Liberty Correctly (1 Cor. 10:31-11:1)

#### 1. Glorify God (10:31)

<sup>31</sup>*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

The 'so' at the beginning of this verse alerts us to the fact that the argument is about to be summarized, and Paul does this with immense clarity and challenge. He does this by drawing three conclusions from these case studies.

The first principle, which governs everything else: eating, drinking, abstaining – or indeed any other area of our behavior – is stated as a command. Paul uses the Greek *eite*, 'whether,' a word implying choice, three times for emphasis. The 'glory of God' should be uppermost in informing and directing all decisions in these matters. Our first allegiance and responsibility is in that the chief end of man is to glorify God, and from this obligation and privilege no area of life is to be excluded. The Christian's greatest concern in life is to attribute honor and praise to the God of the universe.

The Bible's central message for believers in all ages is summarized in verse 31. The purpose of using our liberty carefully and selflessly is to glorify God. God created man to glorify Himself, and that is man's purpose in life. The first question and answer in The Shorter Catechism are: 'What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.' Paul is saying that even in the most mundane, routine, nonspiritual things of life, like ordinary eating and drinking, God is to be glorified. His glory is to be our life commitment.

The word 'glory' means 'something that is worthy of praise or exaltation; brilliance; beauty; renown.' God's glory has two aspects. First is His inherent, or intrinsic, glory. God is the only

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 17

being in all of existence who can be said to possess inherent glory. No one can give it to Him; it already completely belongs to Him by virtue of who He is. The second aspect of God's glory is ascribed glory (Psalm 29:1-2). Obviously, we cannot give God glory in the sense of adding to His glory, any more than we can add to His strength. The psalmist is simply urging us to recognize and acclaim the glory God already has.

What does it mean to do everything for God's glory? It means to live in such a way that God receives the credit. It is to live in such a way that there will be no other logical explanation for us except to say our lives have been touched by God. The apostle Peter urged his readers to live with integrity so those around them would glorify God (1 Pe. 2:12).

### 2. Love Your Neighbor (10:32-33)

<sup>32</sup>*Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God,* <sup>33</sup>*just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.*

In addition to keeping God's glory in mind, the Christian must also keep the good of others in mind. What is the pressing need of those who do not know God? They need to be evangelized! They need to hear the gospel of Christ declared and to see it demonstrated.

Love for God must also issue in love for neighbor, hence Paul's next command, which is all-inclusive. No category of person among whom Paul ministered was excluded. We are revisiting the explanation in 9:20-22 of how he made himself 'a servant to all, that I might win more of them.' This includes not only the pagan Corinthians but also religious Jews and weaker Christian brothers. All are to be treated with the same love and respect. Freedom is not to be exercised so as to cause any to stumble away from Christ, whether Jew, Greek, or fellow-Christian.

These three groups cover all of humanity. No action of our should prevent an unbeliever, whether Jew or Gentile, from coming to Christ (cp. Acts 15:20-29) or should cause a weak brother in Christ to stumble (1 Pe. 2:11-19). That many people are offended by the gospel is their problem, but when they are needlessly offended by our way of living, that is our problem; and it dishonors the Lord. The term *aproskopos*, here translated 'give no offense,' is rendered as 'be...blameless' in Philippians 1:10.

The apostle had learned that the message of the cross remains a scandal to Jews and folly to Greeks, and that believers cause offense purely because of their faith (1:23). Here, he stimulates the Corinthians to avoid being abrasive, even abandoning actions which, although right in themselves, must create strife; freedom can involve a surrender of rights in order to avoid alienating others. This does not mean that he modified his gospel to offend neither Greeks nor Jews, a tactic anathema to him (cp. 1:23; Gal. 1:10; 1 Th. 2:4), but that he is careful to maintain friendly relationships with all.

Because the salvation of many others is Paul's driving motivation (cp. 9:22), his own good will always be subordinate to theirs. He will use his freedom to deny himself the rights which are freely his if that means that others will come to be saved, through faith in Christ crucified. His own behavior is set free to serve others, to please them in any way that does not compromise the gospel so as to win them to Christ.

### 3. Imitate Christ (11:1)

<sup>1</sup>*Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 17

This verse belongs to 10:23-33, and it may be unfortunate that it falls within chapter 11 in our Bibles.

Paul asks them to imitate him. In this, however, he points to the true and ultimate model who is not Paul, but Christ. Paul is a great model of both gospel ministry and committed Christian discipleship, but only because he himself is following so closely in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus. Christ was the authentically ‘free’ person who laid aside His liberty for others. Christ truly represents and incarnates the God from whom He comes.

The reason Paul was so confident and successful in his Christian living in general, and in the responsible use of his Christian liberty in particular, was that he was an imitator of Christ, the supreme example of One who set aside His rights for the sake of others (cp. Phil. 2:7-8).

‘Do all to the glory of God’ (v. 31) is the equivalent of the first great commandment to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength. ‘Give no offense’ (v. 32) matches the second great commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves. This is the example of Christ, and of Paul His apostle, that we also must follow if we are to live as authentic disciples in an alien culture.

The Corinthians had lost sight of their twin priorities – the glory of God and the good of others – and could only see their right to gratify their own desires by partaking of this meat. Others insisted just as strongly that this meat should not be eaten. The church was at an impasse. Was there any way out? Yes! Paul says the way out was for each one to start thing again in terms of God and others!

For next time: Summer Break; Resume 1 Corinthians in the Fall.