

# Life Together

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?  
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.  
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.  
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17. ESV)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same  
image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.  
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

## **Do All To The Glory Of God**

**April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

**1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning! Please open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 10:23. That's on page 958 in your pew Bible. Let me remind you of where we are. We had a little break there over Easter and now we are coming back into the text at the end of a rather lengthy argument against the unfettered exercise of Christian liberty. You recall that way back in chapter 8 Paul began talking about the complicated moral and social issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols. His concern throughout has not really been the meat per se. Rather his concern is that the Corinthians are so eager to assert and protect their liberty to do all things lawful for them. That's a dangerous concern, Paul says. It tends to be bad for other people, its often dangerous to your own perseverance and it hinders and stalls the progress of the Gospel. It's not the right thing for you to be thinking about. A mature Christian is never asking: "How far can I go until it's a sin" – a mature Christian is asking: "How much am I prepared to give up in pursuit of the glory of God and the good of all people." They are asking way better questions because they are concerned with way bigger things. Here in verse 23 Paul begins to bring this section in for a landing. He gets real practical and he provides some very useful principles for navigating complicated moral and social scenarios. Let's read the text, remember the larger concerns and then discuss the guiding principles that Paul provides. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

<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. <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.” <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. <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?

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

<sup>1</sup> Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:23–11:1 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Paul begins this wrap up section by quoting back to them their main concern and once again demonstrating its inadequacy. They were concerned to protect the full extent of their personal liberty. “All things are lawful for me”. And to a certain extent, that’s true. There is no such thing as a pagan god and therefore, there really is no specific moral issue in eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols. That is correct, but it is not useful. Such a narrow, personal concern does not well serve the greater issues of God’s glory and the good of other people. Bigger concerns dictate narrower principles – that is the gist of Paul’s concluding argument. Let me spell that out for you in greater detail. First of all let’s talk about those bigger concerns.

## **Bigger Concerns Than Personal Liberty**

He lists those at the end, though he has been arguing for them throughout. For our purposes however, it will be helpful to be reminded of them first. A Christian has bigger concerns than simply maximizing personal liberty. He or she is concerned first of all with:

### **1. The glory of God**

If this were a sermon about the glory of God we might list a number of things that are spoken of in Scripture as serving the glory of God, but high on that list, very near if not at the very top would be the two things Paul has been speaking about here in 1 Corinthians. Based on the wording of verses 31-32 and the flow of the argument in chapters 8-10 we can safely suggest that:

**i. The glory of God is served by the gathering of the nations through the Gospel of Jesus Christ**

Paul was making that argument in chapter 9. He was saying that in his interest to reach as many people as possible with the Gospel of Christ he was willing to sacrifice all manner of personal liberty. He was willing to go without salary if that would be helpful, he was willing to take on Greek customs to reach Greek people, he was willing to maintain Jewish customs if that would help reach Jewish people. He was willing to become all things to all people to save some. This is reflective of the central concern in the Scriptures to glorify God through the ingathering of the nations. When more and more people begin to centre their lives around the character and goodness of God displayed in the person of Jesus Christ, then God is glorified. He will be beautiful and sufficient and absolutely CENTRAL in their hearts and minds of many. God will be glorified in the gathering of the nations through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's a much bigger concern than personal liberty. That's a better thing to be thinking about when you are navigating complicated moral and social situations. Think about what manner of personal conduct will best serve the spread of the Gospel. Think about that when making moral decisions.

Secondly:

**ii. The glory of God is served by the observed transformation of saved people**

All throughout 1 Corinthians Paul has been concerned for how people think about God when they look at Christians who bear his name. He concluded his conversation in chapter 6 about sexual immorality by saying the same thing:

So glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:20 ESV)

He said that one of the ways we can glorify God is by showcasing the power of God's grace to overcome sexual temptation. Let people see that you are a different person now, sexually speaking, because of the grace of God. God is glorified when people see us CHANGED and SET FREE.

Jesus said something like that too; didn't he? He said:

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16 ESV)

As Christians, we want people to see that the grace of God in Christ is CHANGING US from one degree of glory to the next. We want that to be TRUE and we want that to be VISIBLE. At first that sounds immodest, but it is consistently taught in the Scriptures. Paul said to young Timothy:

Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. (1 Timothy 4:15 ESV)

Do these things that will help you grow SO THAT all may SEE your progress. Now what saves this from being immodest is that the glory being sought is for God and not for us. We want people to see our progress and attribute it to the grace of God in Christ.

That's the BIGGEST bigger concern that Christians need to attend to when they find themselves navigating complicated moral and social situations. They are asking way better questions than: "What am I allowed to do?" They are asking: "What manner of personal conduct will most commend the Gospel and best display the power of God's grace in Christ?" That's the BIGGEST bigger concern.

The second bigger concern is:

## **2. The good of all people**

In verses 31-32 Paul says:

<sup>31</sup> So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. <sup>32</sup> Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God (1 Corinthians 10:31-32 ESV)

Rather than thinking about our liberty we should thinking about the glory of God and the good of other people; those are the bigger concerns. The NIV translation here of verse 32 is perhaps more accessible. It says:

Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks, or the church of God. (1 Corinthians 10:32. NIV)

That three part division reflects the arguments Paul has been making throughout. We can cause people to stumble by:

**i. Causing unnecessary moral outrage**

Paul is thinking about Jewish unbelievers who would be outraged if they saw Christians eating meat they knew was sacrificed to idols. Jews are very concerned about such things and if we want to reach Jewish people with the Gospel then we should not FLAUNT our liberty or knowledge in such a way that creates unnecessary moral outrage. Sometime you are free to do things you really shouldn't do if you are actually concerned about the souls of lost people.

Let me say that another way. You can tell whose soul you care about by what liberties you indulge. You don't care about Muslims if you insist on walking around with a hot dog while you preach the Gospel. You don't care about old people if you insist on getting a tattoo and piercing your eyebrow. You don't care about young people if you insist on reading from the KJV and pretending that its always 1960 in your church. You can always tell whose soul you care about by the liberties you indulge. Care about as many as you can, Paul says. And don't cause unnecessary outrage.

Secondly, we can cause people to stumble by:

**ii. Seeming to affirm sinful behaviour**

That's what Paul means when he mentions the Greeks. It was the Jews that were likely to be outraged but it is the Greeks who were likely to stumble if they saw Christians eating meat they knew had been sacrificed to idols. If a Greek saw a Christian do that, he might think that it was possible to worship Christ AND to worship pagan deities. Again, its not hard to think of contemporary applications of this same principle. If an unbeliever sees you drinking alcohol for example, he or she might think that loving Jesus does not necessarily mean leaving behind addictions. That could introduce an error at the critical stages of faith development. You don't want to do that – not if you care about people. You don't always to explain the complicated reasons behind your personal liberty. You don't want to cause people to stumble by seeming to affirm dangerous things.

Thirdly, we can cause people to stumble by:

### iii. Teaching people to ignore moral conscience

This is what Paul means by referring to the church of God. It is the Jews who are in endangered by needless moral outrage, it is the Gentiles who are endangered by accidental moral affirmations and it is the new believer that is endangered by the suggestion that conscience can be safely ignored. Paul made that point way back in chapter 8. He said:

<sup>9</sup>But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. <sup>10</sup>For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, **if his conscience is weak**, to eat food offered to idols? <sup>11</sup>And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died (1 Corinthians 8:9–11 ESV)

Paul says that when I am in a complicated moral and social situation I am not thinking about the extent of my personal liberty, I am thinking about the spiritual welfare of my weaker brother. There is a brother over there looking at me and watching to see what I do. His conscience is weak and not yet fully informed by Scripture. He doesn't have a very accurate understanding of what is right and wrong but he instinctively feels like this behaviour is somehow out of bounds for the Christian. Therefore, even if it actually ISN'T – I will not indulge my liberty lest I unwittingly encourage this brother to begin ignoring moral conscience. I don't want to do that. I don't want to turn that off – that conscience is a gift from God to keep him out of trouble. Yes the software on the Christian conscience is updated by reading the Scriptures and growing in knowledge but I don't want to short circuit that process in his life. I don't want him turning his off, because mine operates at a higher level. He needs the warning of moral conscience. I don't want to mess with that, so I will happily abstain.

In complicated moral and social situations, Christians are thinking about WAY BIGGER THINGS than the extent of their personal liberty. They are thinking about the glory of God and they are thinking about the good of other people. With those BIGGER THOUGHTS in mind, Paul now offers some very practical guidelines for navigating those complicated moral and social situations. Let's take a look at those guidelines now.

## **Guidelines For Navigating Complicated Moral And Social Situations:**

The first one comes from verse 23 and also 31-32. First and foremost, Paul says:

### **1. Always remember the mission**

Paul reminds them that they have a mission that is more important than the exercise of their personal liberties: “All things are permissible for us – YES BUT not all things are helpful to the mission. Not everything serves the glory of God not everything helps people make progress in the journey of faith.” Therefore, Paul says, personal liberty needs to give way to Christian mission. The mission comes first. You don’t go into a social situation thinking about what you are permitted to do, you go into that situation seeking the glory of God and the eternal welfare of men and women. You ask mission questions. Will this behaviour help or hinder the cause of the Gospel? Will this behaviour profile or obscure the beauty of God’s character and the power of God’s grace? Will it bring God glory or cause Christ shame? We’re always thinking about stuff and we’re always aware of how our actions contribute to the progress of the Gospel and the glory of His Name.

Now, that is universally true for all people everywhere, but let’s be honest it is more true for people like us who live in places like Orillia. In a small town like this it is easy to be known publicly as a Christian. If no one in Orillia knows that you’re a Christian, chances are very good that you are not actually a Christian. That’s a good thing but it means that everything you do COUNTS in one way or another against the Name of Jesus Christ. When you do good things it really helps everybody whose sharing the Gospel. When you do bad things it really hurts everybody whose sharing the Gospel. That’s a big thing but this is a big call and God is a big God and he’ll help you, but you need to remember that you are always on mission.

Secondly, Paul says that:

### **2. Partake of lawful pleasures with thanksgiving when appropriate**

He says that in verses 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.” (1 Corinthians 10:25–26 ESV)

You can buy stuff at the market and in verse 27 he says you can accept invitations to dinner. We’re not withdrawing from the world here. We’re not doing the Amish thing. We’re going to the party, we’re going to the bar-b-q, we’re having a steak and some hot dogs, ok and we’re doing all of that, when appropriate, with thanksgiving in our hearts. We’re not grouchy people – we love the world and the fullness of it. We’re not Gnostics and neither are we ascetics. We’re just careful and we’re just thinking about bigger things. That’s all. So if there are no Gospel issues in play, if there is no threat to God’s glory in the situation that you find yourself in then eat and drink and give thanks. The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof. Sometimes, Paul says, you get to eat on the job! It doesn’t happen all the time, but when it does you should be thankful and you should shut up. Just be happy and enjoy.

That leads us to a third principle:

### **3. When you socialize you shouldn’t moralize**

We see that in verse 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. (1 Corinthians 10:27 ESV)

When you go to a party, Paul says, and the waiter brings the food, you don’t need to ask: “Has this food been sacrificed to an idol?” You don’t need to FORCE the issue. If it doesn’t come up, you don’t need to engage it. You can just be present. You can just get to know people. You can just be nice and social without using every opportunity to discuss the full moral content of your faith.

Some of you need to hear that. Some of you go into every social situation armed for war. Now, some of you have the opposite problem. You surrender before the first shot is fired. First thing you do when you walk into a room is to try and find someone to surrender to. You need to settle down, grow a spine and take a stand every once in a while. But some of us need to turn it off now and again and just be present. Hear a story from a neighbour about their kids. Laugh unless

its inappropriate. Talk about baseball or hockey or even politics. Make some friends. Find some common ground. You don't have to provoke confrontation. Sometimes you should just eat or drink whatever is served and keep your mouth shut.

Be careful, though, Paul says:

#### **4. Be careful to avoid even the appearance of evil**

That's the balancing principle, we see that in verse 28:

<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. (1 Corinthians 10:28–29 ESV)

What is going on here? Who is providing this information and what is the reason they are sharing it? Bible commentators Ciampa and Rosner understand the informant here as an unbeliever. They describe the scenario this way:

They presumably mention the idolatrous association of the food because they are aware that Jews and Christians (the latter being considered a Jewish offshoot) had severe qualms about eating such food. They could be merely interested in the Christian's response, or, more likely, they think they are helping the Christian by informing them so that they might make an informed decision regarding whether or not they would abstain from eating that item.<sup>1</sup>

You see, here is the funny thing, pagans actually have a very detailed understanding of Christian morality. They have no intention of abiding by that understanding but they do generally expect you to. They are watching to see if you will behave in accordance with your convictions. The unbeliever views hypocrisy among professed Christians as permission to not consider the central claims of Christian faith. So they are watching you to see if this is real and if you really live like you believe. Therefore, Paul says, if you become aware that this is happening, then you have to immediately respond according to the belief structure and expectation of the person watching. If they think it's a sin for you to eat the meat, then don't eat the meat. Conduct yourself according to THEIR STANDARD for the sake of the Gospel.

Let me translate this into a contemporary key. We are talking here about how to navigate

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<sup>1</sup>Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 492.

complicated moral and social situations out of concern for the glory of God and the good of all people. So, first of all to be clear, you can't apply these principles to moral or social situations that are not complicated. This has nothing to do with whether you can go to the strip club or not or whether you can smoke crack or not. Those things are not morally complicated. We have verses for that stuff. That's not what we're talking about. This is for situations in which a particular moral or social option is not in and of itself sinful but that may be perceived as such by certain people. If those people SEE you do this thing, it may rob God of glory and cause them to stumble – that's the very narrow set of circumstances we are talking about, so let me transpose this into a contemporary key.

Suppose you are at a neighbourhood party. You were invited and you want to engage your neighbours in the hope that you might win some of them to Christ. You go to the party. Good for you. We're not Amish, we're not allowed to withdraw from the world, so good for you. You arrive at the party. When you arrive your host greets you at the door, takes your coat and puts a cup of punch in your hand. You're not sure what's in the punch. That's ok. Don't ask. You didn't come here to moralize, you came to socialize. Don't ask what's in the punch. Take a small sip; say, MMMMMM, thank you, and move on. Now, if someone comes up to you and whispers: "You know that there is alcohol in that punch right?" then, you whisper back: "Thanks for the tip" and you put it down and you go find a Pepsi. You do that because your confidential informant obviously believes that real Christians don't drink. Whether they do or not, isn't the point. The point is that you want to show this person that real Christians abide by their convictions. So if nobody says anything you smile and hold the cup. Eventually when its polite you are probably going to want to put that down and grab up a bottle of water but if someone points it out, then you put it down right away out of concern for their spiritual progress. You make Gospel decisions, you make glory decisions. You care about God and you care about other people. That's how these guidelines work.

### **Conclusion:**

Now, if you think about it, that's just the Jesus way. He was with us, but he was always GOD with us. While he was with us, he didn't care much about his own desires and appetites. He came to serve, not to be served, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

<sup>31</sup> So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. <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. <sup>1</sup> Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1 ESV)

That's the way of Jesus and this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.