

1Corinthians 10:23-33 "Seek the Good of Others to God's Glory"

It seems people in general have a tendency to push things as far as possible before being confronted. That little toddler who was told not to get near the T.V. because he keeps changing the channel on dad, is found inching his way back toward the forbidden fruit just to see how close he can get.

The teenager who's been told to be home at 11:00 on a Friday night seems to take that as meaning 11:15 with each successive weekend pushing it another 5 minutes. And of course the adults who know that if the speed limit says 45 it really means they have a grace space of 5 miles an hour, and so they make the speedometer hover right around 49-50 MPH.

It seems we're simply not content unless we feel we're getting more than what is intended as we push the envelope of whatever the restriction is. Most would call that human nature. God would usually call it something different.

But when it comes to living life to the glory of God the believer in Christ Jesus needs to realize that the issue is not as much about what rule we've kept, but have we pleased the Lord in whatever we've done or didn't do?

And by that I mean, if our motivation is simply trying to adhere to a set of rules for life then the rules become more important than the person we've been called to please. For that teenager who continues to come home late on Friday nights, it's not as much about the time as it is as a disregard for the parents who love that child.

And so it is with God and His people. Obedience is certainly important when it comes to following Christ, but the motivation should not be focusing on what rule to obey but rather to realize that our love for Christ, the person, is what will encourage our hearts not to want to disappoint the Lord who loves us.

But in the process of not wanting to displease our Lord we should also take into consideration not to displease others when we have the choice, even when our choice might be biblically acceptable.

This is where Paul has been going with our liberties in Christ, even liberties to eat meat sacrificed to idols, as in the case of these Corinthians. Because if we knowingly decide to exercise a liberty when such a decision will harm another then we now cross the line from liberty to seeing how far we can take that liberty as we consider only ourselves.

Does this mean that liberty has been abolished? Not at all. But it does make us consider a principle, which permits such a thing, and now brings it back

to the reality that relationships are more important than a rule or a right we think we have ownership to. And this is what Paul says in our text.

1CO 10:23-24 "Everything is permissible" - but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible" - but not everything is constructive. 24 Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others."

The NASB puts it this way.

1Co. 10:23 "All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify."

What is Paul saying? Essentially, he means that those things that the Bible does not prohibit for a believer are things which may fall into that category as a liberty and permissible to practice.

But simply because it may be lawful or permissible does not mean that it will always be a good thing under all conditions. It is lawful for me to travel I-75 at 70 MPH. But it may not be profitable to travel that speed during a torrential rain.

It is permissible or lawful for me, if I can afford it, to buy a \$300,000 house. But it may not be profitable or beneficial for me, as a Pastor, if my congregation is struggling with their own financial lives and their hard earned money is going toward that house, when it might be better served going to some other aspect of Christ's ministry.

And so, when we consider those things which are permissible for us it is not just us we must consider. We must also consider others and how some of our decisions will help them grow closer to Christ.

In the case in Corinth these Christians are not being commanded by Paul to give up eating meat simply because some of it was sacrificed to idols. But on the same note, if eating meat under certain circumstances will actually harm the walk of another brother or sister in Christ, then they must reconsider that.

Our objective in life, as believers in Christ, is to edify the body of Christ and bring glory to the Lord in the process. That's why Paul says that all things are lawful, but not all things edify.

The word edify in the Greek literally means to build a house. The idea here is that we believers need to be in the construction business, not in the demolition business, unless we're demolishing those things which are sinful and destructive in our own lives.

Paul wants us building on the promises of God and building one another up in such a way where the house of God is going forward and the house can

be seen as a home where the Lord's people flourish in their relationship with the Master builder, Jesus Christ.

EPH 2:19-22 "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of *God's household*, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole *building* is joined together and rises to become a *holy temple* in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being *built together* to become a *dwelling* in which God lives by his Spirit."

This is what the Lord is doing in the lives of every one of His people in Christ. He is building us together so that we can become this dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit. As we dwell with our God, and as we dwell with each other, His house is shown to be dwelt by the Spirit of the living God and we are seen as living stones. Peter refers to this.

1PE 2:4-5 "As you come to him, the living Stone -rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him - 5 you also, like *living stones*, are being *built into a spiritual house* to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

How does the world see the house of God? They see it and make determinations about it only as they see the stones which make it up. And if they see living stones living to the glory of God, then they see a house which is built upon the living corner stone, as they see our lives dedicated to Christ and each other.

The bottom line is how are we bringing glory to the God who is building this house? And how are we trying to edify each other so that this living house, the church, is seen to be a place where God dwells instead of just a place where people gather on Sunday mornings?

This is important. And Paul makes the point that to accomplish this a love for each other must abound.

1CO 10:24 "Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others."

ROM 15:1-3 "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. 3 For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."

PHI 2:4-5 "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:..."

Now, here's where the rubber meets the road, because even as believers, our old nature's sometimes get in the way of wanting to put the interests of others ahead of our own.

Paul isn't saying we can't have any self-interests, he's just saying that if we have to lay those interests aside for a time when we have the opportunity to edify and build up another brother or sister, then we would be blessed by God if we do that.

In the case at Corinth this means putting aside the liberty to eat meat sacrificed to idols under certain circumstances.

1CO 10:25-27 "Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, 26 for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." 27 If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience."

Paul has shifted the focus here a bit. In the previous section he spoke about participating in the table of demons, intimating a worship aspect of eating meat sacrificed to idols. But here, Paul is not talking about participating directly in any worship of demons simply by eating meat sacrificed to them. Notice he says in verse 25, "Eat anything sold in the meat market..."

Here Paul is making a distinction between the place of commerce which is separate from the inner workings of the pagan temple. And basically, he says, if you go to the meat market you don't need to ask if this cut of meat was sacrificed to idols. Just buy it and eat it without raising questions of conscience.

He adds that last part because if you ask if that meat has been sacrificed to idols and the answer is yes, now your conscience, or the conscience of someone with you, may not allow you to eat, even though it wouldn't be sinful. Why wouldn't it be sinful?

1CO 10:26 "... "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

Paul is saying that under normal circumstances even meat bought in the market which may have previously been sacrificed to idols is not meat which is actually tainted spiritually by any idol or demon. God's earth was created to provide for His creation, including man.

And though God gave certain restrictions to Israel about what kinds of foods to eat, in the final analysis, it had nothing to do with one food being better than another, it had to do with having Israel show its covenant faithfulness to God through obedience as those prohibited foods spoke of a spiritual condition.

In fact, Jesus Christ made this abundantly clear to Peter when he taught him two very important truths.

ACT 10:11-15 "He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. 12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. 13 Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." 14 "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." 15 The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

The context had to do with embracing the unclean Gentiles who were now to be seen as people who could also eat at the table of the Lord as they placed their faith in Christ. But the obvious secondary teaching is that the restriction of food was always meant to teach spiritual lessons to Israel, since those restrictions were now being lifted for Jews who knew Christ.

And Peter obviously understood this since we know that after this incident he often ate with Gentiles as Paul points out in his letter to the Galatians when speaking about Peter.

GAL 2:12 "Before certain men came from James, he [Peter] used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group."

What was he afraid of? Two things. That the circumcision group, who were believing Jews, and felt that the Jewish law was a necessary part of a Christian's experience, might find Peter eating with unclean Gentiles according to the law. And number two; the unclean food Peter ate, which was prohibited by the law, would be found on the Gentiles' menu.

You see, God declared that the Gentiles were no longer to be seen as unclean people who shouldn't be loved with the gospel, and the foods which were once restricted for the Jews, are now declared by God to be clean for all, including believing Jews.

Peter, at this point, had no problem believing God on this. But he did have a problem with the way it might look to the brethren of the circumcision. And so he played the hypocrite when the circumcision group came to town. And this is when Paul confronted Peter.

GAL 2:14-16 "When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? 15 "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' 16 know that a man is not justified by observing the law,

but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified."

If we're not justified by the law, what makes us think we can keep our salvation by observing the law? This is the point Paul also made to those same Galatians.

GAL 3:2-3 "I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? 3 Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"

And yet, there are many who name the name of Christ and still want to saddle God's people with this law and that law and conclude that to be a real Christian you need to do this or that, or observe this law or that law.

In other words, if our salvation, which also includes our sanctification, depends on observing a particular law, then Christ's atonement needs additional help to make it effectual. And now, good works are essential to keeping your salvation instead of being the fruit of the life you have in Christ.

Paul calls that a different gospel.

GAL 1:8-9 "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!"

If observing Levitical laws, like the eating or not eating of certain foods, was meant to be placed on the plate, if you will, of our salvation experience, then what was grace now turns into law. If we teach that eating food of any kind somehow made us unholy then what do we do with Paul's quote from Psalm 24?

1CO 10:26 "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

And if God says it's okay to eat what He has provided then we have no business giving such restrictions when it comes to salvation and our walk with Christ.

But, what if we take that same food and begin placing burdens on the consciences of others with that food?

1CO 10:27-30 "If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. 28 But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do

not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake - 29 the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? 30 If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?"

Paul basically says to these Corinthians, "let's say a friend of yours invites you over for dinner and he happens to be an unbeliever. Maybe that same friend also invited over another Christian. What if that other Christian, maybe a young believer, knows that the meat was offered to idols, and now makes it publicly known at the table. What do you do?"

Here Paul gives practical advice, not for the sake of the stomach, but for the sake of conscience; not yours but the others involved at that meal.

Now that the meat is deemed blessed unto the idols, as far as the young believer and the unbeliever are concerned, to eat that meat shows contempt for the Savior who you say is the only one to receive worship and adoration. Now, obviously as a mature believer you know there's no problem eating that meat, but here is where your liberty ends and your obligation to honor Christ, and help your brother in that situation, begins.

To eat that meat under those circumstances will not further the cause of Christ and could harm the conscience of the weaker brother and may even give further fuel to the unbeliever to conclude that it doesn't matter how you live for the God you claim as the only true God.

Suppose you're half way through the meal and the issue comes up? You've already given thanks to God for the food and you're already in the process of enjoying what God has provided. But to eat it at that point brings judgment from others.

1CO 10:29-30 "... For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? 30 If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?"

Instead of possibly bringing dishonor to the Lord it would be better, under such circumstances, not to eat. Imagine the message you give the younger brother, as well as the unbeliever, if you abstain. In this circumstance it could get real uncomfortable. But better to dishonor the guest than dishonor Christ.

1CO 10:31-33 "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God - 33 even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved."

Here it is. Whatever we do, we need to do it for the glory of God. And by definition that means we have to consider others as more important than ourselves. Because to do it for the glory of God is to do it for the will of God which is to bring all people to Christ, and encourage their growth in Christ so that they too may bring glory to God.

I guess it comes down to what we consider to be important in life. Are our own motives the end all? Is what we can get out of life the end all to what life is? Or is glorifying God with our lives the most important thing?

MAT 6:25,33 "..... Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

As we seek first His kingdom we can't help but bring glory to His name as we seek to do those things that please Him according to His will. And as Paul considered his life he was always seeking to bring as many as possible the truth about the Kingdom of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

1CO 10:33 "... For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved."

There's a goal for every one of us. Glorify God and allow the Lord to use us so that many will be saved from His wrath and receive instead His grace and mercy. Oh, to be an instrument of grace and mercy in the hands of God. There is no higher calling, no higher aspiration. And we can do it in whatever situation we find ourselves.

You don't need to be a Pastor or an evangelist to be used by God to His glory. But you do need to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and place all of life in its proper perspective to be able to accomplish that.

There's nothing wrong with wanting to seek our own good, but may we never do it to the exclusion of seeking the good of others knowing that we might be the only one some unbeliever will ever get a chance to see as those who glorify God with our lives.

May we carry Paul's attitude out to the world in the words he wrote to the Romans.

ROM 5:1-2 "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."