

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

**Title:** Glory for God, Edification for Others

**Truth:** Our conduct is guided by two ideas: honoring God and helping others.

**Date/Location:** Sunday October 25, 2020 at FBC

## Introduction

In chapters 8 through 10, the apostle Paul has laid out the principles of conscience, liberty, love, knowledge, rights, the dangers of disqualification, the connection of idols and demons, and the importance of restricting liberty and rights for the sake of the gospel. By using two real-life examples, he now helps the Corinthians to navigate some of the specifics of their situation before moving to other topics.

The practices he explains are applicable in different situations for Christians across all countries, all cultures, and all times—not just in first century Corinth. These truths will help us decide about matters that may be questionable or doubted or debated in our own time, whether food, beverage, entertainment, ways of living, and all kinds of activities.

### I. Emphasize Edification, v. 23

- A. The mantra of the Corinthians comes up again: “all things are lawful for me.” Remember this from 1 Corinthians 6:12? We said there it was a slogan used as an excuse for sin—in that case, sexual immorality. They probably shoe-horned all kinds of activities into the “lawful” category so that they could feel better about them. But changing how you think about something does not make it right if it is inherently wrong! You can call a thorn a rose, but it is still a thorn!
- B. Just like in 6:12, here we have a two-fold repetition of the phrase: all things are lawful—but not all are helpful; all things are lawful—but not all things are edifying. The apostle undercuts their thinking by elevating them to a higher set of principles. Instead of, “What can I get away with?” you should be thinking “What should I aim for?” Paul is clear that their slogan is not an appropriate way to

live. You do not have a right to do anything or say that everything is permissible. It just is not true!

- C. The emphasis must be on edification: building up. This word as the idea of increasing one's capability to live properly in the Christian life. In its most plain and "material" usage, it refers to constructing a building like a home (Luke 6:48) or tower (Luke 14:28) or barns (Luke 12:18) or a temple (Mark 14:58, Acts 7:47) or tombs (Matt. 23:29) or a synagogue (Luke 7:5) or a city (Luke 4:29). The idea of material construction passes over into the spiritual realm when the word refers to the growth of the church (Matt. 16:18), or the building of a spiritual house of believer-priests (1 Peter 2:5), or building on a another man's ministry work (Rom. 15:20), or even rebuilding a theological system that one previously tore down (Gal. 2:18). The word can also refer to "internal" things, where the grace of God builds up the believer to his expected inheritance (Acts 20:32). The church was being built up (Acts 9:31) and notice that this does not refer to the numerical growth, because that comes under the heading of "increase" later in the verse. God designed the church so that the believers would build one another up (1 Thess. 5:11) and be able to live good Christian lives. We are built when building-quality "stuff" is used in our lives by ourselves or others, so that we have the building blocks for growth. The Word, church, prayer, fellowship, worship, instruction, evangelism, etc. all contribute to and benefit from edification.
- D. Love always seeks to edify (1 Cor. 8:1). Edification is not, however, focused on one's self. If it is, it runs amok quickly (1 Cor. 14:4, 8:10). Interestingly, if you swap the first two letters of edification, what do you get? Focusing on self may well mean that the self has become deified and is the idolatrous focus of your existence.

## **II. Focus on Others, v. 24**

- A. The focus of edification is rather on others. To seek your own glory is not glorious (Prov 25:27). Love does not seek its own (1 Cor. 13:5). We are not to do things out of selfish ambition (Phil. 2:3). We ought to be like Timothy, of whom Paul said that he sought the things of the Lord unlike many others who focus on their own interests (Phil. 2:19-21).

B. For example, if you do a better job of seeking blessing and benefit for your spouse instead of yourself, what do you suppose will usually happen to your marriage? If you seek the well-being of your church, and the church is filled with people wanting to increase the well-being of each other and outsiders, what will happen in that assembly? But suppose on the other hand if you focus on your own wants, at home or in the church, what will you get? If you focus on your own hurts and peeves with your spouse or the church, what will happen? The book of James tells us that you will get strife and envy and all the rest of it (James 4:1).

### **III. Make Judicious Use of Liberty, v. 25-27**

- A. Judicious in my title means “using good judgment or sense.” It means not to do crazy things. Do not, for example, do something that could cause a new believer in Christ to stumble into sin.
- B. Whatever you suppose liberty to allow, it cannot be a sin. Paul has helped us to understand that meat from an animal offered to an idol can be eaten by Christians without a violation of God or of conscience if the conscience is properly informed. Actually, he says to not ask questions that could violate your conscience. Just buy the meat, cook it, and eat it. If you go asking around too much, you will undoubtedly find out information that could bother you or someone else’s conscience. “The animal was offered to an idol.” “A pagan person was the butcher.” “The animal was owned by a pagan idolater.” “The money you pay us with will not be used for Christian purposes.” Being “weirded out” by any of this is unnecessary because of the kind of freedom we have in Christ.
- C. Why is this possible? Because the animal, and indeed all food that we eat, ultimately comes from God. “The earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness” (Psalm 24:1). Try praying that at your table occasionally: “Lord, thank you for our food today, because we know you gave it to us out of the abundance of your bounty. We know that it, along with all the earth and everything in it, belongs to you. Thank you for sharing with us a portion of your things to enjoy.”

D. If you are invited to an unbeliever's home, you can go eat there<sup>1</sup> if you desire. Note that—it is not required by God that you go, but it is an option if you so desire. When you attend, eat the food, and do not ask if the food was offered or not. It does not matter. Use the opportunity to minister the gospel to those people.

#### IV. Care for the Consciences of Others, v. 28-30

- A. But if someone puts you to the test by explaining that the food was offered to idols, do not eat it. Why? Your conduct then has a more significant impact upon them than it would if it were not made an issue. Imagine that a weaker brother is along for the dinner as well as yourself. That brother—not to mention the host—needs a clear testimony of separation from idolatry, and the statement about the meat has made *that* the issue. To edify those folks, the first step is: do no harm!
- B. Are you going to show yourself to be purely belonging to Christ? Are you going to “defile yourself with a portion of the king’s meat?” (Daniel 1:8). Are you going to offend the weaker brother, or will you risk offending the host by not eating their food? At that point it is not just the meat that is at issue. It is the fact that eating it will affect that another brother, and perhaps also the host. Remember, the earth is the Lord’s (Psalm 24:1), *including* all its inhabitants! We must care about people.
- C. The issue of conscience has to do with the other weak-conscience believer—not with your own conscience, because you have determined there is no problem with the meat even though offered to idols. The problem is not your liberty, nor your giving of thanks. It is that you cannot give thanks for something that will cause another brother to stumble. You cannot say, “Don’t judge my liberty, bro!” Yes, your liberty can be evaluated based on the conscience of *another* person. Your condemnation is not be based on violating your conscience—it is based on misusing your liberty in harming another’s conscience!

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<sup>1</sup> Does that strike you as strange considering 1 Cor. 5:11?

## **V. Honor God in Everything, v. 31**

- A. The ultimate standard of our behavior is whether we glorify God. Watching out for others, edifying others, judiciously using our liberties, caring for the conscience...all these things need to be done to glorify God and with a view toward honoring Him (not ourselves!). In fact, this and the next verses expose two main guiding principles in our lives: the honor of God and the help of others.
- B. Therefore, whether we eat (meat or anything else), or whether we drink (not referring to alcoholic beverage here), or whatever we do, we are commanded to do it all for God's glory.
- C. Said another way, if what you are doing cannot or is not being done for God's glory, then change.

## **VI. Do not Cause Unnecessary Offense, v. 32-33**

- A. The inter-relatedness of so many things means that all of us—new believers and old—must be loving toward one another and overlook what could be offensive circumstances. If we live in a circumstance where there are Jews and Gentiles and Christians, it can be tough to keep track of all the possible ways of offending others. But we must take pains to not cause stumbling for any of these groups of people.
- B. The apostle Paul seeks to please all people, by which he means to avoid offense, so that he can save as many as possible. Therefore, he limits his liberties and gives up his rights for the sake of the gospel of Christ. *That* is so worth it that it is comparatively easy to let go of those things that belong to him to honor God. This is unselfish living.
- C. I used the word “unnecessary” in the title of this section not because the text says so, but because the word offense is quite broad in the English language. There are things that Christians do—like calling for righteousness and telling the good news of Jesus—that are deemed offensive by the world. These kinds of things do not “count” against this verse because this kind of offense is not a cause of stumbling. Otherwise, we could never utter a word about

Jesus in many places in our culture because it would be considered “offensive.” I would not need such a qualification if we had a different word for “offenses” that relate to giving the truth, because we should not and cannot avoid those. The point is that offenses due to our behavior in areas not related to the truth should be minimized so to avoid obstacles for the gospel to make its way freely to the lost.

## **VII. Imitate other Godly Christians who are Following Christ,**

### **11:1**

- A. In this section we have an example of an unfortunate chapter division. The first verse of chapter 11 ought to be the last verse of chapter 10.
- B. The command to imitate Paul as he imitates Christ is to explain to the Corinthians that they should follow Paul’s example. As he has indicated he would live in chapters 8, 9, and 10, they should do likewise. He is a good example for them, and for us.
- C. Paul in turn was following Jesus. How exactly did Christ handle these kinds of things? A relevant example is found in Matthew 17:24-27 where the Lord instructed Peter to avoid unnecessary offense in the matter of taxation. However, in Nazareth (Matt 13:54-58) when he taught in their synagogue, the people were offended at him, for as He said, a prophet is not honored in his own hometown. There, Jesus taught truth and the people could not take it. The problem was entirely on their side, not the Lord’s. He was bound to say the truth of God, and so are we, regardless of its popularity.
- D. If you face questionable issues in your life, humbly seek out what other godly people would do in your situation. Watch them or ask them and carefully consider the reasons why they behave the way they do. Then, if everything checks out, imitate them. If you are not sure about all the reasons, but in what you see it appears that this person is godly, you can still imitate them and pray for fuller understanding to come later.

## **Conclusion, 11:1**

This can be a tough road to walk at times with the myriad of perspectives and sensitivities that people have. But happily, at the day of Christ, all His people will be delivered blameless (without offense) before God. At that time there will be no more offenses because there will be no more sin. It is sin that causes us to create offenses, and sin which causes others to stumble or take offense. But this will be all gone due to the glorious work of Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile, we do not base our behavior primarily on Christian rights and liberties (self-centered). We base it on love for others, and glory for God (others-centered).

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