

## 1 CORINTHIANS 10:23-11:1

### INTRODUCTION

If I could summarise the central message of this chapter I would simply quote to you verse 31. In fact this verse could also be quoted as the central message for all believers in all ages. God created mankind to glorify Himself and that is mankind's chief purpose in life. However mankind is unable to fulfil its purpose because we are sinners and as a consequence we do not know God and have no desire to know Him.

But God sent Jesus into the world to live, die and rise again so that sinners can be redeemed and as a consequence we are able to bring glory to our God. It is the purpose of every true Christian to glorify God and we can do this through everything that we do or say.

Paul has been dealing with the subject of Christian freedom since chapter 8 and in this section that we are looking at Paul explains two principles that every believer must understand about our Christian freedom if we are to truly glorify God in everything we do.

### 1. USING CHRISTIAN FREEDOM TO BRING GLORY TO GOD (vs. 23-30)

Paul states two principles to guide every Christian concerning how to use one's freedom in Christ for His glory.

**a) Edification Rather than Gratification (v 23-24)** – Paul summarizes what he has been saying so far about Christian freedom. It seems that some of the Corinthians had taken a well-known Christian slogan "Everything is permissible" to justify their actions. If they wanted to do anything even when it was of a dubious nature they would say everything is permissible to justify their behaviour.

But as Paul had already explained in 6:12 that slogan did not literally mean everything but it is referring to things that are not identified in Scripture as sinful, such things are permissible. He was talking about what we might call questionable practices, the grey areas of Christian living things that Christians have different views on but which are not condemned in the Bible.

Paul says not everything is "constructive" and the word translated "constructive" means "to build up or to edify." What Paul is saying is that anything that builds us up in our faith, anything that contributes to our spiritual growth is beneficial for us and is therefore profitable. So the question that every Christian must ask when considering whether we should or should not do something that is of a questionable nature something which Christians may disagree about is to ask is this beneficial to my spiritual growth.

To put it another way will this hinder me in my spiritual growth or will it enhance it. We must not only consider ourselves but we must also consider our fellow Christians (v 24). If doing this questionable thing will not be beneficial to others even though it might be beneficial to me personally then we must not do it. It might not be condemned in the Bible but it might not be profitable or constructive for others if I go ahead and do it.

Our primary concern should be the good of others rather than our own good. Now this of course goes against human nature, which is self-focused but a Christian has been redeemed and is now God-focused and as a result should be other-focused.

A pastor once preached on this verse and asked after the sermon what people choose to give up for the sake of others. There was a complete silence. Afterwards a member of the church came to the Pastor and said I have just realised that I don't give up anything for the sake of others. He

realised that day just how selfish he had been. Selfishness must have been a problem at Philippi for Paul to write Philippians 2:3-4.

Christian freedom does not give me the right to do what is right but debatable unless my actions are profitable for the building up of others.

**b) Freedom Rather than Legalism (vs. 25-30)** – The true spiritual welfare of others should be a concern for us as we think over how to use our Christian freedom. However the standards of others should not rule or decide everything we do. In many ways this principle counterbalances the previous one. As much as possible we should seek not to offend the weak consciences of fellow believers.

But we should not go to the legalistic extreme of making great issues out of everything we do so as not to cause offence. Paul gives us an illustration to show us what he means. He takes up the issue again of food offered to idols. When a Christian goes to the meat market to buy his joint for Sunday he is not to ask whether or not the meat has been offered to an idol. Ignorance is sometimes bliss, simply go ahead and buy the meat without seeking clarification on what is an unimportant issue as we saw in chapter 8. If the meat was offered to idols so what; idols do not exist as we have seen in previous weeks.

Don't go out of the way to ask questions in order to buy meat that has not been offered to idols, don't let someone's weak and sensitive conscience stop us from doing what is perfectly right to do. The reason Paul gives is that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it including the animal from which the meat came (v 26 cf. Psalm 24:1). As we have seen in this chapter no Christian is to participate in idolatrous ceremonies.

However after the idol meat is sent to the meat market it is only meat, it is like every other piece of meat at the market therefore a Christian with a strong and clear conscience is free to buy it and eat it.

In the same way if an unbeliever invites you for a meal then the Christian should eat the meat placed in front of him without asking questions about its previous use. If the issue of eating meat offered to idols does not bother your conscience then simply do not ask embarrassing questions, simply enjoy the meal placed before you. It is clear that eating the meat will not offend the other person and to refuse to do so might offend him so simply eat it and don't worry where the meat has come from. Christian's freedom is a privilege that we must not forfeit unless it clearly offends someone else. Otherwise restricting our Christian freedom for no reason simply leads to legalism.

It's very easy as Christians to refrain from all debatable issues even though our freedom in Christ permits us to do it. It is so easy to allow our refusal to partake in questionable activities to become a legalistic bind upon us. Legalism does not bring glory to God, but a true exercise of Christian freedom does; a freedom that considers others and the benefits it brings to others will ultimately bring glory to God.

However if in the course of the meal or before you go to the meal someone tells you that the meat being served was sacrificed to idols. Then it is wise not to eat it not for our own sake but for the sake of the conscience of the one who told you. Perhaps you have been invited to an unbeliever's house with another young and immature Christian who has a sensitive conscience about meat offered to idols.

This young believer asks and finds out that the meat was used for idol worship and tells you. Now to be honest the issue does not bother you at all your conscience is strong and mature but that does not give you the right to exercise your Christian freedom at the expense of your weaker and

more sensitive Christian brother. We cannot insist on exercising our Christian freedom if doing so offends others.

In such cases we are to give up our liberty in order to protect the conscience of our younger brother,

The principle is clear we are to modify our practices for the sake of others, but we are not to modify our consciences. The legalism of a weaker brother must not make us legalistic too but it must make us gracious towards our brother. But the beliefs and practises of our fellow believers are important and in the case that Paul mentions our brother's conscience is more important than the feelings of an unbelieving host.

If someone has to be offended, it is better to offend the host by not eating the meat offered to idols than offend a brother or sister in Christ whose conscience is still weak. If we have to choose to offend someone it is better to offend an unbeliever than a sensitive Christian for his edification is very important.

However is it not unfair that a mature Christian should have to restrict his Christian freedom because of another Christian who has not yet come to understand the issue or is unable to deal with it in a mature way (v 29-30)?

Paul can understand the question if a mature believer eats the food sacrificed to idols with thankfulness to God for his provision then why should he be denounced by his fellow Christian who simply is too immature or too young in the faith to understand? The answer as we will see is that offending other Christians will not bring glory to God.

However we need to be careful as Christians that we do not denounce our fellow Christian because they exercise their Christian freedom differently from us. We just need to be very careful that we do not expect every other Christian to behave like us and to come to the same decision that we have come to concerning some questionable or debatable issue. But the big issue is the glory of God and if my exercise of Christian freedom is offensive to some of my fellow believers then I am better refraining from doing whatever it is that is causing offence because God is not glorified when Christians offend one another.

## 2. THE PURPOSE OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM (VS. 31-32)

The whole purpose of using our Christian freedom carefully and selflessly is to glorify God. The idea here of eating and drinking is in the context of things offered to idols but it is not limited to that context. Paul is saying that even in the most mundane routine non-spiritual things of life, ordinary things like eating and drinking can be done for the glory of God.

Our aim and purpose in every activity that we are engaged in day by day whether it is at work, at home or somewhere else is the glory of God. His glory should be our life commitment. It is the reason why God created us and sustains us he wants us to bring glory to his name. A person either lives a life that honours and glorifies God or he lives a life that dishonours God and robs him of his glory. God is supremely concerned for his own glory and so should every Christian. God is dishonoured when we who are his people sin through the careless use of our Christian freedom because God by his grace has redeemed us and reconciled us to himself through the sacrifice of his beloved Son.

This is why God disciplines us as Christian people and sometimes that discipline can seem severe but God does it in order to receive glory from his people in order that his people might live lives that are honouring to him. He longs for His people to be obedient and faithful to Him because that ultimately brings glory to our wonderful God and Saviour.

So I hope you can see how this applies to our Christian freedom. When we exercise our freedom in Christ carelessly and thoughtlessly without any consideration of other believers then God is robbed of the glory due to his name because some of his people are offended by our behaviour.

However when we exercise our Christian freedom with great care and with selflessness so that no one is offended then God receives the Glory due to Him. We ought to live our Christian life so carefully and thoughtfully so that no one can be offended by our actions whether that is Jews Gentiles or the people of God (v 32). In other words it's not just Christians that we are to think about but unbelievers as well. So if we are living in a community that has many Muslims we are to act in a way that will not offend them.

The gospel will offend them but that is all right and expected but our behaviour must be lived in such a way that people cannot take offence at what we do. We must be very careful in how we live out our lives. In every situation that we face our first thought must be the glory of God and therefore we must consider others and make sure that our actions do not offend other people unnecessarily.

Our actions must not be a hindrance to the gospel our actions must not hinder people from coming to faith. Our actions must not cause anyone to stumble or fall therefore we must give careful thought to every situation so that God will be glorified in that situation through our lives and by our words.

Paul longed to bring glory to God through his life his aim in life was to please everybody in every way. He lived not for himself but for God's glory, which in practise meant he did not live for his own good but for the benefit of others. He wanted others to be saved for nothing glorifies God quite like salvation. Therefore his own considerations were put to one side he thought always of others and the driving motivation was the salvation of others and ultimately the glory of God.

That's why Paul can say follow my example (11:1). Paul had lived among the Corinthian people for 18 months, people saw how he lived they witnessed how he used or refused to use his Christian freedom in order that others might benefit. Paul was willing to forego his rights and his own pleasures in order to see others saved and in order to make sure no one was hindered from receiving the gospel.

Paul knew that God would be glorified through the salvation of sinners and through the growth of his church and so he was prepared to limit his own Christian freedom in order that he might please others in every way possible.

The reason why Paul could encourage the church to follow him was that he was confident that he was following the example of Christ (11:1). The word "follow" is the word imitator, Paul was copying Christ's example and he wants all other Christians to do likewise so that God will be glorified in all that we do and say.

Jesus Christ is our supreme example of one who set aside his rights for the sake of others. He left heaven and entered our world taking the body of a man and placing upon Himself the limitations of living in this world.

He was even prepared to go to the point of death (Philippians 2:5-9), because Jesus knew that glory would be brought to God through the salvation that his death and resurrection accomplished on behalf of sinners.

Therefore as I finish let us all imitate Paul as he imitated Christ and let us all seek to bring glory to God in all that we say and do even if that means setting aside the exercising of our Christian

freedom. That is a price worth paying in order that our God could receive all the glory that is due to his name.

Amen