

Seek the good of others

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Date: 17 July 2022

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening, everyone. Thank you so much for your warm welcome, Willie. And let me bring the prayers and the greasings of your brothers and sisters in Grace Church Montrose. It's wonderful, really, really is wonderful to be with you. As we read from 1 Corinthians, would you please open up back up there if you'd close your Bibles? That's where we're going to be spending all our time together this evening. And let's pray, let's ask God in prayer one more time for his help as we open it up and dig into it together. God, our Father, we pray this evening, please speak clearly to us. Help us to understand how we as your people should live in a way that honors you and seeks the best for others. Pleased by your Spirit, the Spirit who inspired your words, illuminate it for us this evening, so that we would not just be hearers of your words, but doers of it as well. Work through us and in us this evening, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Now let me open up a time together, just asking you a question. I wonder if any of you know how many selfies somebody in their early 20s is predicted to take in a lifetime. I wonder if any of you have got a guess. How many selfies do you think somebody is predicted to take? We've got quite a quiet audience in here. For those who are online, there is no one speaking at all. The answer is, how many? A thousand. A thousand in a lifetime. No, the number is 25,700 selfies somebody in their early 20s is predicted to take in their lifetime. Or to put it into another metric, people are predicted to take, spend 53 hours per year taking selfies. 53 hours per year taking selfies. If that's you and you need to seek help, come and talk to one of the elders afterwards. I'm sure they'd like to pray for deliverance for you on that. One of my slight bugbears is I gave up social media a while ago, but every so often I look over my wife's shoulder and look at her pictures, whether that's on Instagram or Facebook or whatever it is. You know, historically what you would do if you had a camera, what you would have done is you would have looked in an event and you would have looked through a lens and taken a picture of something. But what happens now is instead you turn the picture against you, your phone against you, and now you become front and centre. And where my issue is, is when it comes to pictures of weddings. So often I see pictures of people going to weddings, but I never see a picture of the people actually getting married. Normally it's a picture of the selfie of the two people or the one person who's been, and you never find out who it was that got married or how they looked or how they dressed. What we're looking at this evening together is a passage in a letter that Paul wrote to the early church in Corinth. And what he wants them to do, what God wants us to do, as his people, is to decenter ourselves. Take ourselves out of the centre of the frame and seek to put God in his glory and others in their good right in the centre of it. And particularly the goods that Paul speaks about here, what he's doing in this section of 1 Corinthians that we've come to the end of here, I'll explain a little bit more about that as we go along, is he wants to make sure of the salvation of all his brothers and sisters and those who he meets in his community. And where we are here is at the end of a section in 1 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians chapter 8 through to 11 verse 1. And here is the culmination of his arguments. What Paul is doing is he's trying to help the church in Corinth think about what does it look like to live as God's people in a world that rejects and ignores God. What does it look like for those who have been transformed by the grace of God, whose lives have been turned upside down to live in a world that is the other way around to the way we now see the world? You see, what Paul says is that those who have believed in Jesus are now shaped by a wisdom that looks totally opposite to what the world pushes forward.

[4 : 45] A wisdom that is rooted in the fact that Jesus, the King of all creation, came to die on a cross, living in poverty amongst people whom he came to save and was rejected by.

And so what Paul wants us to do is to de-centre ourselves and our chief consideration must be the salvation of others and the glory of God. And that shapes all that we do.

This whole section is deeply helpful for you on that front. I'd really encourage you to read through it. But I've got two big points for you this evening. If you're those people who like to take notes, I've got two points for you. And the first point this evening is this. Eat and don't eat.

Eat and don't eat. Now it's my fault I should have said that we should have read from verse 23. So let me just read it for completion's sake. Verse 23, Paul says this, I have the right to do anything, you say, but not everything is beneficial. I have the right to do anything, but not everything is constructive. You see, this is kind of sums up what Paul is trying to do here.

While the Christians have the ability to do certain things, while they have been freed by the grace of God, that is not what is to shape the decisions that they make.

[6:16] Their rights must be set aside when they're seeking the good for others. Responsibility over rights, we might say. And so here, what Paul is saying, and he kind of gives us a few case studies here, is he's saying this, eat and don't eat. Have a look at those two case studies with me.

Verse 25, Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for the earth is the Lord's and everything in it.

So here, the first case is, imagine this, you're going to the local market and you are walking along and you're walking in your tweed jackets, one of those lovely kind of middle class markets, and you're walking along and you walk past and you see this venison in one corner and you see this lamb in another, you see this chicken in another place and pork in another.

And what Paul is saying is, as you walk down and you're looking at these different meats, you're not to worry about where they've come from. You're not meant to pull aside the man or the woman who's manning the stall and say, where did this come from?

What happened to it before it came here? Who touched it? How was it killed? Who was it sacrificed to? What Paul is saying here is, don't worry about that, it's all.

[7:34] Your conscience need not be panged on that front. Fear not, you can eat this food however you want. Or here's the other scenario that we get. Verse 27, If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.

What Paul is saying here is, imagining that you're invited around to a meal, you've sat down at a table, the food is put in front of you. Once more again, you don't need to stop and say, hey, where did this come from?

Who touched it on the way? How was it killed? Who was it sacrificed to? No, instead, Paul says, you can eat it freely without your conscience panging, without any fear or anxiety.

You can take that with joy and thanksgiving. The passage just before what we're reading now, Paul was telling them that they are in no way to eat food which have been sacrificed to idols.

Yet here he's saying, you don't need to fear where the food comes from, even if it has been sacrificed to idols. What's the difference? In this scenario, back in this, earlier in the chapter, this is going into a temple where you are, people know what's going on, where the food is being given, obviously and openly in an act of worship.

[8:58] And what Paul is saying, by doing that, you are uniting yourself to the God whom that food has been eaten to. But here Paul is saying, you don't need to worry about that because, verse 26, for the earth is the Lord's and everything in it.

And so what Paul is wanting the Christians here to know, and he wants us to remember is this, is we don't need to ask where it came from because as Christians, we know that everything comes from the hands of the good God whom we serve.

He's saying we don't need to worry or be anxious. He said all we need to do when we receive food is to receive it with thanksgiving.

Because we remember a good God who gives good gifts, seeking the good of his people to sustain us as we live in this world. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it.

It's that reminder for us to whenever whatever God gives us is to thank you for us. I know so often when we gather together for meals, when we thank God for the food, it can be quite perfunctory.

[10:14] We've got a toddler who we're teaching the prayer for and at the moment it seems to be more of a password for him to get to the food quicker than having for us. So he tries to pray before I do. Thank you God for food.

Amen. Let's eat. But it's a reminder here that wherever the food has come from, we don't need to be fearful. We can be joyful and thankful for what God has given us.

And so what Paul is saying here to the church is eat. Eat without your conscience panging. Because you know there is one God who has given good gifts to his people. Yes, have a look at where he goes then in verse 28.

But if someone says to you, this has been offered in sacrifice, then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience.

Here the issue, what Paul is saying, is that our own conscience is freed and liberated. We trust and we know who God is and what he has given us.

[11 : 29] But the concern here, the way that the decision is made by a Christian is not primarily about what we can do or what benefits us, but what another thinks that they can do and what might benefit them.

This kind of shifts. This is what we're saying about the shift and the worldly mentality, the worldly wisdom that shapes the whole of what Paul is trying to undo here, is that the worldly mentality, if it is lawful, then I can do it, no matter what.

But the mentality of the kingdom of God says, wait a second, what can I do that serves others? de-centers ourselves and thinks, think to ourselves, what is the good, what is the benefit, what is the advantage for another?

Who is it that is asking this question? Well, if you have a look down at verse 20, 30, verse 32, do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks, or the church of God.

This can be a question from a Jewish person, a Greek, these would have been the two dominant people that they would have encountered in Corinth, or a Christian as well.

[12 : 48] Someone whose conscience might be panged by what you are doing. So, let me put forward to you a few case studies that might help us to translate it to here.

You see, what Paul is doing is he's thinking through one of the most prominent examples that is going on in the life of Corinth. But underneath this are principles which are meant to shape the life of Christians, not just 1900 years ago, but shape the way that we think our service here in Edinburgh and wherever it is that you are from.

And so let me put a few forward of these. And I wonder if you want to, I'll give you some answers, but these are ones for you to think through and consider what does it look like for you as you seek to live out what Paul says here.

So imagine you're at work and you've made the long walk this week, the temperatures have gone up and you've made that long walk to the Bacon Bussey shop.

You've just been craving it. You get all the way there and back, it's taken 20 minutes to get there, 20 minutes to get back and your back is dripping with sweat but you think this is the best Bacon Bussey in town, this is wonderful.

[14 : 02] You sit down and you're just about to unwrap it and then one of your colleagues comes over, a devout Muslim. What do you do in that scenario? You're free to eat it.

As a Christian, you are free to eat that food. As a citizen of Scotland, you are free to eat that sandwich. But here, the concern for the Christian is the salvation of another and by eating that food, are you stopping that colleague standing, sitting with you and talking with you over that remaining 20 minutes of lunch?

These are the kind of questions that are being put for us. What about something like doing yoga? Now, I know there's probably lots of different opinions on this and some might not have opinions at all about what yoga is, where it's come from.

Many people who practice yoga nowadays don't do it with any kind of spiritual impact. It's more about body and mental health. But some Christians really struggle with this, seeing it as an abandonment of worship of God.

And so while you think that you might be free because the yoga that you go to has no kind of spiritual undertones, what happens if one of your friends says, do you know that that's worshipping another God?

[15 : 22] What do you do in that moment? You are free to do it. Maybe you can keep it silent and don't tell anyone else about it. Or finally, and here's one that I won't give an answer to you, but I wonder if it's this.

I think it might not be as much as controversial as it would have been a year, 18 months ago. What happens if somebody you know, when it came to the COVID crisis, thought to themselves, I can't go, I can't be in the living room with you if you don't wear a mask.

Yet you think to yourself, I don't want to do it. I don't have to do it. There's nothing in the law that says this. It makes life uncomfortable for me. What do I do in that moment? One of your neighbours comes around, wants to talk to you, but they demand that you wear a mask.

What do you do in that moment? And what Paul is saying here is he's saying when you're making this decision, think about them. Think about their goods.

Think about their benefits. Think about their salvation. because that's what Paul says here as we get to the final, our second point is this and if you're those note takers, here's your second point.

[16:36] What Paul says here is when you're making your decisions, do all for God and all for the good of others. Do all for God and all for the good of others.

And what happens here is this is now Paul kind of zooming out right at the end of his arguments of this section of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Paul zooms right out here and he focuses on the driving principles for us as Christians as we seek to live in this world in a way that is honoring to Jesus and honoring to those whom we are around.

And so Paul says the two driving principles are these. Glorify God and seek the good of others. Glorify God and seek the good of others.

So this evening is good regular members of the free church. You'll remember the answer to the first question of the shorter catechism. What is the chief end of man?

It's to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. You see this has kind of shaped all of Paul's arguments. If you just flick back with me a page or so you will see in 1 Corinthians chapter 8 verse 5.

[18:03] For even if there are so called gods whether in heaven or on earth as indeed there are many gods and many lords yet for us there is but one God the father through whom all things came and for whom we live and there is but one Lord Jesus Christ through whom all things came and through whom we live.

This is the core confession this is the central truth that shapes everything that we do as a church that there is one God this is the central truth which shaped the worship and the life of Israel here Israel there is one God there is one God alone and so this is what Paul is saying there is only one true God only one God worthy of all our worship the one God who shapes every decision that we are to make and so part of what that looks like is it means don't dine with other gods don't do something that would suggest any legitimacy to another god don't do anything which would bind you to another god because they are not true they are empty and there is just one lord who demands the full allegiance of his people and so what

Paul is saying is that we must consider in everything that we do how can God be glorified look at their verse 31 so wherever you eat or drink or whatever you do do it all for the glory of God this is the very first thing that we must think about as we wake up in the morning the very first thing as we consider what our weeks going to look like what our very first decision as we meet other people as we consider big life choices is saying how can we do whatever we do to the glory of God here for Paul he's saying for the people in Corinth they must look like a people whose lives are shaped solely by their concern to worship God in Christ their true distinctiveness as a church is seen in saying there is one

God one God alone and he alone is who we worship and obey he alone is the one that is worthy of glory and praise and honor and so everything that we do will be shaped by that concern and seeking the good of others and so this is what Paul is saying then that we are called to seek the good of others and that's where he finishes this section that we're looking at here have a look at verse 32 do not cause anyone to stumble whether Jews Greeks or the church of God even as I try to please everyone in every way for I'm not seeking my own goods but the goods of many so they may be saved so you see they about seeking good good of others and he defines for us then what is the good of others it means to be saved and his concern is if he wants to see people saved the danger is causing a stumbling block for them where he talks there about do not cause anyone to stumble literally it means putting a stumbling block before someone else. So it's like a toddler when they are playing with their toys and they leave a train in the way so often that can cause a stumbling block for parents. And that's his concern here. Anything that might protrude, anything that might hinder, anything that might block and turn people to turn around and walk away, that is what Paul wants to do. Except for the most important thing, and we'll think about that in a moment, only one thing should cause people to push away, but not the church seeking their own rights, their own benefits above others.

So whether it's Jews or Greeks or the church of God, our concern must be how is this going to make sure that those who are maybe already in the church, how can we make sure they do not lose their salvation or walk away? How does this make sure that those who are considering Jesus don't walk away because of the foolish things that we do? And so when Paul then says here, he says, even as I try to please everyone in every way, Paul's not here talking about being people pleasers. [23 : 12] I know for many of us, people pleaser is quite a negative and a kind of a derogatory way of calling someone. You never call yourself a people pleaser, or maybe you do sometimes. Normally you talk about it to someone else when they're making a decision that you don't like that they've made. But what Paul is saying here is when he's talking about pleasing everyone, he's talking about this idea of not putting stumbling blocks, but making sure that people can see Jesus. That is his grace concern.

Because what Paul is saying here is the only thing that should offend, the only thing that should cause people to stumble, is the gospel itself. You see, what Paul has been driving at throughout this letter, where he begins is he talks about the nature of the gospel. How it upends our understanding of reality. What he says is earlier in this letter is that the gospel seems like foolishness and weakness to the watching world. Because it does. For a people who were concerned about wisdom and sophistry, for a people that were concerned about power and influence.

What Paul was saying is that all the church does is preach a crucified savior. All the church does is put their trust in a man who was overwhelmed by the Roman Empire. You see, the gospel is rooted in this, is that Jesus, the one who was rich beyond measure, became poor. The one who was greater than all became weaker than all. So that whoever puts their trust in him can be saved. The very heart of the gospel is of a weak, vulnerable, vulnerable, rejected savior. This is a message that put many people off. People laughed at the Christians then and they still many times laugh at Christians now. But Paul says it is that and that alone that people should reject. Not the people who try to stand in front of it, who put in stumbling blocks in front of it, in front of that. I'm reading a book at the moment about a woman who went in the mid-noughties to do some mission work in Afghanistan. She worked in a small rural town and she talked about what life looked like for her. And she talked about the clothing that she would have to wear every time that she walked out of the house. And it was really interesting the way that she vindicated what she did. She said, those are the rules. That's what's demanded of a woman in this area and that's what I will do. As a Christian, she could have worn what she wanted, knowing she was loved and accepted by her God. But so that she could reach the women in that area, her concern was not to push any stumbling blocks which were getting the way. And so often for us, what we must remember is this, is that perception is key.

We're quite a visual people, aren't we? And so often we will see something and make a judgment almost immediately. I don't know if you know this, people can make their first impression of someone within, I think it's two seconds. I don't know what my impression that I gave you this evening was like.

[27 : 23] Hopefully you have pulled back from whatever it was. But if you think of what it's like for these people who see us as Christians, what are the decisions that we make? Are we those who are known with a deep concern for others, who would lay down our rights so that we can seek the good and benefit of others, which is ultimately their salvation? And so this is what Paul is saying.

Paul says this as he finishes. Verse 1, follow my example as I follow the example of Christ. Back in chapter 9, Paul talks about how as an apostle of Jesus, as one sent by God, he was due to be paid by the people, those who are Christians. They were to financially support him.

Yet he said he laid aside that responsibility so that they could hear and know and trust the gospel and live in light of that gospel. And so Paul says, imitate me, follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.

Because again, as we thought about that, Jesus set aside his own goods to be spat upon, to be rejected, to receive slander and false accusations, to be beaten, to be nailed to a cross, laying down all that belong to him, all his rights as the king of the universe, so that we might be saved. Jesus died on the cross, bearing the wrath of God in our place. He who knew no sin became sin so that we might become the righteousness of God. And what Paul is saying here is, there is the ultimate example for us.

[29 : 29] The one in whom we have found life was the one who laid down his life for us. And so what Paul is saying is, therefore, we must lay down ourselves so that we can seek the good of

others.

Now this evening, what I've been doing, and I've given you examples, but what Paul is giving here is principles which shape. I can't tell you what to do in every situation. But ultimately, what Paul is saying, and he's given us these driving principles, but most importantly is he gives us a picture. He points us to Jesus. And he says, look at him. Look at all he's done for you. And that's what the life that he calls us into as his followers.

As we seek the good and the salvation of others. And we seek to glorify God in everything that we do. And we seek the good and the glow.

And he says, the beautiful thing with the friend, and theidän of the family we make the two are, for God's sake. Thanks Hangody. Here there are three how it tells him who was the one who was the one who I am so is, and he tells him, and he's given us today. And that's what he means. And I think everybody can continue to you. And he'sacts a lot of emotion.

[30 : 53] We can only do this i remember.■■■, and of course, because one of the other words most importantly, on this LED network, did he give us 70 points.