

Do it all for the glory of God

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[0 : 0 0] of Christ. So, there in chapter 10, verse 31, we have this principle, do it all for the glory of God. And here is a guiding principle big enough to apply to all of life. Really simple statement, not difficult to understand, but it has massive life-shaping importance. Here is a principle, do it all for the glory of God, that could guide all the established rhythms of our life.

Here is a truth to apply in all the juggling of various responsibilities and relationships that we have day to day and week to week. If we find ourselves asking, what's my goal in this moment?

What's my purpose in this situation? What's the controlling principle governing what comes next? Here it is, for the Christian, do it all for the glory of God. So, we've got this big overarching principle, but as you were listening along to Paul's argument, it was a very interesting road to get there. Because we've come down a very, I imagine for many of us, a very unfamiliar road, the road of what do we do about food that's been offered to an idol that's getting sold in a meat market?

Now, I imagine for many of us, that's something that we've never had to think about. But it is a principle and an idea, a concept that will be familiar to millions around the world. And there will be millions of people living the Christian faith who are having to ask these important New Testament questions. Believers in very different cultures and contexts to ours, and missionaries who go to different parts of the world, if you go to any place where there is a strong local religion, and that religion has dietary restrictions, these kind of questions are going to come up.

And maybe, just maybe, somebody here one day will end up being a missionary to Africa or to Asia, and you'll look back and you'll think, ah, this is a text. This is a really important text for me to consider. But even if not, there's still really important principles. And actually, it was something that was really important in the first century for most Christians, especially those who were Jewish, and then they became followers of Jesus. They were having to ask all kinds of food questions.

[2 : 3 0] It was one of the big issues. Can Christians eat meat that was previously in the Old Testament considered unclean? Well, Jesus said so, but that was a radical change. Can Christians eat at the house of a Gentile, someone who is not Jewish? Again, unity in Christ says yes, but that was something that took quite a lot of effort and understanding for the church to get to. What should a Christian do about this food that's offered to idols? And what difference does it make if I'm eating personally at home, or if I'm going to someone else's house and we're having a shared meal? And so, these kind of questions were coming up all the time as believers from different backgrounds were trying to figure out how do we live together as one body in Christ? So, we're being introduced to an ancient issue, but I think it's probably an issue that has some modern parallels, like in our setting.

Maybe as we go through this, we might be thinking, well, how do these set of principles that we'll think about, how does that apply to, for example, my thoughts or my attitude to alcohol consumption, or my spending habits, or the things that I watch on the telly, or the kind of language that I use in company? I think there are some principles that we can also helpfully apply to our own setting.

At the same time, we're being introduced to an ancient church. So, we've just read one little bit of the letter of 1 Corinthians, but Corinth was a significant city within the Roman Empire, kind of a notorious city, quite an immoral city. It was also a place where lots of former slaves or former soldiers had been given their freedom, and so there was this thing, go to Corinth and make a name for yourself. And so, it was a place where there was lots of competition, lots of people trying to get to the top of the social ladder, and so they were known and they celebrated the idea of being self-made people, and they loved celebrity teachers. And what we see within the whole book is that there are significant issues of personal pride and these divisions that are rocking this young church.

And we'll see a little bit of this as well, that we're introduced to how Paul applies the gospel to everyday life. So, here's one issue, food offered to idols, and Paul's going to apply the gospel to how to think about that. But he does it all through the book. He does it about issues to do with the Lord's Supper. He does it to do with attitudes towards different leaders in the church. So, we'll see some of this. So, he brings the gospel to bear on everyday Christian ethics. And if you read the letter, you'll discover there's so much that we can learn from this letter about how the gospel shapes how we think about all of life. But central to these chapters, central to the Christian, is this theme, do it all for the glory of God. So, we're going to think about it, first of all, think about it narrowly as it relates to this issue, the problem of what do we do about food that's offered to idols. Okay, so we're in Corinth, and we've got a bunch of new Christians, and most of them have been saved from a pagan background.

So, they're used to probably every day going to a temple, offering sacrifices to idols, including offering food to idols. They're still surrounded by idol worship. Even when you go to buy your meat every day, there's this reality that it's been offered to an idol at some point, most likely. So, what should they do? We get some fascinating teaching. And what we see is that there are a group, this is a church that's very divided, there are a group who say, well, we know, let me tell you our opinion, and let me exercise my rights. And then we've got a group that are described as the weak. So, let's see what Paul has to say. He reminds them, chapter 8, so go to chapter 8, first of all, first eight verses, he says, it's not about what you know. So, the idea of knowing and knowledge is really important to this section. So, he says to these guys who are full of themselves because they think they know. We know that we all possess knowledge, that's one of their phrases.

[7 : 08] He says to them, but knowledge puffs up while love builds up. So, Paul says, listen, I know that there are some things that you know, that an idol is a non-thing, and that there's only one God, and that eating idol food is no problem. They know all those things, but he says to them, beware.

The Christian life is not all about knowledge. What comes first is love. Don't be all about your knowledge that puffs up. Be about love that builds up. Don't put pride over love, he says. He says, actually, in verse 3, a really interesting thing, he says, the best kind of knowing is to love God and to be known by God. That's priority number one, to be known by God and to know God's love. And then in verses 4 to 6, Paul says, listen, I know as well. I know there's only one God. I know there's only one Lord. I know those idols are not real. And in fact, he makes a wonderful statement in here about Jesus. He says, for us, there's one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live. And there's but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. So, in the midst of this, a really amazing description of Jesus as God.

Jesus, the one who we are to worship with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. So, Paul says, listen, I know that too. I know the truth about God and the truth about idols. But what does he say next? In verse 7, not everyone knows. Not everyone possesses this knowledge. And here he's not even talking about people who are outside of this new church. He's saying, even within our Christian gathering, he's saying, there are some who've been brought up with idols, and they've always believed these idols are real. And so, for them, it's a really big deal. They think if they eat this food, they're going to be defiled. So, what should the people who know do?

He also applies some logic in verse 8. He says, food doesn't bring us near to God. We're no worse if we do not eat and no better if we do. But he wants to use that logic to say, so be careful not to eat in a way that's unloving. Be careful not to act in a way that makes problems for others. And so, he identifies, and this is where I think we have a general principle, he identifies in these areas where people take different opinions, there's a danger to avoid.

Simply asserting my knowledge and my preferences regardless of the people around us. He says, there's a glory to seek, but it's not the glory of my knowledge. It's God's glory.

[10 : 09] It's about showing love for God by being thoughtful to the people around who maybe are weaker, who are less mature, who've got a different background. So, knowing is not everything.

The second principle that he identifies here from verse 9 onwards of chapter 8 is, he says, in effect, aim to build others up, not to tear them down. Verse 9, be careful that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. So, imagine the scene. You've got a church gathering. And then the next day, there's some Christians who are at the market. Some of those Christians have just very recently left idol worship, going to the temples, worshiping false gods to become a follower of Jesus. So, they're still kind of living in that world, but they're just coming out of it. And they go to the meat market, and they see a mature believer going from the meat market, maybe even going into the temple, and there they're happily eating the food that's been offered to idols. It's entirely plausible that that weak believer will look at the mature one and say, okay, he's gone to church, and now he's gone to the temple, and he's taking the food for the idols.

So, Jesus and the idols, they must be equal. So, why don't I just worship both? I suspect that'll work out quite well for me. And so, Paul warns about not causing a stumbling block to someone else.

If someone with a weak conscience sees you with all your knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what's sacrificed? And the significance of that, the destructiveness of that is clear. So, this weak brother or sister for whom Christ died is destroyed by your knowledge. He says to them, recognize this is not a small thing. You sin against their conscience. You're acting harmfully against someone for whom Christ died. You're running the risk of causing their faith to run aground by the careless use of your freedom.

And actually, when you do that, you sin against Christ Jesus himself. He puts it a different way in chapter 10. 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.

[12 : 47] No one should seek their own good, but the good of others. Does my action benefit other believers? Does my action build up other believers? Are my actions thinking first and foremost about other believers?

The danger that Paul exposes is a very real one. It's about how we choose to exercise our Christian freedom. How do we choose to live out our Christian ethics when they are seen, when we are seen by others?

Do we understand that our example can have a profoundly harmful effect on someone who is less mature, who has a weaker conscience than we do? Perhaps we've seen that in our own lives and our Christian experience. Something that is fine for one believer, you know, whether that's going to a pub, whether that's watching certain kind of films, whether it's hanging out with certain kind of crowds, that can be totally fine for one person, but for another person, it could cause them a huge problem.

Might lead them down the path to sin, to sin against their own conscience, to sin against Christ. And so there is a glory to seek, but it's not to glory in, I've got the right to do whatever I want. I've got freedom in Christ. God is glorified when we put love for others ahead of my personal freedom to do what I want.

There is glory for God. There is glory for God when love for others makes my rights fade into insignificance.

[14 : 43] And the third principle, and we've kind of already touched on it, but he drives it home towards the end of chapter 10 is this, consider everyone's conscience. And this is where things get really interesting. This little section reminds us that Christian ethics is not like, it's not like a wooden law, fixed laws that are just applied unthinkingly. Rather, we're always having to be thinking, always having to be applying the truths of God's Word into different situations. And this is a great example for this. So, we should always be asking, how do I glorify God now, and in this situation, and now, among this group of people.

So, the first setting, verse 25 and verse 26, is the setting of the meat market. And Paul gives him very straightforward teaching. Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience. And he quotes Psalm 24 from which we sang, for the earth is the Lord's and everything in it.

So, everything belongs to God. Jesus has declared every food to be clean, so don't worry about what you are eating. And here's an important principle. Remember, Paul knows that some people have weak consciences. He is teaching and training and strengthening consciences. I know you have an issue with this, but really, you don't need to. It's his pastoral encouragement. Okay? So, in the meat market, you can eat anything. Then there's a second setting, verse 27 to 30. If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.

Eat what's put in front of you. Don't ask the question. Don't risk shaming the host. Receive the hospitality. Significant for people in cross-cultural mission. But then, what if the situation changes?

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, both for the sake of conscience. Same food, but now everything has changed because of that one simple statement. This has been offered to an idol.

[17 : 22] And now Paul says, if that happens, you don't eat it because clearly the conscience of the other person is an issue. Again, for the sake of an unbeliever, it's avoiding any confusion.

It was avoiding the confusion that Jesus and the idol are equal. It's making clear that Jesus is not an add-on. He's not another one of the many gods that they worship. He is uniquely different. He's not like the idols. And so, the danger to avoid when it comes to conscience is we must be careful to always pay attention to the conscience of others. Not like the bull in the china shop, we must be sensitive to the sensitivities of others. We do not want to cause someone to stumble.

We do not want someone to have a false view of Jesus. We don't want someone to have to wrestle and agonize and fall into sin because we've been inconsiderate. Rather, there's a glory to seek.

And this is where verse 31 comes, so whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. And what does that look like? It looks in part like, verse 32, not causing anyone to stumble. It looks like, verse 33, trying to please others.

It looks like seeking the good of others so that people might be saved rather than put off following Jesus. And it absolutely looks like following the example of Christ. Christ who always showed an unselfish, loving concern for others, who was willing to put His rights to one side in order to faithfully and obediently carry out God's plan of unselfishly and sacrificially loving, serving, dying for people like us.

[19 : 27] Jesus lived for the glory of God, and He calls His people to do likewise. So, when we think about application, of course, the situations change, but the principles remain.

It may be that we go through our whole lives, and the issue of food offered to idols may never be a problem. It is quite likely. But there will always be questions of conscience, and there will be always areas on which Christians disagree. And so, we need always to be asking the question, how do I act in such a way that God is glorified? How do I move beyond just asking, is this thing banned? Let me check the list, to, is this beneficial? Not beneficial for me, but beneficial for others.

It's important for us to realize that the issues of food and drink matter, because everything matters to God. Spending, watching, all of those things matter, but God's glory matters more than anything.

And it reminds us that our love for one another has to be more important than us simply claiming my rights. So, that's the narrow focus when it comes to doing everything for the glory of God. Just for a few minutes, we're going to move to the wider focus, to Paul's own missionary practice. You know, thinking about how do we learn to live well, you know, as people? How do we learn to figure out what's right and what's wrong as general principles, but also as situations become more complicated? What do we do in certain situations? Most of us, we probably find that's a mixture of teaching that we receive, but also examples that we watch. You know, when we're children, there is stuff that we pick up from. Just being in our families, we pick up on stuff. We don't need to be taught it, we just see it. Sometimes we are taught it as well. But we just come to understand there are certain things that are right, and there are certain things that are good, and there are certain things that are bad and are not so good. And maybe as we get older, maybe as we come into the workplace, we're looking to find a mentor. Maybe we're given a mentor for a job. Maybe we have that sort of onboarding thing when we get a new job, and we have someone whose task it is to explain what the job involves and how to do that well. It's really helpful to have a good, committed mentor.

In a sense, Paul functions as a mentor for this young church, a real mixed bag of people, various levels of maturity, all kinds of pride and divisions going on. Some of them are claiming my rights. They're fighting over who their favorite Bible teacher is. Some of them are so full of their idea that they can have freedom from rules, that they're doing crazy stuff, and they're full of divisions. Divisions about what is moral and not in God's eyes. They're full of divisions even when they sit at the Lord's table.

[22 : 39] And so, Paul writes this letter, and he very much wants to show by his own example as well as by his teaching, here is how you begin to apply the gospel to everyday life for the good of others.

So, if you've got a Bible, four very quick examples to see how Paul does everything for the glory of God, that that's the engine that drives his life. Chapter 3. It's in the middle of a discussion about the church and its leaders. There are some people saying, I follow Paul, I follow Apollos.

Verse 5. What after all is Apollos and what's Paul? Only servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.

So, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything but only God. Paul is not concerned about his reputation. I should be the number one Bible teacher. His concern is that God gets the glory for new life and for growing faith. Chapter 4. There are people who are doing Paul down. Paul, you're not much of a teacher. You're not much of a leader. You're not very charismatic.

Look at what he says in verse 10. Some irony here. We are fools for Christ, he says of himself and his fellow apostles. But you're so wise in Christ. We are weak, but you're strong. You are honored. We are dishonored. To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty. We are in rags. We're brutally treated.

[24 : 09] We're homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we're cursed, we bless. When we are persecuted, we endure it. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world, right up to this moment. Paul is not for a second concerned about his comfort, his status in the eyes of society.

He is willing to be a fool for Christ, considered to be a nobody, so long as people would see Jesus as the somebody. In chapter 9, verse 1 to 6, He's saying, Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? He's making this argument that he has rights as an apostle. He has rights, for example, to travel with a wife. He has rights, for example, to claim money and food from them because he's bringing God's Word to them.

Don't we have the right to food and drink? Verse 4, don't we have the right to take a believing wife?

But, verse 12, if others have this right of financial support, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. So, Paul is so concerned that people not think he's simply in it, he's not simply a preacher of the gospel to make money for himself, that he takes nothing from this church to make absolutely sure that Christ gets the glory. And then we read, chapter 8, verse 13, Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall. He's not concerned to satisfy his appetite. He's not saying, I really like eating meat, so I don't care what you think. He's willing to never eat meat again, if that will be a source of blessing to his brothers and sisters in Christ. At all points,

Paul is concerned for the glory of God. And at all points, we see that Paul's faith is a thoughtful faith. And his first thought, in this moment, with this particular group of people, in this particular situation, what will bring God glory? What will honor Christ and the gospel most? And Paul's logic is absolutely shaped by the gospel that he teaches. Jesus left heaven, gave up his rights, gave up everything to come into this world. Jesus gave his life on the cross to die for his people, suffering death on the cross in order to save and rescue. And because Paul knows that, and it's his heartbeat, he says, I'm willing to give up my rights to serve Jesus and to serve the church of Jesus.

[27 : 38] Paul understands, as someone who preaches the Bible, as someone who preaches about Jesus, that there are going to be times when he gives offense. In chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians, he says, in verse 18, the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. And then down in verse 23, we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. So, he knows that the gospel will always offend. People will hear about a Savior who humbled himself to die, and that's crazy. People will be offended by the fact of being told that they're sinful and they can't save themselves, and they need a Savior. But he will always preach that, but Paul will not add offense intentionally in the way he lives. There is gospel offense, and we must be about that if we're going to be faithful to Jesus, but there is an offensiveness that sometimes as Christians we can be guilty of, which we are to have no part of.

That's Paul's pattern. Now, let's just draw this to a close and think more as we move more widely to today, as we put this into practice for our own lives, this principle, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. So, I recently, it was too late, it was after New Year, but I came across this advice, why not skip resolutions and make a rule of life?

I don't know how many people made resolutions. I don't know how many of them have wobbled and collapsed already, but I quite like that idea of having a rule of life. That seemed like, here's a good idea, to have a focus, to have a lens through which to view all of life. And then I came across, I never heard of a rule of life before, but I think it's a really ancient practice in the church, and it's defined this way. Here's a rule of life defined, an intentional, conscious plan to keep God at the center of everything we do. The starting point and foundation of any rule of life is a desire to be with God and to love Him. That sounds a wonderful thing, doesn't it? Here's a rule of life. I want consciously to make God central. I want the foundation of my life to be enjoying life with God and enjoying His love. The advice then moved on to like a lengthy kind of five-page plan and taking a whole day to figure that out, so I decided that was a bit too much for this year.

And then I came across 1 Corinthians 10, verse 31. I thought, yeah, here's the simple approach. Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. There's a great starting point for a rule of life.

Think about it. Think about it for tomorrow, regardless of what your day holds, whether it's super busy or it's quite quiet, regardless of what's coming next in your calendar.

[30 : 50] No matter what conversation you're about to have, think about the chores that you'll need to complete. Perhaps you have reports and paperwork to fill out. There'll be meals to cook, laundry to do, perhaps a Bible study to teach. In all of those little moments, wouldn't it make a difference if we went into them thinking, I'm going to do this and this to the glory of God?

Then there's no such thing as an ordinary thing. Everything becomes full of meaning. Think about the different hats that we wear in the course of a day. If you're a Christian, you are a child of God. You're also someone who has a wide variety of relationships in your family, in your friendship, in your work, in your university. Think about your responsibilities that you spend doing your nine-to-five or whatever it looks like. Think about all your responsibilities in the context of serving in a church. And again, apply that rule of life. How can I do this?

Be this person, be this person, the child of God, the father, the husband, the son, the worker to the glory of God, showing love for others, putting the needs of others, the conscience of others ahead of mine, to follow the example of our Savior in the gospel.

Whatever we do, do it to the glory of God.