

Seeking God's Glory and Other's Salvation

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[0:00] Well, in 1965, the Rolling Stones released this hit song. See if you recognise it on the next slide. A bit more volume, Peter.

I'm afraid to do what I want in the old town. Have you heard it before? I'm afraid to do what I want in the old town.

And at the top of the picture is a very young-looking Mick Jagger. But this song, I'm free to do what I want any old time, really summed up what the Corinthians thought.

It was their song. You see, they thought they were so spiritual that they were free to do whatever they wanted any old time. We've already seen this in chapter 6, verse 12, but it comes up again in our passage today.

So just turn over to chapter 10, verse 23 for a moment. Chapter 10, verse 20 over the page, where Paul quotes what the Corinthians say. And he says that I have the right or freedom, the same idea, to do anything they say, but not everything is beneficial.

[1:10] I have the right or freedom to do anything they say, but not everything is constructive. Do you see how he quotes their sayings in speech marks there?

You see, the Corinthians thought they had freedom or the right to do whatever they wanted any old time. Now, it is true that we Christians have great freedom in Christ.

After all, Christ has set us free from having to obey the 613 Old Testament laws in order to be saved. All we do now is we trust in Christ and follow him.

But we also know that we're not free to do whatever we want any old time. We know that, don't we? So how do we work out what we are free to do and what we are free not to do?

I mean, some things are pretty clear. Obviously, we're not free to commit adultery or to steal or to murder, even when your children are driving you crazy.

[2:08] So what are we free to do? I mean, those things are clear, aren't they? But what happens if it's less clear? For some friends of ours, they asked us one time whether they could eat halal food because a Muslim neighbor had invited them to dinner.

Are they free to eat that or not? Another friend of mine, Stuart, has become a missionary to Muslims and he goes to their mosques and participates in their worship services to build relationships with Muslims in order to evangelize them.

Is he free to do that? Or here's a list on the next slide that I gave my Bible study group last week. Are we free to take part in a Roman Catholic mass or communion service, which is different to the Bible's version?

Are we free to watch whatever movies we like? Are we free to drink alcohol, play poker, take our children or grandchildren trick-or-treating come Halloween in a couple of months' time?

How do we know what we as Christians are free or not free to do when it comes to these topics that even Christians disagree about? Well, let me begin because this passage really is a continuation of last week's.

- [3 : 23] Let me begin by reminding you of the context so far. In ancient Corinth, there were temples on every street corner, it seemed. And so most of the meat you bought in the meat market was sacrificed to one of these idols.
- And so for the Corinthians, the issue of freedom was not whether to go trick-or-treating or not. The issue was whether they could eat meat sacrificed to an idol. For them, it was everywhere.
- For us, it would be like having nine out of ten butchers selling halal meat. And this raised three issues for them. At first, were they free to buy this meat from their local butcher?
- At second, were they free to eat this meat at their neighbour's house? And third, were they free to eat this meat at an idol's temple? Which was really the big issue.
- Because in those days, there were often dining rooms attached to the temples and people would book it out for a party, much like people book our church hall for parties. And so on the next slide is a foundation of a temple in Corinth.
- [4 : 24] You can go and see this foundation today to a Greek god. And archaeologists have worked out a map of the temple which included dining rooms. So on the next slide is the map.
- At the top is the courtyard. And then down, you've got three dining rooms. And then right next to the dining rooms is the kind of inner sanctuary of a temple. But the whole facility, courtyard, dining rooms and temple, was known as the temple of the god.
- And people would, as I said, book parties and use the dining rooms. And we know this because we've got some ancient manuscripts, which were basically ancient party invitations. And so on the next slide, we've got, this is one we have.
- Apollonius requests you to dine at the table of the Lord Serapis. That's the god. And that's the picture of the god in the right corner there. On the occasion of the coming of age of Apollonius' brothers in the temple.
- And so this party invitation was like to an ancient debutante ball for men, it seems. But notice it was at the table of Lord Serapis.
- [5 : 30] And so are the Corinthians, as Christians, free to attend? Because the host was seen as the god. It was his table, his temple, you see.
- It's this third situation that Paul primarily deals with. And he began to deal with it last week by saying, no, don't eat at the temple. Why?
- Well, because it might cause your weaker or younger Christian brother or sister to stumble back into idolatry. So if you've got your Bibles there, let me just remind you, because today's passage really does follow on from last week.
- So have a look at chapter 8, verse 9. Chapter 8, verse 9. He says, Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights or freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.
- For if someone with a weak conscience sees you with all your knowledge that idols are nothing and that meat sacrifice to idols are nothing, but if they see you eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols?
- [6 : 37] So this weak brother or sister for whom Christ died is destroyed by your knowledge. You see what Paul is saying? You may know that idols are nothing.
- You may know that food sacrificed to an idol makes no difference. Paul agrees. But he says, Be careful that you don't then cause a young Christian to stumble away from Christ back into idolatry.
- For when they see you eating, they'll think it's okay. Except for them, it's not a matter of eating. It's a matter of worship. And before they know it, they're back worshipping the idol they just left for Christ.

And so as Vijay rightly pointed out last week, Paul says we're to give up our rights to save others. Or in other words, we're to forsake our freedom to safeguard their salvation.

And it's not just safeguard those who are Christians, but also to seek salvation for those who are not yet Christians. So come with me to chapter 9, verse 19.

[7:41] Over the page, chapter 9, verse 19. Paul says, Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone.

Why? Well, to win as many as possible. You see, Paul forsakes his freedom not just to safeguard the salvation of young or weak Christians, but also to seek salvation for everyone, as many as possible.

And so this first principle that we see here is really the horizontal principle, the one another principle, that helps us decide how we're to use our freedom. And it's this.

Will it help others be saved? Or will it cause others to stumble? We can represent it on the next slide, the horizontal line. We've got to work out, is it going to cause people to stumble or is it going to help people be saved?

That's the horizontal principle. But today in our passage, Paul addresses the vertical principle, the vertical concern. That is, our relationship with God. And he begins by saying, don't cause yourselves to stumble and miss the prize.

[8:55] So at point two in your outline and chapter nine, verse 24 in your Bibles. He says, Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize?

Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

Do you notice how here Paul turns from talking about others stumbling to them stumbling? Notice in verse 24, he's telling them to run in such a way so that they don't miss out on the prize.

What is this prize? Well, verse 25, notice what he calls it, the crown that lasts forever. In other words, it's life eternal with Christ in the new creation.

That's the prize. You see, their eternity is at stake. And so they must run in such a way to not miss out on eternity. How? Well, like an athlete who goes into strict training.

[10:01] Now, I'm not an athlete myself. I know it's hard to tell just looking at me. Though I did run, race my son the other day and lost. I was puffing so much that Michelle actually had a phone out to dial triple zero.

It's a bit humiliating, actually. But I do know some athletes who are marathon runners. And they have this strict training program, which requires a great deal of self-discipline and self-control.

You know, they get up really early every morning. They have an amount of kilometers that they run each day, which varies to try and build up the body and let it rest at certain times. They have a strict diet.

They hydrate regularly and make sure they have enough electrolytes. And on it goes. The point is, their strict training involves a great deal of self-discipline and self-control. And without it, they would not get the prize, let alone finish the race.

In fact, someone from my old church tried to enter. We entered a marathon without any training. He didn't finish it. He got severe shin splints and was taken to hospital dehydrated.

[11:04] You see, you need training and that requires self-control and self-discipline. And it's like that being a Christian. Being a Christian is like running a marathon. We need to train at being a Christian.

That requires self-discipline and self-control. And that's what Paul does. You see verse 26? Therefore, I do not run like someone running aimlessly. I do not fight like a boxer beating the air.

No, I strike or control my body and make it my slave. So that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

Do you see what Paul's saying? He practices self-control. Why? So that he won't be disqualified for the prize. And so take coming to church as an example for us.

We are free. We have Christian freedom to miss church as much as we like, really. I mean, coming to church doesn't make someone a Christian. But it sure does help us continue as a Christian, doesn't it?

[12:06] You know, meeting together to encourage one another, to hear from God's word and to praise his name. And so, again, well done for practicing self-discipline and not staying in bed, even though it would have been really tempting this morning of all mornings.

And for the Corinthians, Paul is worried that they weren't disciplining themselves at all. They thought they were free to do whatever they wanted at any old time. They were taking their Christian freedom too far by eating at an idol's temple.

And so now Paul is worried that they could themselves stumble back into idolatry and miss out on the prize. After all, that's what happened to Israel. You see chapter 10, verse 1?

For or because, so he's continuing, I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and they all passed through the sea.

They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

[13:09] Now what Paul is saying here is that ancient Israel were also spiritual, just like the Corinthians. In verse 2, all of Israel had an experience of baptism, says Paul.

Of course, it was into Moses, through whom God saved them from Egypt, rather than Jesus, through whom God saves us from sin. But they had an experience of baptism. And in verse 3 and 4, Paul says that all Israel had the same spiritual food as each other.

By spiritual, he means given miraculously by the Spirit of God. And so they had manna that came down from heaven, do you remember? And they drank water from a rock, of all things, if you remember.

They all, in other words, had these spiritual experiences. They were all God's people, but what happened to them? Verse 5, Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them.

Their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Why? Well, because they fell back into idolatry and immorality.

[14:12] See verse 6? Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts upon evil, just as they did. So do not be idolaters, like some of ancient Israel was.

As it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to indulge in reverie. That's what they did when they worshipped the golden calf. Or verse 8, We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did.

And in one day, 23,000 of them died. That's what happened in our first reading, where they had sexual immorality with Moabites, and they worshipped their gods, and they were killed.

Or verse 9, We don't have time to look at all four examples in detail.

But do you see Paul's point? Israel were God's people. They had spiritual experiences. They even saw God perform the ten plagues on Egypt. They even walked through the middle of the Red Sea.

[15:16] And yet, they still forsook God, and fell back into idolatry and immorality, just like the Corinthians were doing. And if that happened to them, if they were judged and fell, and missed out on their prize of the promised land, then Paul says, It can happen to you too.

Do you see verse 11? These things happened to them as examples, and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.

So, he says, If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall. No temptation has overtaken you, except what is common to mankind.

You see, the Corinthians may think they're free to do whatever they want any old time, to eat in an idol's temple, but they are still human. And so, the temptation of idolatry is still just as much a temptation for them as it was for Israel.

In other words, we're all susceptible to the same sorts of temptations. I remember being in a prayer group at Bible College with a guy called Neil. Great guy.

[16:30] I looked up to him. And I remember one time, he was in tears, and we wanted to pray for his friend because his friend just left his wife. And it broke Neil's heart. He couldn't believe his friend would do this.

Three years later, Neil left his pregnant wife for another girl. And it broke my heart. You see, we're all susceptible to the same sorts of temptations, whether it's unfaithfulness or idolatry or greed.

They may take different forms and some may be stronger to one person than another, but they're all common to us all. For Israel and the Corinthians, it was the temptation to worship religious idols.

For us, it's the temptation to worship worldly idols, like money or family, health or house, work or self. And one of those things, of course, may be tempting for one person than another, but we're all just as tempted to idolatry and unfaithfulness and greed in one form or another as the person sitting next to us.

And so we're not to be complacent when it comes to temptation and sin in the Christian race. The great news, of course, is we're not alone in the Christian race.

[17:49] You see the rest of verse 13? But God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear or resist. And when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

Did you see how good God is? God is faithful to us and will help us run the race so that we don't miss the prize. How? Well, firstly, He will never let us be tempted beyond what we can bear.

And second, when we are tempted, He will always provide a way out. And I take it that includes providing God's, His Spirit to prompt our conscience to take that way out.

Sometimes the way out is simply listening to the Spirit's prompting to change the channel or turn the TV off. And sometimes it's listening to our conscience which tells us to keep our mouth shut rather than saying that thing we really feel like saying to that person.

And sometimes it's doing the good thing that the Spirit prompts us to do rather than not doing it at all. Either way, God is faithful and will help us run the Christian race so that we don't miss the prize.

[19:01] And for the Corinthians, it meant listening to the Spirit's prompting not to eat in an idol's temple. Not just because it can cause others to stumble, but because it can cause them to stumble as well.

So why take the risk? Paul is saying. I remember some 15 years ago, Michael Jackson, that pop singer, held his adopted child out of a window of a hotel over a balcony.

Here he is on the next side. I don't know if you remember this, but it made headlines the world over. And there was this huge discussion. And the poor kid, he's not only got a blanket over his head, he's being held precariously.

And notice, it's not on the balcony, it's over the balcony. And people were talking about, is Michael free to do that or not? And basically say, look, well, he's free, but he's really stupid to do that.

It's too risky. And it's the same here for the Corinthians. You may think you're free to eat in an idol's temple, but it's really stupid.

[20:03] It's too risky. And in case that is all not reason enough, you know, that others might stumble, that they might stumble, Paul really ups the ante and says, you know what?

Eating in an idol's temple is actually fellowshiping with demons. So point three in the outline, verse 14 in your Bibles. He says, therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.

I speak to sensible people, judge for yourselves what I say. It's not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks, you know, at communion, a participation in the blood of Christ.

And it's not the bread that we break, a participation in the body of Christ. Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all share in the one loaf. Now here, Paul starts talking about the Lord's Supper.

And the word participation is the same word as fellowship. And Paul says, whenever we have communion or come to the Lord's table, we use food. We use bread and wine as symbols to help us remember Christ's death.

[21:05] And as we participate in communion, we're participating or expressing our fellowship with Christ. And we're saying with these symbols that his body and his blood has brought us forgiveness and united us to him and each other as one body.

The closest analogy I could think of in society today is kind of like marching in an Anzac Day parade. The marching is simply a symbol. But as we participate in the march, we are both remembering the soldiers who died for us and expressing our fellowship, our solidarity with them that we now benefit from their sacrifice.

So also when we come to the Lord's table, bread and wine simply symbols, but as we participate in the Lord's supper, we both remember Christ who died for us and express our fellowship with him where his sacrifice brought us forgiveness and unity with him and each other.

But when the Corinthians ate at an idol's temple at the table of Lord Serapis or whichever Greek God it was, they're expressing fellowship not with God, not even with the idol because idols are nothing, they're actually expressing fellowship with demons that stand behind idols.

Have a look at verse 19. He says, Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything or that an idol is anything? No. But the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons not to God.

[22:38] And I do not want you to be participants or have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord at communion and the cup of demons too. You cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.

Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he? Do you see what Paul is saying? They cannot eat at an idol's temple not just because it might cause them or others to stumble back into idolatry but because to do so was to have fellowship with demons who stand behind all false religion.

And that does not glorify God does it? That does not honour God who bought us with Christ's precious blood and rightly does not want to share us with demons.

And so this is the vertical concern that Paul has here us and God. We can represent it like this on the next slide. Do what is what we're doing or how we're using our freedom does it glorify God or is it putting us at risk of stumbling too?

And so we can add these two concerns on the next slide to look like this the two principles. This helps us to decide how to use our freedom.

[23 : 59] Does it cause others to stumble or be saved? Does it cause ourselves to stumble or glorify God? And so when then are the Corinthians free to eat this sacrificial meat?

Well Paul concludes by applying these principles and showing them. So it's our last point point four and verse 23. He says I have the right to do anything you say the Corinthians say but not everything is beneficial says Paul.

I have the right to do anything the Corinthians say but not everything is constructive says Paul. No one should seek their own good but the good of others. That's the horizontal principle.

And so he says eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience for the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. In other words when it comes to buying a meat from the local butcher just go for it.

It's only meat after all and it belongs to the Lord anyway. What about the neighbour situation when you're invited to a neighbour's barbecue? Well 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 but if another person there says to you oh this has been offered to a sacrifice well do not eat it both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience.

[25 : 20] I'm referring to the other person's conscience not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another's conscience? If I take part in a meal with thankfulness why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?

In other words if a neighbour invites you to a barbecue and there's halal meat there like happened to our friends then go for it eat the meat but the horizontal principle means if there is another Christian who is also invited and they're concerned about it and they tell you look oh this is being sacrificed to an idol then don't eat it for the sake of that Christian's conscience because why wound their conscience and cause them to judge your freedom just forsake your freedom to safeguard their salvation and as for every other situation including the ones we face today we'll use both principles to help you know how to use your freedom in Christ you see verse 31 he says so whether you eat or drink or whatever you do do it all for the glory of God the vertical then verse 32 do not cause anyone to stumble whether Jews Greeks or the church of God the horizontal principle even as I try to please everyone in every way for I am not seeking my own good but the good of many so that they may be saved follow my example as I follow the example of Christ so can you see these two principles here at the end these are the two that we had applied to our own situations so take drinking alcohol which is one of the examples we started with yes we are free to drink alcohol in moderation but there may be situations where you forsake your freedom to safeguard someone else's salvation if a young

Christian has been an alcoholic and we do have people like that at our church then you might not drink in front of them in case they fall back into alcoholism and away from Christ that's the horizontal principle yet you might also not drink because you know that you yourself might fall into the temptation of drinking too much and not glorify God that's the vertical principle and that was my dad actually I grew up in a house where there was no alcohol at all and not because my dad thought it was a sin but because his father my grandfather had become an alcoholic and he would spend most of his pay packet down at the pub to the point where if my grandmother didn't get to his pay packet first remember in those days there was no internet transfer the pay packets were a literal packet with cash in it if she didn't get to that packet first that little yellow packet first then they would have next to no money for food that week and because my dad was a

Christian he did not want to risk stumbling into the same temptation his father stumbled into and not glorify God and like Michael Jackson it was too risky for him and so our house was alcohol free that's the vertical and that might apply for you as well I mean we all have different backgrounds and you don't have my father's background but nonetheless addiction is a common temptation we all need to watch or take a Roman Catholic Mass for example as I said they teach a different sort of communion they say officially that the bread becomes literal body of Jesus that the juice becomes the literal blood of Christ different Catholic churches might say different things but that's the official teaching and so for me personally I would not take part in it to participate in that kind of unbiblical worship is actually well it's false worship it's false religion and behind false religion stands what demons or take the movies we watch we might free to watch whatever we like but there are some things that might cause us to sin in our minds and not glorify

God and so we'll limit our freedom to glorify God and make sure we don't stumble for my friend who was a missionary I think he still is to Muslims to participate in their services I think personally is taking his freedom too far because again he's participating in false religion but can you see how these vertical and horizontal principles help us to decide what we are free and not free to do as you read in chapter 10 verse 23 we have the right we may think we have the right to do anything but not everything is beneficial for us or for others we may think we have the right to do anything but not everything is constructive and so instead verse 31 whether you eat or drink or whatever you do do it all for the glory of God and 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 am not seeking my own good but the good of many so that they may be saved follow my example as I follow the example of

[30:32] Christ let's pray our gracious father we do pray that you would help us to practice self-control and self-discipline to be willing to forsake our freedom for the good of others but also not to risk falling into temptation ourselves but to do everything for your glory and the good of others that they may be saved we ask it in Jesus name amen