

Two Chief Concerns

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[0:00] The scripture reading for today is taken from 1 Corinthians 10, verses 23-33.!

Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. For the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.

If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience.

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

I do not mean your conscience, but his, for why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?

[1:23] So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

Here ends the scripture reading. Thank you very much, Joan, for reading.

I think most of us, if not all of us, have taken some time to think about 2026 and perhaps have made plans, or we have desires of things we want to accomplish, or changes we wish to make.

And if you're an overachiever, you probably have a long list with ambitious time frames. But above and beyond whatever we may have planned for 2026, whatever desires we might have, this morning, I want to call us to commit ourselves to two chief concerns.

I want us to think about this year that's in front of us, laying aside whatever expectations we may have of it, whatever plans we have for it.

[3:01] And I want us this morning, in our remaining time, just to hear from God's word two chief concerns that we need to give ourselves to, that we need to occupy ourselves with.

And these two chief concerns, they're not concerns because we are at the beginning of a new year. They're not seasonal. These two chief concerns are ongoing concerns.

They are ongoing concerns, indeed, ongoing duties that God has laid upon all those who belong to him. And they are relevant, not just at the beginning of a new year, but they are relevant every day in every year.

And so this morning on this first Lord's Day of the year, I want us to consider them. But before we do, let me begin with a prayer.

Father, we are so grateful that you have spared our lives to see another year, and this first Lord's Day finds us in your house with your people and now sitting under the preaching of your word.

[4:30] Would you join there to us, Lord? And would you speak to our hearts? Would you speak to our hearts, Lord, in a way that is not just relevant for this moment, but truly relevant for the rest of this year and indeed for the rest of our lives?

Lord, cause us to hear as we ought and then to obey as we should. And we pray, O Lord, that your name will be glorified in and through the preaching of your word.

And we ask all this in Christ's name. Amen. In this passage before us, we find the Apostle Paul concluding instructions that he had given to the Corinthian church regarding the issue of eating food that had been sacrificed to idols.

Early in verses 14 to 22, Paul had expressly prohibited the going into temples and eating food that was sacrificed to idols.

And this is what was happening in the Corinthian church. There were some in the church who were going into the temples of idols and because they had the view that idols are nothing and I'm a strong person and all things are lawful for me to do in any event.

[6:06] I can do that. And Paul said to them, no, you are not to go into the temples of idols and eat food. That's what he was saying to them in verses 14 to 22.

But the reality was that the city of Corinth was overrun by idolatry. Idolatry was pervasive in the city of Corinth.

While a person could certainly avoid going into an idol's temple and eating food there, that was something that you could do. It was very difficult because idolatry was so intertwined in Corinthian society, it was very difficult to totally separate yourself from the idolatry that was taking place.

In Corinth, for example, in the marketplace, the food that they would buy, the meat that they would buy, generally, meat that was sacrificed to idols made itself into the temple and was sold right alongside ordinary meat and there was no way of knowing which was which.

And if you made an inquiry, there's no telling that the person who you spoke to would tell you the truth. And so, just avoiding idolatry, if one were to do that, you'd have to leave the city of Corinth.

[7:36] It was a very complicated place when it came down to this issue of idolatry. This was the Corinthian reality. And Paul understood this reality.

Paul understood that beyond the clear prohibitions not to go into the temples of idols, the members of the church at Corinth had to wisely live in this society where idolatry was so pervasive.

And so what Paul does is in these verses, in verses 23 to 30, Paul wisely identifies two particular situations, two common activities, buying food, buying meat in the marketplace, or eating food in an unbeliever's house, and he begins to address them on these two particular issues to point to larger issues because Paul understood that it was more than just trying to list all the various things that they should and should not do.

What Paul does is Paul speaks to them in a general and a principled way to help them to make God-honoring choices that were moral and ethical and pleasing to the Lord.

And so for the apostle Paul, the issue was motivation. The issue was motive. What would motivate you when you go to the marketplace to buy or not to buy? What would motivate you when you go to an unbeliever's house to eat or not to eat?

[9:21] What's your motivation? This was what was of concern to Paul. It wasn't so much what they did, but it was first and foremost the motivation for why they did what they did.

And so what we see Paul doing as a wise pastor, in verses 31 to 33, Paul addresses the church at Corinth in this principled way where he calls them to occupy themselves with two chief concerns.

He's essentially saying to them, I'm not overly concerned with the specific things that you do. But what I'm concerned about is that as you do them, you give yourselves to two chief concerns.

Be occupied with these concerns. The apostle Paul is essentially saying to the church at Corinth in verses 31 to 33.

And so I want to consider in our remaining time these two chief concerns that Paul puts before the Corinthians. And I want us to put them before ourselves this morning as well.

[10:44] The first chief concern that we are called to keep in front of us as we live life is the glory of God. That's the first chief concern that Paul raises.

Look at how he does in verse 31. So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Notice that verse 31 starts with the conjunction so. And so it signals to us that Paul is connecting what he said earlier to what he's now saying in verse 31.

What he said in verses 23 to 30, he is connecting to what he's saying in verse 31. In verse 31, Paul says, whatever the activity, whatever the activity we engage in, we are to do it for the glory of God.

Now, Paul addressed the Corinthians about the issues surrounding the purchase and the consumption of food and the idolatrous context of Corinth.

[11:59] But what is, again, his concern is their motivation and what it should be rather to buy meat in the marketplace. And how they should conduct themselves when they eat at an unbeliever's house.

He does that. But he does more than that. He goes beyond that and he says, he says, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, whatever you do encompasses every single other possibility of activity that we can engage in.

Paul says, whatever we do, we are to do all for the glory of God. Brothers and sisters, this is God's word. And these are not words that seem to say one thing and are saying something else.

Paul is saying, whatever you do, you are to do it for the glory of God. Those words encompass all of life. There's no aspect of life that is exempt from what Paul is calling us to.

Paul is saying to us that as we live life, every aspect of life is to be lived to the glory of God. The first question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism is this.

[13:37] What is the chief end of man? And the answer is, man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

This is why we exist, brothers and sisters. We exist to live out this chief end, which is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

This chief end is the first of our two chief concerns that we should be occupied with as we live life. Not just in the beginning of a new year, not just in a new year, but this is the chief concern for all of life.

we're all different. We all have different circumstances, and despite our differences, and despite our different circumstances, God has called all of us in those different circumstances, with our different personalities, with our different giftings, God has called all of us to pursue this chief end, which is his glory.

glory. So what does it mean to do whatever we do for the glory of God? And perhaps even more fundamentally than that, what is the meaning of glory?

[15:03] What does it mean to glorify God? what is glory? In the Old Testament, the word glory comes from a root word that means weighty or heavy.

It's the same word that we also get the words dignity and respect and reverence from. And so we can say to give glory means to give weight or to give dignity, to give reverence, to give respect. Perhaps you've heard someone say something like, oh, you don't need to pay him any attention. He's a lightweight or she's a lightweight or he doesn't carry any weight around here. What people are saying is that person's stature, that person's authority is really of no consequence. They can be disregarded. They don't need to be respected.

What they ask you to do, you don't need to respect that because they have no weight. They carry no weight. In the new dictionary of the Bible, it makes this statement about glory.

[16:25] This is what it says about glory. Glory is preeminently a divine quality. Ultimately, only God has glory. Now, God shares his glory with his creatures, but it's not glory that is innate to them.

It's an independent glory from them. It's not independent of God. It is God sharing his glory with his creature. Ultimately and preeminently, all glory belongs to God.

God. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, when we conclude it, we pray, for yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever.

All glory belongs to God. And so, when we think of all of this and we connect the dots, we remember that glory means weighty and heavy and reverence and respect.

it must mean that to give glory to God, we must live in such a way that honors the Lord, that we see him as weighty, we see him as one who deserves reverence.

[17:39] We see him as one who deserves our attention, one we listen to, one we revere, one we respect. Living for God's glory means that we seek to please him.

And we do it not as a favor, we do it as his due, we recognize that this belongs to God. This, brothers and sisters, is our chief concern.

This is the first of our chief concerns. And so, whatever activity we can think about this morning, whatever it might be, whatever duty is the responsibilities that we have, we are called to carry out those responsibilities, carry out those duties, to live in those areas to bring glory to God.

Those of us who are husbands, husbands, what would our marriages look like if we endeavor each day to relate to our wives, mindful of this chief concern that we want to relate to our wives in a way that brings glory to God.

What would our marriages look like? you see, this way, we don't have to have a list as it were, I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that, I'm going to do the other thing.

[19:18] It is one chief concern. God, help me to relate to my wife in a way that brings glory to you. And wives, what would your relationship with your husbands look like?

if that is your chief concern each day, that, God, I want to relate to my husband today in a way that brings glory to you.

Not glory to me, not satisfaction to me, but glory to you. What about as we parent, both parents and children, what if this is our motivation, this is in front of us, that we want to relate to our children, children we want to relate to our parents to bring glory and honor to God.

And we can ask the same question with all the other responsibilities that we have. What would our lives look like by the grace of God, moment by moment, that this is our chief concern?

God, I want to bring glory to you in this particular situation. What would our lives look like? As we go out into the workplace, as employees, as employers, as we're homemakers, as we're providers, when we meet with the disappointments of life, when life goes sideways and things don't turn out the way we want them to turn out, what would it look like for us to bring glory to God in all of life?

[21:09] And see, brothers and sisters, if this sounds heavy in our hearts, we're not hearing it the way that God has called us to it. God will not lay on us that which we cannot do. He will not lay on us that which he does not give us the grace to do.

God calls us that whatever we do, that we are to do it to the glory of God. That beyond our spouse, beyond our employer, beyond whatever we're dealing with, we're seeing God and he is the one in front of us and we're thinking, God, I want to glorify you in this.

You know that we can glorify God in how we argue? Well, let me say it another way, we can glorify God in how we have disagreements because we love disagreements.

We'll have them wherever they are people, in home, in the workplace, in the community, in the church. We'll have these disagreements, but if we would arm ourselves with this motivation, God, I want to glorify you.

I want to please myself. I don't want to be proven, that I'm right, but I want to glorify you. Our world is filled with people who are preoccupied with discovering what their purpose is.

[22:36] And see, brothers and sisters, those of us who have come to Christ, we don't need to be on that futile exercise. exercise.

We don't need to be on that path that is a dead end street. God has already shown us that what our purpose is, is to glorify him.

That is our chief end. That is our chief concern, that we want to seek to glorify God. God. And you know, here's what I would encourage us to do, even in this moment.

This is not so much to say, let me figure this out, or figure that out. This is to say, God, help me to do that. To pray, God, give me the wisdom in whatever the endeavor, whatever the circumstance, that my aim, I would have the presence of mind to desire to bring glory to your name.

This is the first of the two chief concerns that the apostle Paul held out to the church at Corinth, but he holds out to all who belong to Christ.

[23:45] But we must be occupied with this. The second chief concern is in verses 32 to 33.

And it is the salvation of others. And this is my second and final point. look again at what Paul says about the salvation of others starting in verse 32.

He says, give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God. Just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that many, but that of many, that they may be saved.

Now to appreciate the point that the apostle Paul is making, we need to bear in mind what was happening in the church at Corinth.

There were people who were doing all manner of things in the name of the Lord, and they had no concern for how it affected those around them.

[25:07] For example, as we've already mentioned, there were those who saw idols as nothing. They didn't think, well, idols have any power, and so people offering food to them, it doesn't really matter.

I can eat it. I can eat it like I eat any other kind of food, and so they would not be concerned about what they ate, and they would not be concerned about who was present when they ate it, whether it was a believer or an unbeliever, and certainly if it was an unbeliever who felt that idols were something, and they see this believer who is eating it, they could easily draw the conclusion that, well, it really doesn't matter.

Christianity embraces multiple gods as well. This person is a Christian, and they're eating food, worship, sacrifice to my God. Or it could be a young believer, someone who's come out of idolatry, and they see this believer who is eating food offered to idols, and it could tempt them to go back into idolatry, to see it as something that really doesn't matter so much.

What Paul is saying, he's saying you must have concern for how you act, and its impact on those around you.

That's what he's essentially saying. And notice, what Paul does is, Paul makes this point in one sentence. It's in two verses, but it's really one coherent sentence that he makes this point.

[26:48] And to really understand how Paul is making the point, we have to actually read verse 33 first, and then connect it to what he's saying in verse 32, because in verse 32, that's where he lays the command.

But we don't appreciate the command until we appreciate what he says about his own example in verse 33. Look again at what he says in verse 33. Paul says, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many that they may be saved.

Now, Paul is not talking about being a people pleaser. That's what he's talking about. We know Paul was not a people pleaser.

Paul sought to please the Lord in whatever he did. But instead, what Paul is talking about, rather than being a people pleaser, is he's talking about being a servant to others.

others. And he's talking about not being a stumbling block to others. In other words, he's saying, my example is I seek to serve others so that I'm not a stumbling block to them with regard to their salvation.

[28:10] He says, I live my life with the salvation of others in view. I will serve them and I will seek the advantage over my advantage.

In other words, I would be willing to be disadvantaged so that I am not a stumbling block for the salvation of other people.

This is what Paul is saying his own example was. Now, if we look at verse 32, and we hear what Paul is calling us to in verse 32, mindful or in light of what he says in verse 33, he says, give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God.

What does it mean, give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God? Is Paul calling us to be sensitive to the feelings of other people so that we don't offend them in any way?

No, he's not calling us to that because the truth is that living as the Lord would have us to live is offensive to many people.

[29:33] But Paul is not talking about being offensive to people, but what he is instead talking about is being a stumbling block to people, to being a hindrance to other people.

So literally what he's saying is that we have to live in such a way that we don't put obstacles in front of others and we cause them to stumble. Literally what he says is be blameless towards other people.

And he mentions three groups of people. He mentions the Jews and these would be religious people who were not saved but they were near to God.

And then he mentions the Greeks and the word Greeks is oftentimes used to refer to Gentiles and this would be again another group of believers but unlike the Jews they were far from God.

They were into paganism and they were very far from the Lord. And then the third group is the church of God. He's referring to those who belong to God, those who are saved.

[30:43] Now obviously the primary concern is for those who are unsaved. The Jews who though near to God are unsaved and the Gentiles who are far away from the Lord.

And the concern is for both of their salvation. And Paul is saying that those who belong to Christ in addition to occupying themselves with bringing glory to God, they want to occupy themselves with being mindful of the salvation of these people, being concerned that they come to saving faith in Christ.

Now how do we do this? I think it's obvious that Paul is not addressing what we would call blatant sinful living. He's not addressing that.

I think we all know that we should not live contrary to what Scripture clearly calls us to in black and white.

If we live a sinful life that's contrary to Scripture, then we are denying that we actually belong to Christ.

[31:56] Christ. But Paul is getting at something else. He's getting at the kind of offense or stumbling block that we can bring to other people when we are more concerned with ourselves, pleasing ourselves, and our own self- advantage, and the things that concern us as opposed to the good of those around us.

This is Paul's concern. And this is in our homes, this is in our workplaces, this is in our local church, this is in the wider community where these concerns would be in an ongoing way.

And I think we need to be honest and say that giving up our rights, taking the short end of the stick, none of us does that naturally.

None of us naturally would do these things. And so as important as a person's salvation is, we are such fallen sinners that in that moment it is more important to us, left to ourselves, to be concerned about our interests than that person's soul.

And it is only by the transforming work of Christ in our hearts and lives that our affections and that our desires and that our motivations can be reordered that we can have a genuine concern for the salvation of others and that we would be willing to suffer advantage, to experience disadvantage, because we have in view the salvation of the other person.

[34:07] But just imagine what our world would be like. and maybe not the wider world, but our narrow world, your world and my world, in which you live, in which I live.

If we live with a concern for the salvation of others, those who don't know Christ, and even those who do know Christ, that we don't put stumbling blocks in front of them, because we can do that as well.

What would our lives look like? What would our worlds look like? If this was our approach to relating to others, that first and foremost in front of us is their salvation.

And brothers and sisters, I want to encourage us to commit this to prayer. Many of us have family members who don't know Christ. We have good friends who don't know Christ.

we have people who we work with, and they don't know Christ. And it is possible to relate to them day by day, week by week, month by month, and it never registers on our radar that they don't know Christ.

[35:22] And it never registers to us that there are things that we are doing that can be pushing them away from Christ. There are things that we can be doing to be planting seeds in their lives, to call them to Christ.

And so this is the second chief concern that the Apostle Paul called the Corinthian church to, by extension, all Christians, and it is what, on this first Sunday of 2026, that I want us to be called to this morning, brothers and sisters.

let us, by the grace of God, ask the Lord to help us, to put before us in an ongoing way these two chief concerns, his glory and the salvation of other people.

people. I'm aware that a sermon like this could cause us to be more mindful of ourselves than we are of the Lord, be more mindful of what we need to do than what we need God to do in us and through us.

things. And we can be making our list of all the things we're going to do, we're going to do all these things. And thank God that we are thinking in some direction of seeking to obey this word, but I want to encourage us in this way.

[37:02] There will be days that we could rejoice and thank God that maybe we were concerned about the salvation of others. we were concerned about living for his glory. But there are going to be days where we fail.

We just fall flat on our faces. We can be encouraged on both days. Even on the day that we feel really good about giving God glory and really good about being concerned about the salvation of others, even on those days we don't do it perfectly.

So it falls below the standard that God calls us to. And then on those days when we fail, whether we are feeling good about what we did or we feel horrible about what we did and how we failed, ultimately brothers and sisters, we need to look to the one who did not fail.

The one who perfectly glorified God as he lived on this earth. And the one who was not just concerned about the salvation of others, he gave his life for the salvation of others.

Listen to what Jesus says in the high priestly prayer in John 17. He says, verse 5, I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work you gave me to do.

[38:24] I glorified you on earth, gave glory to God perfectly, and he accomplished the work that God gave him to do, which is to come and to live a perfect life and then to die a sacrificial death on behalf of sinners.

And that is where we rest, brothers and sisters. That is where we draw our satisfaction from, that Christ has perfectly glorified God, that Christ has perfectly been concerned for the souls of the lost. And I pray that as we do this, it will one, motivate us to follow the Lord's example, but also to rest in what he has accomplished for us.

Christ. As I close this morning, I wanted to say a word to those who do not know Christ. If you don't know Christ this morning, these two chief concerns are really not for you.

These chief concerns are the concerns that are laid on those who belong to Christ. If you do not know Christ this morning, your chief concern must be your eternal soul.

[40:16] And the Bible tells us that the only way to escape the wrath that is to come is we must turn away from sin, we must repent, we must put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so this morning, if you're not within your heart of hearts and you do not know Jesus Christ, I say you come to Jesus this morning, turn away from your sin, and trust in him.

And what you will find is he is a savior who is quick to pardon every sin. And it matters not what that sin is. His grace is far greater than our worst sin.

And so I call you to repentance this morning. I call you to put trust and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is your chief concern. And then upon responding to that chief concern, you can embrace these other concerns to glorify God and to be concerned about the salvation of others.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we are so grateful that you have given us your word. And I pray for us this morning, Lord, that you would help us by your spirit to recognize the need to give ourselves to these two chief concerns, to bring glory to your name and to seek the salvation of others.

[41:57] Father, you know where each one of us is, you know what each one of us needs. Join there to us now and help us. We pray all these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.