

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1 AM

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if you would turn up 1 Corinthians 10 that Susan just read for us on page 958, we come to the end today of this little section in 1 Corinthians, these three chapters 8, 9 and 10, which are all about, well at least on the surface, it's all about eating meat offered to idols and this was a big pressure on the Christians in Corinth. It was impossible to live in Corinth and avoid this issue. If you had a birthday party for your 13-year-old or if a friend of your 13-year-olds had a birthday party, it would be held in the temple.

You know those playrooms? There'd be a room for the kids and all the meat would be offered to idols. If you had a celebration, a city celebration, feasting at the idol temple meant that eating meat likely was offered to the demons there. And as you might expect, the Corinthians are fighting over this. Some of them say it's fine to eat the meat. Others say, no, it's not fine, that's worshipping demons. Others say, no, we're free to do whatever we like, why should I limit my freedom? So what's so wise about these chapters is that the Apostle Paul keeps showing that the real issue is not meat offered to idols. As Jordan said last week, on every issue in the Corinthian letter here, on just about every issue, the fundamental issue is pride. And that means every time we think we're better than the Corinthians, we suffer from exactly the same disease.

So the last four verses of chapter 10, the first verse of chapter 11, what the Apostle Paul does is he takes two very strong spiritual ropes and he ties them around all the issues that have been bouncing around in eight to ten idols, freedom, personal rights. And if we were to take these two principles, if you like, and apply them, it would make a huge change in our lives and a huge change in our church. Because the Corinthians had asked Paul, what do we do about food offered to idols to settle the dispute among them? It would be like writing to the Apostle and say, how can you settle the dispute of how we handle COVID or church governance? I know that's a bit close to the bone, but you know what I'm talking about. It was an area on which the Bible did not give an explicit command. And most of the decisions, the vast majority of decisions we make as believers, are in this big area where the Bible does not give an explicit or clear command. Where should I holiday? Should I shop at Safeway or Save-On? Come afterwards,

I'll tell you where. Should I cheer for the Canucks? Should I go to a Canucks game? Should I drive a car? If so, which car? Most of the decisions we make as believers, there isn't a clear command, do this or that. And throughout the centuries, Christians have tended to go one of two directions on this. Both are directions of pride. The first is legalism, where we come up with lots of rules and regulations and you have to follow those rules and we look down on those who don't follow those rules and you become hard and brittle and arrogant about your rules. And the other is license. This is the way of individualism where we say, these are my rights and my freedoms and my autonomy. And the problem with that is we become like people around us and our faith becomes increasingly irrelevant. But both of them really stem from pride. So what are these two revolutionary principles the Apostle gives us in all these issues?

And I want to spend the rest of the time on these two things. Number one, in verse 31, do all things to the glory of God. You see down there at verse 31, so whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Most of us spend most of our time seeking our own glory. We try to play God.

[4 : 3 1] And here is the most revolutionary principle of Christian living. Whatever you are doing, eating, drinking, swimming, walking, playing, working, having children, exercising, putting out the trash, calling your parents, spending money, do all, all, all for the glory of God. And the whole conversation about meat offered to idols comes to this, whether an action that they took and whether an action that we take brings glory to God. It's God and His glory that's the great test of what is right and wrong in every circumstance. Our ultimate aim is not to please ourselves, but to

please Him. Not to build my glory, but to seek His. In her novel, *Wise Blood*, Flannery O'Connor says of her character Hazel Motes, there was a deep, black, wordless conviction in him that the way to avoid Jesus was to avoid sin.

It's very clever. You avoid Jesus by keeping the rules. And if you do that, you've got all the rights. He owes you a good life. You don't need the glory of God. You can build your own, you see. And the Corinthians, as we've seen, are so preoccupied by their personal freedoms and rights and not the glory of God. Well, that's very fine, you say, David, but what does that mean, do all things to their glory? I mean, we have this vague and fuzzy idea of what glory is.

The first meaning of glory is literally heaviness. God alone has glory in Himself. He's heavy with majesty and power and dominion and rule and position. He's rich in glory. He deserves the highest reputation, praise and worship. So, to do something for the glory of God means that in your choice, you're showing that God weighs more than anything else in your life or anyone else. It means that God is more important than anything else, even your own glory, even the approval of others, more than what you'll do to make yourself happy. But glory is not just a neutral, unqualified power and greatness.

Do you remember in the Old Testament when Moses said, I want to see your glory? He said, yes, I will show you my goodness. I'll make my goodness pass before you. Otherwise, all the power and majesty and might of God might be crushing. And this is why in the Gospel of John, Jesus, as He approaches His death on the cross, says that in the cross, in His death, it is the supreme revelation of His glory and the glory of God.

[7 : 31] Because as He dies, it is out of His sheer absolute goodness and grace. In humbling Himself, in giving Himself for our sake, in sacrificing Himself to death, that is where the glory of God is preeminently revealed. And that means to do something for the glory of God is to do something good for another, which may take humility and may take sacrifice and giving, but it will certainly take love.

And glory is not just great power, nor is it just great goodness, but it's when that power and goodness shines out of God. And we see it. So, when God rescued the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, He says again and again and again, it's to show my glory. I want to show my glory. And then when God dwells with His people at the end of the book of Exodus, He comes down in a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire by night. It is His glory. And when Jesus is transfigured on the mountain, do you remember, He shines with an unearthly, with a heavenly light? It is, Peter says later, we saw His glory.

So, to do all things for the glory of God means being aware that even in the most ordinary and mundane things that you and I do, if we do them for God, God Himself is able to shine through those things with the light of His goodness to others. Isn't that amazing?

As I was preparing this, I thought I should give a hundred illustrations where I see this happening in the congregation. But I thought, well, no, that would give you all fat heads and the rest of us would feel depressed. So, I won't. But it's true. Remember how Jesus says, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works. Why? And give glory to your Father in heaven. Now, there's a couple of steps in between there. But it requires creative thinking. I mean, how do I do this cleaning job in a way that's going to show the glory of God? How do I exercise hospitality that shows the goodness of God? How am I going to make decisions that shines with the glory of God? Since God is glorious in Himself, He does not need our praise. He doesn't lack glory. He doesn't need us to bring Him glory. He's the one single person in the universe. And if nobody gave glory to God, it wouldn't affect His glory one little bit. It wouldn't take away His glory just in the same way as if everyone in the world were blind. It wouldn't affect the sun shining. But here is the amazing thing. God delights to bring His people into His great purpose of revealing Himself and His goodness and His glory to others. Isn't that great? Like the Westminster Shorter Catechism says, what is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

[10 : 48] It's so hopeful and it's so purposeful. Life is about far more than a job or marriage or a house, you know, find a house or retirement. And this is the first revolutionary principle in Christian living, do all to the glory of God. And if you're following me, you're probably asking, how do I do that?

How do we do this in concrete ways? Like what does it mean in practice? And that brings us to the second big principle and it is copy Jesus in loving others. Copy Jesus in loving others.

As soon as I use the word love, you know Christian love is unique. This is not Paul saying, all you need is love. This is not love is love is love is love. This is not the selective love where we only love those who are going to give back to us. This is the unique love that burst into the world in the person of Jesus Christ. It's utterly other person centred. It's not sentimental or schmaltzy. And it was so remarkable and so shocked the early Christians that they coined a whole new word. It's the word agape. I know you're never supposed to quote a Greek word in a sermon, but there it is, agape. It's the unique Christian love. And this is so important to the Corinthians who are struggling with pride that he gives a whole chapter to it in chapter 13. I'm looking forward to that. But now as he explains that to love others as Jesus does, what the apostle does is he spins it out and he gives us four steps in what it means to love others as Jesus does. Just listen, see if you can hear the four steps in verses 32 to 11. 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, be imitators of me as I am of Christ. Let me just go through those four steps and we'll finish. Step number one, give no offense to Jews or Greeks or to the church of God. This is how we do all things to the glory of God. What it means is this, it means valuing the other person in such a way that you will try and avoid giving them something to stumble in their Christian faith. Or if they're non-Christian, something will block their path to becoming Christians. Do you remember this is where Paul began in chapter 8 on food offered to idols. You remember in chapter 8 verses 1 and 2 concerning food offered to idols? All of us possess knowledge, he said, this knowledge puffs up but love builds up. He says your love is, your knowledge is just giving you fat heads, it's just puffing you up, whereas love builds up. Paul says it doesn't really matter whether you're right and wrong on this issue about idol food. The point is that by exercising your rights, you are becoming a stumbling block to the weak, verse 9. Or in verse 11, by your knowledge you are destroying the weak person, the brother for whom Christ died as you sin against Christ. He says I'd rather be vegan than cause a brother to stumble, the sister to stumble. [14 : 25] This first step is a lovely proof of Christian love. I think it means thinking about people in your life and thinking about how vulnerable we all are, putting ourselves in the shoes of others, taking care in what we say and how we say it, so as not to cause a brother or a sister to be tripped up in their Christian path. Years ago when I worked in Sydney, I worked with an older Christian who had said something in public that had upset a brother. And although my first friend was probably right in what he said, when he heard that the brother was upset, he jumped in his car and drove the two and a half hours down the coast and spent the morning with his brother and then the two and a half hours back simply out of love. It affected me very deeply. I thought he does not want to put any obstacle in the way of that guy's faith. And that's the first step in Christian love. Give no offence to others, only the offence of the cross. Step two, seek the positive good of the other person.

Now what makes this impossible is pride of course, because even when I look like I might be doing something good for someone else, I often am doing it for my own self and for my reputation. However, the Apostle Paul in verse 23 goes at the Corinthians and he quotes the big slogan that's going around the church at the time. Verse 23 in chapter 10, all things are lawful. In the original it's all things are lawful for me, for me.

And this is the perfect creed of proud individualism. My life, my choice, my freedom, my body, my rights.

What's good for me, that's the measure of what's good, full stop. But Paul immediately turns their individualism on its head. He says, yeah, but not all things are helpful. Not all things build other people up. He says, we don't live to ourselves. We don't make decisions just on what is good for me.

[16 : 41] The bigger consideration in our decisions is what's helpful and builds up the faith of others. And that's the second step in agape love. Because if you're a Christian and you follow the Lord Jesus, you're not an island in yourself. You're part of the body of Christ. And the love that Christ has for you will show itself in how you care for others in the body. So when you come to make decisions about ordinary mundane things in life, part of what you're asking is, what can I do that might build up other people? Or as Paul says in verse 24, let not anyone seek his own good only, but also the good of another.

I mean, we've looked at this before. This is completely revolutionary. Paul's not saying give up your own interests completely, only when it's more loving to do so. But the willingness to give them up for the good of the other means that when we come to make decisions, we're asking different

questions than our friends around about us. We're no longer asking what's in it for me. I'm asking what's most loving for you. I'm not asking how can I express my rights and freedoms. I'm asking how can I limit my rights and freedoms to build you up.

This completely changes everything. I mean, for example, simple illustration, it changes why you and I come to church. You don't just come to church to meet with Jesus for yourself, to feed your soul, and to worship God. That's part of the reason. You also come to build other people up. And that means as you drive here, Christianly, you think creatively about what you can do to build other people.

I think this is one of the problems with being online. Now, I know there are all sorts of people who physically can't be with us here. That was me for the last two weeks. I had a bit of a bad back, and how thankful I am for the live stream. But I doubt that's true for the hundred people who are online today. How can we better seek the advantage of others? So here's step one and step two.

[18:57] Don't put a stumbling block in your brother's way. Number two, seek the positive good of the other person. How do we seek? What is the positive good of the other person? Step number three, do whatever it takes to help the other person toward salvation. And that's been the thing since the beginning of chapter eight. Paul wants the Corinthians to catch this as their concern, to be more concerned about the salvation of those around them than their great knowledge and their rights and their freedoms. It is possible for us to endanger the salvation of others in the decisions that we make. Toward those who are not yet Christians, we need to think how would they perceive the Christian faith? In fact, the whole of chapter nine that we breezed over very quickly is a long personal illustration from the apostle himself. Because one of the reasons the Corinthians criticized him was that he refused to receive payment for his ministry when he was there in Corinth. Remember that?

Instead, he went and worked in a sweatshop basically and earned his money that way to preach the gospel free of charge. Now in other places he went and preached the gospel, he was quite happy to receive remuneration. But in Corinth, money worked differently. Money always came with strings attached. It was always a sophisticated form of control. So in chapter nine, Paul's very clear, I have a right, I had a right that you would pay me. Look back at the chapter, verse four, verse five, verse six, verse 12, it's my right.

Jesus himself said it's my right. And then halfway through verse 12, he says, but I've not made any use of this right. Why? That would put it rather, I didn't want to put any obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. In other words, he deliberately handed over his right to be paid for the sake of their salvation. I've become all things to all people so that I might win some. And the treasurer is sitting there saying, I hope David is about to announce he will do the same. I wish I could.

This is the third step in Christian love. When you ask, what is the good I can do for that person? You ask then, whatever moves them into the direction of their salvation, that's the best form of love. What builds them up in their Christian faith? What will cause them to see Christ more clearly? Or to serve Jesus more wonderfully? Or what does it mean to invest in the growth of other people?

[21:43] This is Christian love. And that's why the illustration, verse 27 of chapter 10, is as it is. As we read through that, if you're invited to the home of a non-Christian and they serve you meat, Paul says, don't act like a Christian snob. Don't say, well, I'm sorry, I must inquire, was this sacrifice to idols?

No, no, no, you eat what's set before you. Unless the host says it was sacrificed to idols, then you must decline, not because you have to, not because the meat is tainted, but because it might hinder their path towards salvation because they believe in the idols. See? So step one in this Christian love is not putting a stumbling block in anyone's way. Step two is seeking the positive good of the other person.

Step three, the positive good is their salvation. And step four, the final step, which is the basis for it all. And that is, this is how Christ loved us. So look at 11.1, be imitators of me as I am of Christ. This is the core of Christian ethics. You might be asking, where does the power and energy come from to love like this? It comes from the way Christ has loved us. You know, we follow the Lord who gave up the privileges of heaven and entered our world and humbled himself in grace and in love for us and suffered for us and rose for us just out of love. And the Christian life is following in his footsteps, receiving his love so that we're able to follow in his footsteps. This is the Jesus who weans us from our own pride and our self-love. This is the Jesus who said, the first will be last and the last will be first, that anyone who exalts themselves will be brought low and whoever brings,

puts themselves low will be exalted. And he showed that the greatest expression of freedom is being able to give up your freedom for the sake of others. And here are the two revolutionary principles side by side, doing all for the glory of God and loving others as Christ would have you love them. And they're not two things, they're the two sides of one coin, they belong together. How can I do anything for the glory of God? By seeking to love as Christ has loved. And even though faith, hope and love abide, and I think abide forever, the greatest is love. So St John's, let's pursue love. Amen.