

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1 PM

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[0 : 0 0] So it'd be great if you could turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 10 that Aaron just read. My name is David and I work on staff with Aaron and grateful for his invitation to come and speak with you.

It's been a long time since I've been at this service, so it's nice to be with you. And we're going to come to a conclusion of these three chapters, 1 Corinthians 8, 9 and 10.

If you're visiting or if this is your first night here, these three chapters are a unit in the book of 1 Corinthians, a very naughty church in the New Testament.

And the issue that's on the surface through these chapters is what to do about food that's been offered to idols. It may not be an issue for you today, but it is a pressing issue in Corinth.

Especially if you became a Christian, it was unavoidable to deal with this question. So every birthday party that your friends had would be held in the temple of an idol.

[1 : 0 7] Your high school graduation would be held in the ballroom of the temple of Aphrodite. Or one of the other of 34 temples that were in that small city of Corinth to 34 different gods.

Every public holiday you had to go up to the temple with your friends. And when you did, there'd be some liturgy like we did tonight. And then they would take an animal and they would sacrifice the animal and then they'd have a barbecue with the meat afterwards.

And they might have sacrificed the animal to Apollo or to Poseidon or to Hera, to Athena, to Dionysius, to Zeus, to Pan. And then you'd eat the meat.

And that would be the feast of, and that would be eating food offered to idols. If you worked in the tax office, the annual party would be held in the temple to Caesar.

And if you didn't go, it was not looked on favorably. Every form of employment demanded attendance at the temple. And if you were lucky enough or unlucky enough to go to the temple of Asclepius, you'd all take drugs together and then go to sleep in this big room and have dreams and then interpret your dreams together.

[2 : 2 8] Might be more interesting than coming to church at St. John's, but there are problems with it. Because if you were a Christian, it immediately put you in a very awkward position living in Corinth.

I mean, should you go to the temple? Should you eat that meat after it's been offered to an idol? And as you can imagine, the Corinthians were fighting over it.

Corinthians made a...they were experts at fighting over things. So some were saying, you should never go, you should never eat any meat offered to idols. Others were saying, I'm free as a Christian, I could go, don't limit my freedoms.

And at the start of chapter 8, if you just flick back to that for a moment, they had written to Paul about this. You see the first two words, now concerning, he's addressing their question, now concerning food offered to idols.

And his answer's a bit strange. See how he starts? Because in Paul's mind, the food offered to idols is not the real issue.

- [3 : 40] The real issue was their pride. They were puffed up. They had fat heads like balloons, being puffed up with their own pride.
- And that is the opposite. There was no room left in their lives for love. And the big thing to notice in these chapters is what Paul does.
- See, there's no direct command in the Bible about what to do in this circumstance. And in exactly the same way, the vast majority of the decisions that you make and that I make today and every day, there's no direct command in the Bible.
- I mean, where should you go on holidays? Should you shop at Safeway or Save On? You know, should you, should I drive a car?
- What sort of car should I drive? Should I cheer for the Canucks? Probably not, right? So what does the Apostle do?
- [4 : 43] Well, in these chapters, notice what he doesn't do. He doesn't do two things. He doesn't give them a whole list of rules and regulations to follow. That's the way of legalism.
- And the problem with legalism, apart from the fact that you don't follow the rules, is it makes you proud. You begin to look down on others who are not following the same rules as you.
- But he doesn't do that. There's no room for love in that. The other thing he doesn't say is he doesn't say, follow your heart. Just you're free as a Christian. Do as you wish.
- That's the way of license. And the problem with that is that also makes you proud because you look at the people with rules and say, well, they're not as good as I am. And that doesn't make room for love either.
- So as we come to the end of these three chapters here, the last four verses of our section, what the Apostle does is he gives us two principles.
- [5 : 39] They're two strong spiritual ropes that tie all the issues together. Two things that if we do them, no matter what decisions we are making, no matter what we're facing, will please God.
- So here are the two, here are the, that's where I'm going to go for the rest of the sermon. Here are the two principles God, that Paul gives us here. Number one, do all for the glory of God.
- See that in verse 31 in chapter 10? Again, so whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
- I know a lot of us spend a lot of our time seeking our own glory. We try and play God. But here is the revolutionary principle of Christian living. Whatever you are doing, Paul says, drinking, eating, playing, working, having children, swimming, cleaning your teeth, putting out the trash, calling your family, whatever you do, all that you do, all, all, all, says the Apostle, do all to the glory of God.
- In other words, the whole conversation about Meadhofer to idols comes down to this. Whether an action that I take brings glory to God or not. It is God and His glory that is the big deal.
- [7 : 00] That's the burning deal for us as Christians. What's right and wrong in every circumstance is what will bring Him glory. So our ultimate aim is not pleasing ourselves or pleasing Him.
- Not seeking my own glory, but seeking His. What does that mean? I mean, we talk about glory, we use the word tonight, but it's a bit fuzzy and vague, isn't it?
- The Bible says that the first meaning of glory is heaviness, weightiness. God alone has glory in Himself.

He's heavy with majesty and power and position. He's rich in glory. He deserves the highest reputation and praise. So to do something for the glory of God means that in your choices you show that God outweighs everyone and everything else in your life.

It means making choices that show that God is more important to you than anything else, even the approval of others. But glory is not just unqualified weightiness and power and greatness.

[8 : 11] Remember when Moses said to God, show me your glory? Remember what God said? I will show you my goodness. So the glory of God is goodness in itself.

Otherwise, the weight of God's glory would just be crushing. And that's why when we come to the Gospel of John, Jesus, when He speaks about His death on the cross, says, The supreme place of the revelation of the glory of God is in my death on the cross.

The sheer absolute goodness of grace of God in humbling Himself and giving Himself in sacrifice for us.

That is where glory is revealed. So the glory of God is not just power or goodness, but it's power and goodness displayed in humility, in sacrificing and humbling Himself to save us.

So to do something for the glory of God means to do something good for another person, which may take humility and it may take sacrifice.

[9 : 17] It will certainly take love. And the final thing to say about glory is that it's not just great power and goodness in itself, but it's that power and goodness when it shines out and shows itself to other people.

I've been reading the book of Exodus this week and I've been reading the ten plagues, which are not cheery reading, but in almost every plague, God says, I'm doing this to show my glory so that Egypt will know my glory.

It was to show His glory. I'm bringing you out of slavery to show my glory. And when He comes to dwell with them in the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, it is His glory.

And when Jesus is transfigured in the New Testament on the mountain and shines with a heavenly light, Peter says, we saw His glory. So to do things for the glory of God means being aware that even in the most ordinary decisions and the ordinary things in our life, if we do them toward God, God Himself shines through those things with His goodness so that others can see.

This is what Jesus meant when He said, Let your light so shine before others that when they see your good works, they will give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

[10 : 37] And I think this requires some creative thinking. I mean, how can I do this job of mopping the floor to the glory of God that shows the glory of God?

And how can I exercise hospitality or make decisions that reflect well on Him? Don't get me wrong.

God is absolutely glorious in Himself. He doesn't lack glory. He doesn't need us to give Him glory. In fact, if not one person in the universe gave glory to God, it wouldn't diminish His glory in any way.

But God delights to bring us into His great purpose of glory, of revealing Himself and His goodness to others.

And I think this is very hopeful and very purposeful, don't you? I mean, for those of us who belong to Jesus, life is about far more than finding a job or finding a marriage partner or building a home or having a comfy retirement.

[11 : 41] God dignifies our lives by saying, you can actually make choices in the little things in your life toward my glory. It is the revolutionary principle of Christian living.

Do all to the glory of one. And that's the first point. And now you ask, if you've been paying attention, how? How do we do this?

You know, how do we make this concrete? What does this look like in practice? And the second principle that the Apostle gives us here in these verses is the way to do it is to copy Jesus Christ in loving other people.

This is not the vague, all you need is love. This is not love is love is love. This is the unique love, the Christian love that's not sentimental but acts for the good of the other.

It's so important that the Apostle Paul is going to give a whole chapter to this in chapter 13, which we'll see when we come back to this series. And what the Apostle does here is very helpful for us.

[12 : 44] He shows us that to love like Jesus is four things. It's four steps, if you will. Four different parts that make up what it is to love as Jesus did.

So just look down and see if you can pick out these four things in verses 32 to 11. One, give no offense to Jews or Greeks or to the Church of God.

That's the first one. Two, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage but that of many. Three, that they might be saved.

Four, be imitators of me as I am of Christ. Let me talk about those four and then we'll finish. So step one in loving like Jesus, give no offense to anyone, Jew or Greek or the Church of God.

What does it mean to do all things to the glory of God? It means looking at other people and valuing them in such a way that you will refuse to do anything that might cause them to stumble in their Christian path.

[13 : 45] Or if they're not Christians, to have a barrier between them and becoming Christians. That was the problem in chapter 8.

That's the problem with not loving people. They were full of knowledge. And the Apostle says, by your knowledge you're destroying people. The brother for whom Christ died.

You sin against Christ. And I think this first step is a lovely proof of Christian love. I think it means being very conscious of how vulnerable we all are.

I know we look terrific but we're all very vulnerable. We need to think ourselves into each other's shoes. To take care of how we speak to and how we speak about people.

And not be the cause of any brother or sister being tripped up in their Christian way. Do you know years ago when I worked in Sydney, an older Christian who was a well-known person in my orbit, said something that upset another Christian brother.

[14 : 52] Now I think the first guy was right probably in what he said. But when he heard that this guy was upset by what he had said, on Monday morning he got in his car, he drove two and a half hours. He spent the whole morning with this guy and drove two and a half hours back.

Just to say sorry. Just to make sure he hadn't provided a stumbling block to this guy's faith. I was very affected by that. I thought that's what it means to do everything you can.

Even when you hear you might have done something to bring it back. Simply out of love. And that's the first thing in Christian love. Give no offence to others. The only thing we offend people with is the cross.

Secondly, the second step, seek the positive good of the other person. Now if you look back in verse 23, Paul quotes the big slogan in Corinth.

You see in verse 23, all things are lawful. And in the Greek it's all things are lawful for me. For me. It's the perfect individualistic proud creed.

[16 : 01] My life, my choice, my body, my freedom, my rights. What's good is what I measure to be good and nothing else. And Paul turns their individualism on its head and he says, yeah, but not all things are helpful.

Not everything builds up. He says, if you're a believer, you don't live to yourself. You don't make decisions just based on what is good for you.

The bigger consideration is what is helpful, what will build up others in their faith. And this is the second step of Christian love. Have you thought about this? If you're a Christian, you're not an island in yourself.

You're part of the body of Christ. And the love that the Lord Jesus has for you is to show itself and how you love and care for others in the body. And when you make decisions about ordinary mundane things, part of the question that you're going to ask is, what can I do to build up others?

So, that means you'll stay for Soup Sunday. Even if you don't feel like it. You'll go to Soup Sunday and you'll try and figure out what's happening for other people.

[17 : 10] How can I help other people here? Or as Paul puts it in verse 24, let no one seek his own good only, but the good of his neighbour. He's not saying that as a Christian, you never seek your own interests, but only when it's the most loving thing to do.

In other words, the willingness to give up your own interests for the good of another is what it means to love. So, as Christians, we're a strange bunch.

We ask different questions than the world around us. When we come to things, when we look at things, we don't ask, what's in it for me? We ask, what's most loving for you?

We don't ask, how can I express my rights and freedoms? We ask, how can I limit my rights and freedoms to build you up? This is a completely different starting point, and it completely changes how we make decisions.

So, when you come to church, we don't just come to church to receive, to worship God and to pray and to feed on the word. That's part of the reason. But you also come to build others up.

[18 : 22] And I think that means thinking creatively about how you can do it. So, step one, don't put a stumbling block in front of others. Step two, seek the positive good of the other.

Step three, what is the positive good? Do whatever you can to help the person towards salvation. This is the big thing Paul wants the Corinthians to catch.

In other words, Christian love has a direction to it as well. It is possible to endanger the salvation of other people. And Paul's standard operating procedure was not to stand on his own rights, but to try and become like people around him as much as he could so that he might win them for Christ.

This is the third step in Christian love. When you ask, what good can I do for that person? Think about whatever is going to help move them in the direction of salvation.

That's the best kind of love. What builds them up in their faith? What causes them to see Christ more clearly? What will help them be fruitful and grow in the Christian life?

[19 : 32] That's Christian love. And that's why, interestingly, in verse 27 and 28 and 29 and 30, the little illustration he gives, the last illustration, he says, if you're in Corinth and you're invited to a house by a non-Christian friend of yours for a meal and they serve meat in front of you, don't act like a Christian snob.

You know, don't say, well, no, I must inquire, was this a sacrifice to idols? No, he says, don't make a pain of yourself. Eat what's set before you.

But if the host says it has been sacrificed, then you should decline it, not for your sake, not because there's anything wrong with the meat, but for the sake of their conscience, because of what they believe, and that might open the door for a conversation and their path to salvation.

So you see the steps? Don't put a stumbling block. Do what is good for others. Do what is good toward their salvation. And the final and fourth step is this, and this is the basis of it all.

We love this way because this is how Christ loved us. Chapter 11, verse 1. Be imitators of me as I am of Christ.

[20 : 51] There it is. This is the core of Christian ethics. The mark of someone for whom the love of Christ is not just something you know about, but something you are experiencing, is that you will try and follow in Jesus' footsteps and love others in the way that Jesus has for you.

See, the energy and power to love other people doesn't come out of our souls. You can't work it up. It comes out of your experience of the love of Jesus for you.

Jesus, who gave up the privileges of heaven, who entered our world, who humbled himself in grace and love, who loves you and suffered for you and me, and now rose so that we could follow in his footsteps.

This is the Jesus who, the more we come to know him, weans us away from pride and self-love, who teaches us that those who are first will be last and those who are last will be first, that those who humble themselves will be exalted.

And he shows us that the greatest expression of freedom is being able to limit your freedom for the sake of others. So here are the two revolutionary principles that Paul wants to leave with us.

[22 : 10] One, do all things for the glory of God. Number two, seek to love as Christ does. And they're not two separate things. They belong together. They're the two sides of the one coin.

And we know that even though faith, hope and love abide forever, the greatest of these is love. And so the apostle says, pursue love and cling on to Jesus Christ.

Amen.