

Living Clearly for Christ

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Date: 23 August 2026

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[0:00] The letter of 1 Corinthians is a treasure. It contains more teaching on the resurrection, spiritual gifts, marriage, and the virtue of love than any other book in the Bible.

But it is not cold theology. 1 Corinthians is an urgent call for us to remember the gospel. And as a result, it's a call for us to be a cross-centered, holy, and united people until he returns.

Listen in to what God has to say to us through this inspired letter. 1 Corinthians chapter 10.

We are going to be looking today from verse 1 all the way through the whole chapter to the very first verse of chapter 11. I'm going to read and afterward I'm going to say this is the word of the Lord.

And you can respond by saying thanks be to God. 1 Corinthians chapter 10 starting in verse 1. 1 Corinthians chapter 10.

[1:27] Nevertheless, with most of them, God was not pleased. For they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things took place as examples for us.

That we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were. As it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did. And 23,000 fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test as some of them did.

And were destroyed by serpents. Nor grumble as some of them did. And were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example.

But they were written down for our instruction. On whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed.

[2:38] Lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful. And he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability.

But with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape. That you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

I speak as to sensible people. Judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless. Is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break.

Is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread. We, who are many, are one body. For we all partake of the one bread.

Consider the people of Israel. Are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything?

[3:40] Or that an idol is anything? No. I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons.

You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy?

Are we stronger than he? All things are lawful. But not all things are helpful. All things are lawful. But not all things build up.

Let no one seek his own good but the good of his neighbor. 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.

[4:45] 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 don't 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?

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. Verse 1.

Be imitators of me as I am of Christ. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may take your seats.

[5:54] Who's on first? What's on second? I don't know who's on third. This is the famous line from the comedy sketch.

Many of you know it. Abbott and Costello. It sends them into this hilarious runaround of miscommunication. The player on first base for the baseball team is named who?

Costello begins, you know the guys' names? Abbott says, I'm telling you their names. Well, who's on first? Yeah.

Go ahead and tell me. Who? The guy on first. Who? The guy playing first base. Who? The guy on first.

Who is on first? Well, what are you asking me for? I'm asking you. And so they go on. On and on and on. The lack of clarity is really funny in a comedy sketch, but it can be chaos in real life.

[7:06] In a sense, we are all having to answer the question, who's on first? First. In our text this morning, Paul is bringing clarity. Clarity to what it looks like to live as Christians with Christ in the seat of first importance.

Who's on first in your life? This is a culture that's just dominated by the anthem. Be free to do what you want.

But Paul is calling the Corinthians to go through life with a new kind of perspective. The Christian life is not a call to simply follow your cravings, but to follow Christ.

Jesus lived to glorify his father in all that he did and he said. Jesus died for the good of others to bring those dead in sin into life with him through faith and repentance.

So those who now follow Jesus no longer live for themselves, but for the one who gave himself up for them. So Paul is helping the Christians in Corinth see clearly who's on first.

[8:27] And then how they can live in light of this and all the complexities of everyday situations. So even though there are some layers of culture that we're going to need to pull back here, these verses are strikingly relevant for us.

How do we live as Christians in a culture whose anthem is, be free, do what you want?

How do we make decisions about what we drink? What we wear? What parties we attend?

How do we relate to unbelievers? How far into their world can we or should we go? The default all around us is to follow your cravings, but how do we follow Christ?

Paul is giving us timeless principles to help us live with clarity. There should be no ambiguity.

[9:36] No ambiguity for you or those that are around you about who's on first in your life. So if we were to summarize the main point for us this morning, I would try to say it this way.

Live clearly for God's glory and the good of others in all that you do. Live clearly for God's glory and the good of others in all that you do.

And we're going to try to unpack this from three moves in the text, starting with an example from the Old Testament, verses 1 through 13.

So our text, it picks up on an argument that Paul has been making since chapter 8, about how to think and act like Christians when it comes to the ethics of meat sacrificed to idols.

That's their cultural situation. In chapter 10, the conversation shifts from buying meat in the market to questions about participating in temple feasts.

[10:40] For the wealthier people in society, these temple feasts were a place for things like networking. They celebrated birthdays for a family member or a co-worker.

Maybe a place where they would go to close business deals. These were often contexts for elites to go and show their status or to improve their status.

So it seems that in our situation, some of the Corinthian church continue to engage in these feasts because they assume there's no harm.

Because these idols that are here, they're not real gods, right? So we could go benefit from the temple feasts. But Paul, he begins to bring clarity.

Clarity by bringing up a family lesson. And it's a story from non-example. It's like your mom seeing that you haven't brushed your teeth and she launches into talking about your uncle who never

brushed his teeth and now he has to liquefy all of his food and drink it through a straw.

[11:57] Do you want to live like that? Is that what you want? Paul is alerting the Corinthians to a family situation, a non-example from the family tree. Verse 1, if you look at it, For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea and he keeps going.

Well, he's talking about Israelites that God delivered from slavery in Egypt. And then he led them through the wilderness. He tried to.

Think about this. God miraculously provided for these people again and again. God provided a cloud to lead them out of Egypt. He used Moses to part the Red Sea.

And he provided Israel a way of escape from the pursuing Egyptians, their enemies. And then God provided judgment on their enemies by closing the waters over them.

God provided Israel with bread from heaven and then water from a rock to sustain them. The point is that these forefathers experienced firsthand the miraculous and powerful provision of God again and again.

[13:16] And in all these things, they brought nothing to the table but their need. That's all they brought. And God provided again and again and again.

Now, you may be surprised like I was to see that in verse 4, if you look, Paul says that the rock was Christ.

Isn't that fascinating? Christ. He's drawing the Corinthians. He's drawing us. Into the family story.

The provisions these forefathers received come from the same Christ you claim to follow. That's what he's doing. In verse 5, let's us know that God was not pleased with many of them.

It's a warning. Paul's saying that there are parallels between Old Testament Israel in the wilderness and the Corinthian Christians going to temple feasts.

[14:31] In fact, he says in verse 6, these things took place as examples for us. Why?

So that we might not desire evil like they did. So lean in. That's what he's saying. Lean in and hear the warning. Learn from non-example.

In spite of God's repeated provisions, they desired evil. So what can we learn from their non-example?

What is it that he's wanting us to see from this family non-example? Verse 7, don't be idolaters.

Verse 8, don't be sexually immoral.

Verse 9, don't put Christ to the test. Verse 10, don't grumble. I mean, these episodes, they have striking connections with the issue of the temple feasts and the meat sacrificed to idols that we're looking at.

[15:36] In verse 7, Paul says, don't be idolaters. He goes on to quote a scene from Exodus chapter 32 when the people, they're getting tired of waiting for Moses to come down from his rendezvous with God on the mountain.

They're getting bored down there. So they go to Aaron. They demand that he make them gods. Make us some gods we can follow. So Aaron forges a golden calf and they worship in place of the Lord.

And then you know what happens after that? They had a religious feast. That's what they did. They rose up to eat and to play.

In spite of the Lord's clear guidance and provision, the people blurred the lines. And they began to worship the creation rather than the creator.

And they did it through a religious feast and burnt offerings. Does that sound familiar? Verse 8 says, we must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did.

[17:00] So in the Corinthian temple feasts that we're talking about, sexual immorality was very typical. And Paul reminds these Corinthians that God punished the wilderness generation for that same sin.

Verse 9 says, we must not put Christ to the test. The Israelites tested Christ by becoming impatient with his provisions of food and of water.

However, they began to see the Lord's provision as insufficient. They were making demands based on their own desires and their own timetable.

And then the wilderness generation grumbled. What a word, grumbled. Specifically, they grumbled against God. In spite of his provision, they longed to go back to their slavery.

Back to their old lives, the comforts of Egypt. They were unimpressed by God's provision. And they spoke openly and often about how life could have been better.

[18:12] It could have been better if you would have just not moved us out of the luxurious slave life in Egypt. And brought us, God, why would you bring us to this stupid wilderness where you give us this dumb miracle bread from heaven every day?

You see the irony? Paul is trying to get them to connect the dots. Verse 12. He's saying, take inventory, Corinthians.

Is the longing to go back to the temple feast? Is that really a longing to go back to the provisions of Egypt?

The luxury of your slavery? Is that what you want? Don't be idolaters. Don't be sexually immoral. Don't put Christ to the test. Don't grumble. Well, Paul's, he's not addressing pagans somewhere out there in Corinthian society.

[19:28] He's addressing people in the Corinthian church. He's addressing us. This isn't just their family tree.

It was written for us, too. The greatest issues, brothers and sisters, isn't out there. The issue isn't Egypt.

The issue is that people smuggle Egypt with them. We smuggle Egypt with us into the church. We need clarity, don't we?

We've got to have clarity on what really are the real threats to our soul. So often, we're looking out there. We may not attend temple feasts, but where does your heart feast?

Do you find yourself fixing your hopes, your ambitions, your satisfaction on things other than the Lord?

[20:48] Is there a temple feast in your heart that's idolatrous? I just can't go on unless I get this. What about the sexual immorality?

We might not be exposed to temples that feature sexual immorality as a part of the worship, but man, we live in a culture that bows down in worship at the temple of sexual immorality.

Are you trying to live in that temple? Are you chasing pleasure there? Are you chasing escape there?

Are you trying to find your identity there in sexual immorality? Have you begun to make demands of God?

What He can and can't do in your life? Are you challenging Him to meet your expectations according to your timeline? And when you don't get it, are you grumbling against God?

[21:57] Is your heart grumbling against the God who made you, who provided for you? Has God even factored into your conversations recently? Or has He faded into the background of your mind?

Have you grown unimpressed? Have you grown unenthused by His work in your life? His providence in your life? Has gratitude toward God been eclipsed by grumbling against Him?

This isn't for those out there. This is for us. Take heed.

This is a sobering reminder that we can be like some of our forefathers in the wilderness. Immersed in the gracious provision of this glorious God.

Walking among the people of God. And yet, our hearts can be drifting toward Egypt. Take heed.

We've got to take heed.

[23:02] Lean in. Take inventory. Lest we fall. But here's the wonderful news. These things that we're looking at, they were written for our benefit.

For our instruction. For our transformation. We're not doomed to destruction. That's the good news. We don't have to perish in the wilderness with a longing for Egypt.

In fact, the very next verses show us that we can be delivered from sinning in the midst of our temptation. Verse 13.

God. God is faithful. And He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability. But with the temptation, He will also provide the way of escape. That you may be able to endure it.

To keep pressing on through it. First and foremost, this calls us up and away from ourselves to try to fix it. It calls us outside of ourselves.

[24:04] Don't look to yourself. Don't go there for a fix. Don't look back to Egypt either. Don't go there. Look to the deliverer who is able to do something about your situation.

He can provide the way of escape. He can provide in your wilderness. He has already and He will continue to do so for you. Secondly, Paul's carefully chosen words imply that escape from

temptation does not necessarily mean a change of circumstances.

Did you catch that? The escape he's talking about doesn't necessarily mean you're just delivered from the circumstances that you're in. You might still be in the wilderness the whole time.

But He gives the Holy Spirit's power to withstand, and the key word here, and endure.

To keep going in the right direction. To endure through the wilderness. The Lord can deliver you and I from idolatry, from sexual immorality, from distrust, and grumbling.

[25 : 25] He is powerful to transform a heart with His Spirit so that we can endure even through the wilderness. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Point two, example from the Lord's Supper. An example from the Lord's Supper. Paul moves on in verse 14 to say, Therefore, So he's saying, In light of the reality of God's judgment upon and deliverance from false worship, therefore, flee idolatry.

Flee it. I mean, there are some things you can just walk away from. Like okra. I'm just not a big fan. I'm sorry. I know that's not a good southern boy thing.

I just, I can take it or leave it. I can walk away from okra. But, then there are other things that I run away from. Yellow jackets at the top of the list.

If you've been stung, you know you gotta run. Alright? Paul clarifies what our relationship is to be toward idolatry. Don't walk.

[26 : 46] Run. Run. Flee. Run. Don't walk away. Run from idolatry. In these verses, he confronts this nonchalance of supposed Corinthians that are Christians who think, I'm free.

I'm free to participate. I'm free to go to these temple feasts since the idols are not really gods. I'm free to do that. Idols are not gods.

But Paul's saying, they're not nothing. They're not gods, but they're not nothing. Because behind the pagan rituals is the reality of Satan's work.

Paul's argument is that Christians should have nothing to do with that. Verse 20. What pagan sacrifice, even unknowingly, they offer to demons and not to God.

I do not want you to be participants with demons. So, so Paul makes his point in verses 16 to 18 based on the example of the Lord's Supper.

[28 : 08] When, when we eat and we drink the Lord's Supper, he's saying it, it is a participation in the body and the blood of Jesus Christ.

That, that word participation. Participation, it's the same word, koinonia, that we use for fellowship. Fellowship. It points to this idea of intimacy and communion, a united heart.

So those who eat the Lord's Supper align themselves with Jesus. A common heart. Fellowship.

The Lord's Supper is a religious meal. There's an intended meaning behind each one of those elements. It's not just physical food. It points beyond itself to a greater spiritual reality.

Paul says in verse 18 that, that the priests ate food sacrificed to God. Again, Old Testament. In this sense, the altar, it was functioning like a table of the Lord that gave the benefits to the priests that ate.

[29 : 20] But in a much greater way in the New Covenant where we have lived, the Corinthians lived, it brings the people of God into a living union with Christ. As we eat, as we drink, we're declaring openly, we belong to Christ.

We receive the benefits of being united in a relationship with Jesus Christ, his life, his death, his resurrection. That's what we're declaring.

So Paul's driving point is that the religious meal of Christ is incompatible with the religious meal in the Corinthian temple because of the spiritual realities that they represent.

You can't unite yourself both with Christ and with demons saying, yes and amen to both. That's what he's saying. We've got to have clarity.

How far can we go? Well, at a minimum, a principle for us is that we should not willingly unite ourselves, willingly unite ourselves with activities or rituals that are inherently immoral or demonic.

[30 : 33] demonic. This is not to say, clarify, seeking clarity, it's not to say that we should just hide away in our homes and cut ourselves off from all the world.

How do you do that? How do you live this out? And that clearly is not Paul's point because he clarified that exact thing back in chapter 5 saying, in order to separate yourself from all immorality, all demonic activity, you have to be out of the world.

He says, you have to leave planet earth in order to avoid all immorality, all demonic activity. So, so what does he say?

So it's not a warning to avoid any and all influences that are not Christian. If you did that, you'd undermine all the calls to proclaim the gospel that we were just praying for, the gospel to go to unbelievers, the gospel to go to the people that are under the grips of the demonic. Paul's doing that all the time. Becoming all things to all people that by all means some might be saved. So he's interacting with those who are bound in immorality.

[31:51] So what does Paul mean? Do not seek to unite yourself for the enjoyment, the celebration, or the benefits of any activities or rituals that are inherently immoral or demonic.

Enjoyment, celebration, or the benefits. Don't, don't throw yourself into these things that are inherently, directly immoral or demonic.

don't dabble in witchcraft or magic or mysticism. It's not going to go well.

Don't, don't indulge and glorify things that, that glorify murder or torture or death. don't participate in things that intentionally twist or pervert human sexuality like a same-sex marriage.

It's not a ceremony that glorifies God. It's one thing to love the people who are enslaved to these things with a desire for them to be saved.

[33:09] It's another thing to intentionally indulge in these things yourself as if it's just a benefit and compatible with your freedoms. Paul's saying, no, you can't, you can't partake of the table of the, of the demons and the table of the Lord.

Verse 22 asks the question, shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? God's jealousy is not the same emotion of envy like we see in human jealousy.

it's God's righteous concern to protect the truth that he is the creator and he alone is actually worthy of praise.

Give credit to where credit is due. In this case, it's actually right for him to be jealous because all credit is due to him. So let's be clear about who's on first in our honor and our praise and all that we do.

Third, the goal of a believer's freedom. The goal of a believer's freedom. Now, Paul pivots is to address another situation.

[34:31] It's related to meat sacrifice to idols. This time, it's a Christian is invited to an unbeliever's home. Notice, an unbeliever's home for a dinner and there's meat on the menu.

Okay? So there's a possibility that this meat came from the temple. It says, don't go there. But in this case, if you're going to a dinner with an unbeliever and there's meat there, it might be associated with temple worship in an indirect way, but it's not a direct way.

So what should the Christian do in this situation? Well, Paul, as we've seen him do a number of times now, gives, gives a yes, but kind of answer.

Yes, but kind of answer. He begins in verse 23, agreeing with the culture. Yes, all things are lawful. Yes, all things are lawful.

But, there's a caveat, but, not all things are helpful. All things are lawful. Yes, yes, but, not all things build up.

[35:49] Verse 24, let no one seek his own good, but, the good of his neighbor.

In other words, he's saying, you are free to eat the meat. you're free to eat the meat, but, there's something more important to round out your decision making beyond your personal craving and freedom.

There's more to it than what the Corinthians are dealing with. The driving question is not, is this good for me, but, is this good for my neighbor?

For my neighbor. And, and then Paul goes on. He, he goes on to give these two hypothetical scenarios for the dinner party. In scenario one, which is in verses 25 to 27, no one's saying anything about the meat or making a big deal about the meat.

Not talking about the associations with the temple at all. in this case, ignorance is bliss. Eat the meat, enjoy the brisket, have the barbecue without a question.

[37:04] Meat has no intrinsic moral value. It's just stuff. Atoms. Sometimes delicious atoms.

All together. It, it can, it can still be clear eating the meat in that situation. It can be clear who's on first in your life. So enjoy it.

In fact, verse 30 and 31 clarifies that you can eat, you can drink, and you can give praise where praise is due. You can enjoy it.

Ultimately, the cows that died for that burger came from our creator God. And it was very good. And we can give praise where praise is due in that situation.

But you can honor your host who's feeding you and you can honor God at the same time by enjoying the food and drink as a good gift from God. However, verse 28 through 29 introduces scenario two.

[38:11] Suppose someone says to you, this has been offered in a sacrifice. Did you know that? That's the situation.

How does that knowledge change your game plan in that situation? Well, it doesn't change the reality of the meat. It's still just meat. It doesn't change the reality of the goodness of God. It doesn't even change your freedom, believe it or not. The person who brought up that connection with idolatry could be an unbeliever. an unbeliever who wrongly thinks, well, real Christians, I thought real Christians don't eat this and so it trips them up when they see you're going to eat it even though you know it's sacrificed to demons.

So the point here is that we must go beyond our freedom and take into consideration their interpretation. will your eating be mistaken for worship of an idol in their mind?

Does your participation, does it give the impression in their mind of validation? This is what it means to be a Christian. Will it plague their conscience?

[39:30] Your freedom has not changed but there's something more important to round out your decision making beyond your personal craving and freedom. The driving question is not is this good for me but is this good for my neighbor?

And in this case it's not necessarily a believer in the church. In this case the person is likely an unbeliever. An unbeliever. So the good that we want for this neighbor, the ultimate good that we want for this neighbor is something far greater than the good of a burger in our belly.

It's so much bigger than that. verse 33 makes it clear. If you look down the good we want for these neighbors is that they may be saved.

Saved. We want them to know Jesus Christ. We want them to see Jesus Christ so we lay down our freedoms in that situation. We move the little stumbling blocks out of the way.

Verse 32 says that we give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God. And that may come as a surprise to you because in this same letter Paul already said that the gospel message is offensive.

[40:49] It is inherently offensive. First Corinthians 1 chapter 1 said it this way. For Jews demand signs, Greeks seek wisdom but we preach Christ crucified.

Here it is a stumbling block. A stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles. It is inherently offensive.

Oh my friends that is true. The message of the cross is a stumbling block but what we're called to do is to remove all unnecessary stumbling blocks along the path to the great stumbling block the cross of Jesus Christ.

It offends you, offends your neighbor if you drink. Just don't drink, it's okay. We can put down the little things so that by all means people might come to the greatest question of the cross.

If you're not a Christian this morning, I'd like to thank you for coming here. I don't know all the different stumbling blocks that might have been in your path along the way, all the unnecessary offenses that maybe you've experienced up to this point, but I do know that God has so arranged the circumstances of your life that you would be here in order to reckon!

[42:24] today with the cross of Jesus Christ. You see, the cross declares that you and I, we have attempted to live apart from the God who created us as if we were the creator and not him.

Your rebellion against God, it's so severe that it demands the death penalty according to God's standard. word. But the God who stands against you in his righteous judgment is the same God who has come down from his judgment seat in order to die on a cross as a perfect atoning sacrifice for sin.

sin. So you don't have to face the death penalty for your sin. You don't have to go there. You don't have to receive the penalty that according to God's standards do to you if you receive Christ's death in your place.

His payment for your sin on your behalf. So by turning away from your sin and trusting in Jesus Christ you can be made right with God. The judge can be your savior is what I'm telling you today. You can have peace with God even in the wilderness. The stumbling block of Christ can become your cornerstone and you can build your life on him and you can bank on it.

[44 : 09] I invite you to receive Christ today. And maybe you're in here and you could relate to our fathers in the wilderness generation. Maybe you heard several of those remarks and you thought that is me.

You don't have to stay there. There is a way of escape because Jesus Christ he came for idolaters. He came for the sexually immoral. He came for grumblers. He came to deliver those who have been trying to live with one foot in Egypt and another in Eden.

He came for those people trying to straddle the worlds and he's saying come all the way in today. I am with you. I want you with me.

Humble yourself. If you want to change don't keep trying to straddle the worlds and fix it yourself. If you want to change humble yourself today and turn from them.

[45 : 08] Turn from those sins. Confess to Jesus Christ. Confess to a friend today. Don't delay anymore. God opposes the proud but he gives grace to the humble.

So let's use our freedoms. Let's use our freedoms to enjoy God's good gifts. Let's lay down our freedoms for the sake of our neighbors. Let's be a people who live clearly, clearly for God's glory and the good of others in all that we do.

Amen. Let's pray together. Father we thank you. We thank you that though you are our judge you have sent Christ to be the savior.

Not just a one time savior but a savior who walks with us through the wilderness. We praise you even in the midst of the hard things that you empower us to face temptation not on our own strength but in dependence on you in relationship with you the living God.

You will take us all the way to the new Jerusalem. So Lord we cling to you today. We confess we are insufficient for these things but we cling to you. We do not want to hold on to idolatry.

[46 : 20] We want to hold on to you knowing you hold us in the palm of your hand. The mighty grip and outstretched arms so we give you all the praise today for all the good gifts we receive.

In the name of Jesus. Amen. You've been listening to a message on 1 Corinthians during a Sunday service at Trinity Grace Church. For more information please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com may may may may may may Thank you.