

For the Glory of God

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

In my first year of bible college I lived on campus at college and as good, bible loving, diligent theological students, life on campus was marked by two key habits: table tennis and maccas runs.

And one particular occasion, late in the evening, a group of four of us went to maccas, ordered our food, then sat down, said grace, and began to thoroughly enjoy the clogging of our arteries. But as we ate a group of young rowdy guys came and stood around us said loud enough for the whole restaurant to hear, "boy you don't hear people praying about McDonald's very often to you?"

We chatted briefly with them then they went on their way. But as they left one of the guys leaned in and said, well that was a bit awkward... Maybe we shouldn't do that anymore.

Now I suspect if you've been a Christian for any amount of time that scene and feeling is familiar. I was chatting with a dad here at bundy who told me that before having neighbours over dinner, their daughter pleaded with him to not say grace before dinner because it would just be too awkward.

It's that vital question of how different, how overt we are about our Christianity in the various aspects of life. Whether it's removing yourself from the bucks party as the night progresses, withdrawing from the conversation at work as it descends into gossip or slander, saying no shots or drinking games at parties or just that extra drink that will tip you over edge of being in control.

You see the Christian life is often filled with moments that just feel a little bit awkward. And for most Christians this comes with the temptation to retreat or withdraw or even be ashamed.

Over the past four weeks we've been following Paul's answer to the Corinthian question about eating food sacrificed to idols that dominates chapters 8-10. And tonight we come to the crescendo of the argument and answer. The Corinthians wanted to know if they have the right to eat or not.

And if you haven't been here he began to address their question by saying that it's the wrong question. Christians do not live by their rights or are governed simply by what they are free to do, but what is loving. So in chapter 8 Paul said he'd never eat meat again if it hindered another Christian.

Then in chapter 9 he detailed his own example as he lived among the Corinthians. Giving up his rights as a minister of the Gospel for their benefit. Paul did this because of the severity, the seriousness, the importance of being saved by Jesus. He becomes all things to all people for their salvation.

And because salvation is so serious, we invest not only in others knowing Jesus but ensuring that we are faithful to Jesus till the end. So as we heard last week, Paul urged both the Corinthians and us to flee idolatry. Being set free by Jesus does not mean we are blasé about idolatry and sin.

And in tonight's passage, Paul comes to the crescendo of his argument by returning to question of eating food offered to idols but again not simply with a yes or no. Remember Paul is modelling for us how to live in a world saturated by idolatry.

And he reminds them that the commitment of a Christian is not simply “what can I do” but “what is good for others.” And this principle was hard for the Corinthians to accept because they, like us, were in a culture that championed individual rights. We see that in v.23 as Paul quotes them twice.

“Everything is permissible” they say. It was like their mantra of life. We saw this back in chapter 6, they were very much a “my body my choice” people as their commitment to freedom and rights saw them embrace sexual immorality like visiting prostitutes.

But Paul quotes them again here because clearly this was their approach to food offered to idols. Everything is permissible. And Paul deny their freedom or rights. Christians are free, it was central to what Paul would have taught them. Free from superstitions and fear of the many gods that dominated their culture. Free from fear of judgement because they knew the only true and living God had saved them through Jesus. Christians are free.

But just as he did in chp 6, he qualifies their commitment to freedom: ²³ *“Everything is permissible,” but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible,” but not everything builds up.*

Just as he did in chp 8, Paul reminds them that Christians live in community. Being free to eat does not mean it is *always* beneficial to eat. Exercising our freedom or rights does not necessarily build others up, but actually might hinder or even destroy them as it leads them to sin.

So Paul recaps what he said in chapters 8-9, the Christian commitment is not to freedom or rights, but living for the good of others, v.24. ²⁴ *No one is to seek his own good, but the good of the other person.*

This is Christianity 101, the core Christian commitment says Paul. And just as he did in chp. 8, he applies this commitment to eating food offered to idols. But there the focus was on seeking the good of another Christian whose conscience was weak and couldn’t eat the food.

Here the good of others is applied to unbelievers in two main contexts. In v.25 it’s buying meat from the market. Almost all, if not all, meat available for purchase came via the temple. It would have been offered to a god in sacrifice then distributed to the markets for sale.

Then in v.27, it’s being served food in the home of an unbeliever. And in both cases, you can eat. And both these scenarios were expected normal parts of life. Coming into contact with food offered to idols was an unintentional reality. And Paul says eat, eat because you know v.26, *the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it.* It’s a quote from our first reading, Psalm 24:1.

Christians can eat the food because of reality, there is only one creator God, all things belong to him, so you can eat the food and be thankful. It’s why we say grace, give thanks before all meals, because our food is from the true and living God.

So whether it’s maccas, minties, or marble score 8 wagyu, eat and give thanks to God. And this reality means you don’t even have to ask questions about it’s origins in v.25 + v.27! Whether offered to a god in sacrifice or not, this food belongs to the true God and you can eat with thanks.

But that's not the end of the discussion just as it wasn't in chapter 8. You are free to eat in either context but if it comes up that the food was offered to an idol, don't eat.

²⁸ *But if someone says to you, "This is food from a sacrifice," do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who told you, and for the sake of conscience.* ²⁹ *I do not mean your own conscience, but the other person's.*

You picture it can't you. People are laughing and drinking, the host comes around with the meal someone innocently asks, what are we having? Well thanks be to Zeus it's lamb cutlets. Or perhaps, all glory to Aphrodite, we are having chargrilled Rib-Eye. Then they come to you, heart beating fast, you say no. No matter how perfectly cooked, basted, and rested it is, no matter how hungry you are or limited your eating options will be, you say no thanks.

And why? Not because the food is somehow tainted, not because it's dangerous idolatry, it's not about the food at all. No it's for the sake of the one who told you and their conscience v.28.

Remember the conscience is that inner moral decision maker that tells us what is right and wrong – but for the Christian, the conscience is theological – applying what we believe about God to our life.

And Paul says don't eat for *their* conscience. Because what does it tell them if you choose to eat after they tell you it's food offered in sacrifice to a god that they know you don't worship? Well it says you endorse their idolatry, you're ok with it. Perhaps it even says to them it's compatible with your worship and view of God. Or maybe it seems inconsistent and hypocritical...

And so for their good, *for their sake* you say no. For their benefit so they know you do not and cannot endorse idolatry. But you can hear the Corinthians bursting to interject: hold up! you're saying I'm free to eat, I can give thanks to God for all food I eat, but if someone brings it up I have to say no!

And Paul says that's right! And to make that clear he gives two rhetorical questions that at first seem contradictory. V.29 *For why is my freedom judged by another person's conscience?* ³⁰ *If I partake with thanksgiving, why am I criticized because of something for which I give thanks?*

But don't they seem to contradict his point about not eating for the sake of someone else? Why is my freedom judged by another? If I'm thankful for the food, why am I criticized for it?

But for Paul's that exactly the point, why are you? Why are you letting your freedom become cause for judgement and criticism from another? Being free to eat and being thankful for the food does not justify putting yourself in a situation that causes another to think you're actually supportive of idolatry or just inconsistent in your obedience to God.

But you can already here the Corinthians objecting can't you. Perhaps it is exactly what some of us are thinking. It's that just awkward? Isn't that just rude and offensive?

And for those that have followed Paul's argument in chapters 8-10, isn't that inconsistent with his call to be flexible, to be all things to all people (9:22)? Doesn't that just put people off and make us seem like religious nutters who can't get along with others?

Imagine the whole table turning in shock and disapproval? It'll be the last invitation I get won't it – not just from them but anyone else once word gets out. It's so awkward and costly right?

But is it? You see I think that line of thinking is so familiar to us about so many aspects of being Christian. Imagine the awkwardness and offense. No one wants that kind of person in their workplace or friendship group or around their dining table. Or do they?

Because at the heart of our logic is often a confusion about what is actually good for the other person who does not yet follow Jesus. Commenting on this passage, John Dickson says, "the occasional withdrawal from pagan banquets... would present a clear critique of paganism and would very likely lead to an opportunity for believers to explain or defend the Christian position." You might think, really? But why are we so certain that showing our clear commitment to Jesus publically, modelling what worship and loyalty to the only true God looks like, will immediately result in rejection and hostility? Now to be clear it might and you may have examples where that's the case.

But it is not necessarily the case! Nor that does a hostile response actually mean it was a bad course of action! And so I think it leads to an important yet uncomfortable question for reflection that I've wrestled with this week: is our commitment to what we think will offend others actually our thinly veiled idol of comfort? A commitment to an easy life, not a godly one.

Do we easily defend not doing things, not being too overtly Christian either in our words or actions, ultimately because we value our comfort or acceptance or reputation or tension free friendships far more than we value their salvation and eternity?

Now there is a balance of course – this is not a call to be obnoxious and thoughtless and deliberately antagonistic. It's giving a no, not a lecture. But in the scale of totally offensive and obnoxious to being silent and cowardly, I think I know that one is for more likely than the other. But what about you?

I recently heard this quote, which I think captured this perfectly. It is from a New York journalist, Ben Sixsmith, a non-Christian, commenting on the sacking of a Hillsong pastor after he was found to be unfaithful in his marriage. He says:

"I am not religious, so it is not my place to dictate to Christians what they should and should not believe. Still, if someone has a faith worth following, I feel that their belief should make me feel uncomfortable for not doing so. If they share 90 per cent of my lifestyle and values, then there is nothing especially inspiring about them. Instead of making me want to become more like them, it looks very much as if they want to become more like me."

So Paul is asking us to stop and think what is actually good for our unbelieving friends? What do we want them to understand about God through our life and words? Is someone seeing the worthiness and glory of Jesus through your life more important to you than your social comfort or reputation?

That's what is at stake when it comes to saying no at the dinner table for the Corinthians. Will they be different? Will Jesus' lordship shine clearly in their life in a culture of idolatry.

And that question is so relevant because as we heard last week, idolatry is so much more than temples and statues. This is Q.17 of the New City Catechism: What is idolatry? "Idolatry is trusting in created things rather than the Creator for our hope and happiness, significance and security."

Hope, happiness, significance, security. Our world has idols for all of those things. Whether career or money or relationship, success, property, or kids. A world that is searching for meaning and fulfilment in every other place than where it can truly be found. They are chasing after the wind.

And what do we want them to see in us? What do we want them to know or think about God from our lives as a Christian they know, people who profess Jesus as Lord? Paul is asking us if we are actually committed to them considering the uniqueness and greatness of Jesus through our lives?

And you can picture the Corinthians can't you as they read this letter out loud. All I wanted to know is whether I can eat the food offered to idols or not... He takes their question and applies to the very heart of Christianity in vv.31-11:1, the goal, the core motivation of true Christianity. ³¹ *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.* ³² *Give no offense to Jews or Greeks or the church of God,* ³³ *just as I also try to please everyone in everything, not seeking my own benefit, but the benefit of many, so that they may be saved. 11 Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ.*

The Corinthians asked about eating, about rights and freedom, but Paul answered with principles and applications with what brings glory to God. The goal and motivation of the Christian life, for eating, drinking, *whatever you do, is for the glory of God.*

To glorify God is to ask how can I use all of my life to show he alone is the all-satisfying, true, wonderful creator God. It's to ask will make God look great so he is seen for who he truly is. It's to use your life to show that God really is the pearl of infinite worth, the treasure in the field sell everything to get. As the Westminster Confession opens: We glorify God by enjoying him forever.

It's to give God the focus, praise, loyalty of your life that he truly deserves that begins with our hearts being captured by God through the Gospel of Jesus. Glorifying God begins in our hearts but is expressed in how we treat others. That's where Paul goes in vv.32-33.

As Jesus said, the two great commands are to love God *and* love neighbour. Glorifying God in your life will be expressed in living for the good others. ³² *Give no offense to Jews or Greeks or the church of God.*

By give no offense Paul clearly doesn't mean don't do anything that might be offensive or uncomfortable for them. He is talking about hindering them coming to confess Jesus as Lord – what the NIV helpfully calls *not causing them to stumble.*

The goal is there in v.33, so that they may be saved. And Paul is tying together all the themes of chapters 8-10. *Jews and Greeks* speaks of all unbelievers who have different cultures and habits, the *church of God* takes us back to the weak believers who are negatively influenced by our behaviour.

The motivation of the Christian is to seek the good, the salvation, the perseverance of all of them for the glory of God. The motivation of the Christian is united by an other-person centeredness.

And Paul is casting the net wide, this is to be our motivation in the church and out of it, whether growth group or work, church of the footy, friends, family, or colleagues, those interested or apathetic.

That's my example says Paul, but more importantly, it's Jesus': ¹ *Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ*

Paul says remember Jesus. And that is so helpful because he knows that for the Corinthians and for us, this is a real battle. So out of step with our culture that says you do you, fulfil your dreams, be all you can be, don't let anyone stand in the way or hinder your self-fulfilment.

You have the right, you're free to do life however you want, for that alone is the true and authentic life. And so glorifying God as we seek the good and salvation of others flies in the face the self-autonomy gospel of the world, and flies in the face of what is often our personal preference!

And so Paul says look to Jesus for the what and the why. Jesus who came into the world not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. Jesus who came to seek and save the lost by laying down his very life in our place, taking God's just anger at our sin on himself.

Imitate Jesus who on the cross was mocked and humiliated *for our sake*. *"He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself!"* ³² *Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe."* (Mark 15:31-32)

Do you hear not just the irony in those statements but also his example of seeking our good? Yes he saved others, but it's not that he *couldn't* save himself – but *wouldn't*. For in losing his life he was winning it for us! Come down from the cross so that we may see and believe they say, but it's only because he was willing to stay on the cross we even can believe.

The heart of Jesus' example that we are to imitate is his devotion to seek the good of others, in real practical and costly ways. Giving up his very life so that we gain it. That's the example of Jesus that Paul imitated amongst the Corinthians and is to the example we must base our life on. But will we?

As Paul has been unpacking their question about food sacrificed to idols, far greater and more important than simple yes's or no's is the core commitment to live for the good of others because our chief motivation is the glory of God as we follow the example of Jesus.

And as we hear the crescendo to Paul's answer we too are being asked how Christ-centred, how Christ-like is our Christianity? Is it all about Jesus? For him, that others would know him, as you live like him?

As we too live in a culture that is saturated in idolatry, as we too wrestle with questions of what is good and honouring to Jesus, of where there must be separation from what is normal or even celebrated in our culture, there will also be the temptation for compromise, to take the easy road of conformity and silence that ultimately embraces the idolatry of our culture.

So how Christ-centred is your Christianity? And I've put it under three questions that I think capture the heart of what Paul has argued in these chapters: 1) Is Jesus worthy of everything? Can

you join with the chorus of heaven in saying, *“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”* (Rev 5:11-12)

He is worth standing out for, worth losing reputation or friendship or job as you stand for him. Worth the awkward and even the costly moments in any area of life – from saying no to that drink, no to that relationship, no to that invitation.

And I’m sure this may be the genuine question or struggle for some of you. I think it is the most constant and urgent question that most teenagers face as they work out whether they will truly commit and be all in for Jesus not? Is it really worth it? Is *he* worth it?

And if that is you, it’s worth hearing that Jesus isn’t afraid of that question but actually urges us to ask it in Luke 14. To be a Christian, a disciple, is to be all in with Jesus, it’s to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow him (Lk 14:27).

It’s the most important question you can ask because it’s the question that will keep coming up in our Christian lives over and over again as that need to say no comes more prevalent and maybe more costly. Is he really worth it? You’re not alone in asking that question, so don’t ask it alone.

And if you’re not yet a Christian here tonight, then please know that’s the most important thing we want you to take away tonight: Jesus is worth it.

That being saved by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is the greatest, most important, soul-satisfying reality in this world. And to repent and believe is to find life itself. Now if you want to know more or why then get to know him through his word, ask questions of a Christian you know.

Christ-centred Christianity says Jesus is worthy of everything, and the goal of everything. Whether at a party or at work, studying or parenting, in public or private, is it for Jesus? Paul says in Colossians 3:17 that part of how you know it is whether they are they done with thankfulness to Jesus?

Are they all done with an awareness that they are from him and for him? That your money is not your own, your abilities are not your own, your body is not your own because your life is not your own, you are his, bought at price. And I know how that sounds. Without the gospel that sounds crazy, restrictive, and perhaps overwhelming.

Without the gospel it seems that will not be good for us – but we have the Gospel. We have good news of a good shepherd who laid down his life for us so that we might have life to the full. Jesus who made us, knows us, loves us, and calls us to follow him because it will be good for us.

Is your Christianity Christ-centred that Jesus is the goal of the everything? And finally, as Jesus is the goal of everything he is of course the need of everyone.

This is the central reality that has permeated every section of chapters 8-10. Because all people need Jesus, need to know, trust, and be faithful to him – and because of that reality and need, we will make decisions that help others persevere in their faithfulness. And especially we will become all things to all people so that we might save some – even if it means the cost and awkwardness of saying no.

And so as we finish this little section of 1Corinthians 8-10 we cannot help but ask how much do I actually want people to be saved? Do I genuinely want Christ to be celebrated and worshiped by those around me because that's what he deserves and will be good for them?

Good for them regardless of how content and successful their lives are without him. Regardless of how apathetic or antagonistic they are to him. Am I convinced that just as people are destined to die once, they will face judgement before the risen Jesus when he comes. And he will come.

And so how Christ-centred is your Christianity?

Will you embrace the potentially awkward and costly for the good of others and the glory of Christ?

Let's pray.