LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

1 Corinthians 10:23-33

Do everything for the glory of God

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SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Hello, and welcome back to our ongoing study of 1 Corinthians. We're going to finish out chapter 10 with just the last few verses. I don't think this will be a terribly long study, but I'm hoping that you'll have some good things to think about once we're done. We're going to be picking it up in verse 23, and we're going to go on to the end of the chapter, which is 33. And this whole section is really a summarizing of what Paul has been saying for the last several chapters, and it is summarized probably best in verse 31.

So we're going to do this. We're going to skip ahead. Now we'll cover all the verses, mind you, but we're going to skip ahead to verse 33, and I'm going to lay this out for you as the quintessential theme of the section, and it goes like this. So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. That's really the summarizing statement.

So let's go ahead and read these verses, and then we're going to open in prayer, and then we'll talk about them. Beginning in verse 23, again, I'm reading from the ESV. It says, 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 questions on the ground of conscience. For the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, this has been offered in sacrifice, then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience. I do not mean your conscience, but his.

For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks? 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.

Let's pray. Father, as we finish out this chapter, and as we read and go through over again these summarizing statements by the Apostle Paul, we pray that as we lean into you and listen for your voice, that you would speak and that you would tune our spiritual hearts to gain a heart of understanding, insight, and truth. Fill us, Lord God, and guide us in wisdom. We ask it, Lord, in the authority of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Amen. So here we have these summarizing statements, and Paul begins by repeating what I believe was a common statement among the Corinthians. We've dealt with this in the past, so we won't belabor it, but it's that whole idea that all things are lawful for me. And I really truly believe that this was something the Corinthians were reciting as a statement of their own liberty in Christ. And essentially, the statement is true, but Paul reminds them that even though all things may be lawful for you, not everything is going to be helpful.

Not everything is going to be prudent. Not everything is going to be good for someone else. And that's really the key in this whole summarizing passage. Paul is really not talking here about the things that are good for you or good for me. He's talking about the things that are good for others, and he wants us to be always thinking about how our actions affect others.

You know, we've talked about this in the last few studies because it really has been the major theme, and it's an uncommon theme in many Christian Bible studies to sit and talk about how I might moderate my behavior, or words, or actions, or even the things I eat and drink because of others, because of my concern for others and my desire to strengthen those who are believers and potentially lead unbelievers into the kingdom of God. You got to understand, this was the Apostle Paul's world. Everything he did, everything he said, was governed by this overarching passion to either strengthen believers or lead unbelievers to faith in Jesus Christ. And it became his all in all in the sense of how he did things, how he chose to live his life. We have to admit, I think, as people living today, that that's just not our first consideration.

Our first consideration, unfortunately, is how things affect me, whether it makes me happy. And we hear this refrain every time we turn on the television or watch a movie or something, you know, you just need to do what makes you happy. And if it makes you happy, then it's good. Well, the Apostle Paul would say, I don't think that's exactly true, because I need to be concerned about my fellow believers and not to stumble them. And I need to be concerned about unbelievers, that I might not do anything that would push them away from putting their faith in Jesus Christ.

So you see, this attitude toward others in the body and this desire to evangelize is something that really brings conviction. When we hear it in the words of the Apostle Paul, we kind of take inventory of our own lives and we ask the question, is that my passion? Is my passion to care about others so much that I would withhold or forego, perhaps is a better word, my rights? And is my passion to see people come to Christ such that I would be willing, again, to forego my rights or to live even a little differently around those people? So this is the important element of what we are gaining from these passages.

He says in verse 25, eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. And he's talking to people who have a stronger conscience and have a stronger faith. And so he's saying, don't even bring it up for the sake of other people. Don't even ask questions. If you're buying meat, then just buy meat and don't be concerned.

And then he gives this interesting statement in verse 26, which is a quote from Psalm 26, for the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. Now I need to pause just for a moment in the quotation of this verse, because Paul is using it to say it all belongs to God. And so whether it has been sacrificed to a pagan deity or whether it hasn't is irrelevant because it all belongs to God in the first place. It's his. The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, okay?

Now this is important because this principle that the Apostle Paul is passing along applies to other things as well. It applies to every day of the week, every day of the month, every month of the year. It applies to every minute of every day. It all belongs to the Lord. So it's not just a thing that we apply to material things.

It's a thing that we apply to all things. The earth is the Lord's. All of creation belongs to God. Now here's the reason I emphasize that so much. You know, every year around Christmas, I receive dozens of emails from people who ask the question, should Christians be celebrating Christmas?

And the reason they're asking is because they've been told that there was once a pagan celebration on December 25th, and what Christians are really doing is just resurfacing that pagan celebration. And so they really— shouldn't be celebrating Christmas. Do you understand? Do you see in that question, should Christians be celebrating Christmas? Do you see the same question that was happening in Paul's day?

Should real true devotional Christians eat meat that has been sacrificed to an idol? Do you get it? The people whose faith was weak believed that eating such meat had a corrupting influence on them physically. The people who ask the question about Christmas are often wondering if there is a corrupting influence with celebrating the birth of Jesus on December 25th. Well, do you know what my response is?

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. And that includes every minute of every day, every day of the week, every week of the month, every month of the year. And that means December 25th is not up for grabs for pagans to have it and to hold it and to keep it as their own. And then somehow, because we decide that we're going to use that day to celebrate the birth of Jesus, somehow now that day is corrupted. No, no, no.

Pagans don't get first shot on the days that God created. They all belong to him. And what pagans do and don't do is irrelevant. See, this is the same principle. It's the same principle, whether you're talking about meat sacrificed to idols or celebrating the birth of Jesus on December 25th.

And you know, I've dealt with this so many times over the years, and I'll try to get through to people. And I'll say something like, well, okay, how about if I celebrate the birth of Jesus on December 24th? Is that going to be a problem? How about if I choose December 26th? Wait a minute.

How about if I choose July 7th? Is that going to be a problem? Or do we need to go back to the archives and do some research and find out if at some point in history past, some pagan chose that day to celebrate something. And now it's off limits. Do you see how ridiculous it is?

When our faith is strong, when our conscience is strong, we recognize this overarching principle. The earth is the Lord's. It all belongs to him. The fullness of all creation belongs to God. And I'm not going to play second fiddle to any pagan celebration or day.

I'm sorry. I'm just not going to. I refuse because my God created every day of the year and they all belong to him. Right? So the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.

Verse 27. If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you're disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. Well, first of all, you can see that the apostle Paul had no problem with eating with unbelievers. And we followed the same model that our Lord Jesus presented. He ate with notorious sinners, got in trouble, of course, with the religious leaders of the day.

But you can see here, Paul says, Hey, you know, if an unbeliever invites you to dinner and you know, if you want to go, then go. And if you do, don't raise any question about conscience because you know that it's not an issue for you. So don't even talk about it. He says, but if someone says to you, and this means that, you know, maybe there's somebody else that got invited and their conscience isn't what yours is, their faith isn't as strong as yours is. And they do say something like, this meat here, it's been offered in sacrifice.

Paul says, and I'm in the middle of verse 28, then do not eat it for the sake of the one who informed you and for the sake of conscience. And he says in verse 29, I'm not talking about your conscience. I don't mean yours, but his. Okay. Obviously it was an issue of conscience or he wouldn't have said it.

So do you have the right to eat that meat? Yes. Are you willing to forego that right? Because of the conscience of the person who spoke to you. Paul says, I sure hope so, because I want you to care.

I want you to care about your brother or your sister more than eating a piece of meat or your freedom to eat a piece of meat. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? Now this question sounds like Paul is reversing himself, but he's not. It almost sounds like, well, you know, why should I let somebody dictate the way I eat or live or whatever, just because of their conscience? There are many Bible scholars who believe that what Paul is doing here is he's quoting the Corinthians, that they were the ones who are saying, why should my liberty be limited or determined in any way by somebody else's conscience?

And you see that actually fits the passage a little better if Paul is actually quoting something that maybe they said in a letter to him. And even 30 goes on and says, if I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks? Again, probably a statement the Corinthians were making. Well, Paul's going to explain. Why should I be limited in my liberty?

He says in verse 31, whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Because you see, it's a glorious thing in the sight of God when we, God's people, are willing to forgo a freedom because of love. Because you see, that's what God did. That's the example that Jesus gave us. Boy, I tell you, talk about forgoing freedoms.

Jesus went before us in that department and he showed us that he was willing to go all the way to even dying on a cross. He had the freedom to say, no, I'm not going to die on a cross. But he decided to forgo that freedom for you and me. And that's why we are willing to forgo our freedoms for others. Verse 32, give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God.

That means to other believers. Whether you're talking to Jews or non-Jews that are unbelievers, don't do anything to offend them. Be careful not to offend them because your offending could draw them or push them away from Jesus. He says, or to the church of God or to believers. Don't even do something that's going to offend a believer.

Verse 33, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do. Now, is it possible to please everyone in everything you do? No, it is not. We try. But the old saying, I don't think it's in the Bible, but it's true.

You can't please all the people all the time. Absolutely, 100% true. But do we try? Yeah. Why?

Because we don't want to stumble believers and we don't want to push away unbelievers. Bottom line, because we care. We care about people. He finishes that verse saying, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many. Why?

That they may be saved. And you know, I got to tell you, verse one of chapter 11 is really the final stamp on what Paul's been saying here, where he says, be imitators of me as I am of Christ. And that's what we've been talking about. The example that Jesus gives us is the example that we're all trying to follow. His willingness to sacrifice that which was precious.

His freedoms for the sake of others. Jesus said it this way, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Now he did it in a sense of bringing salvation to the world. That's not something you and I can do. We can't bring salvation in the sense that Jesus does, but we can help to encourage someone to come to salvation by doing the same thing, being willing to lay down our lives.

And I know that sounds dramatic. To say, to lay down your life. But that's the same principle of laying down my right. it's being willing to say, okay, okay. Now, I know that this might be raising some questions.

And when we talk about doing things that don't offend people, you know, is it possible for someone to become so picky, you know, about the way you live and to emphasize things that really don't matter to the point where you have to walk on eggshells? Well, yeah, it is possible. You know, as someone who pastored a church, you know, for 40 years, there were times that people leveled criticisms that I decided were not worth it. Just because I thought, I don't think this is a genuine issue. I'll give you an example.

As I grew older, although I preferred to stand while I taught, I got to the point where standing, particularly on a Wednesday night when I would often teach for an hour plus, was, you know, tiring, it was fatiguing. And so I began to sit down, you know, while I taught through the Bible. We had people come to the church and say, I don't think I can attend a church where the pastor sits down. Okay. You know, you might say, well, aren't you supposed to give up your right?

Well, that's really not a right. It was a choice that I made for physical reasons. I had to kind of make a decision and say, well, okay, is this person being overly critical? And is this an issue? Is this really truly an issue that I need to think about, you know?

And there are times, I'm just telling you, there are times when you're going to have to contemplate, is this a genuine issue? Is this really going to keep this person from Jesus? Or is this really going to possibly stumble my brother? When someone criticized me for sitting down while I was teaching, I knew that it wouldn't stumble them. All they have to do is decide to go to a different church where the guy stands up all the time when he speaks.

And it's no big deal. It's not going to turn them away from the Lord. It's not going to embolden them to do something wrong. And yeah, I just, you know, there are things you just have to work through. So know and understand here that this thing is not always open and shut.

Sometimes you got to think it through. But those are the big questions. Is this going to potentially keep someone from the Lord? Or is this going to potentially stumble my brother or sister in Christ? If the answer to either of those questions is yes, or even maybe, then that's when we should be surrendering our rights.

Other than that, sometimes we can chalk it up to just criticism. So I hope some of this helps. We're going to move into chapter 11 next time. And Paul's going to switch gears a little bit on us and get into some good stuff. I hope you're looking forward to it.

I encourage you to read ahead to chapter 11 and be prepared for our study next time. So let's close this time in prayer. Father, thank you so much for your word. Thank you for the wisdom that we gain from it. Thank you, Lord, for blessing us and nourishing us with the scriptures.

Continue to speak to us through them, guide us and direct us in all that we do. We pray these things in the authority of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.