

Challenges Christians Face

Do All to the Glory of God

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Do All to the Glory of God

Scripture

We continue our study in *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* in a series I am calling *Challenges Christians Face*.

One of the challenges that Christians face is the issue of Christian liberty. I smiled recently when I read about Charlie Brown, the main character of the *Peanuts* cartoon strip. Charlie Brown is contemplating life, and he says, “Sometimes I lie awake at night and I ask, ‘Where have I gone wrong?’ Then a voice says to me, ‘This is going to take more than one night.’”¹ Well, my section on Christian Liberty has taken more than one sermon! But, I am happy to tell you that today we come to my final message on the challenge of Christian liberty that Christians face.

Let’s learn about this in a message I am calling, “Do All to the Glory of God.”

Let’s read 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1:

²³ “All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. ²⁴ Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. ²⁵ Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. ²⁶ For “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.” ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ 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— ²⁹ I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else’s conscience? ³⁰ If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?

¹ *Significant Living*, March/April 2010, p. 46.

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ³² Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ 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.

¹ Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1)

Introduction

The tsunami of December 26, 2004 will be a lifelong memory for anyone old enough to remember that a total of 227,898 people died in that tsunami.² One bright spot of that tragic day was highlighted on the cover of the French children's magazine, *Mon Quotidien*. Tilly Smith, age 11 at the time, was featured as the publication's selection for "Child of the Year" in 2005. The British schoolgirl saved about one hundred tourists because she acted upon what she knew. While walking along a Thailand beach during her family's vacation, she recognized the warning signs that a tsunami was coming because her geography class had studied tsunamis just two weeks before. Because of her actions, the beach was evacuated and it was one of the few places on Phuket where no one was killed or seriously hurt. Tilly Smith's heroics model what Christians are called to do each day—take the knowledge of the gospel and implement it into our routine, wherever that may be, so that lives can be saved for all eternity.³

The apostle Paul has been helping the Christians in Corinth understand how the gospel fit into their daily routine so that their knowledge of the gospel could save lives for all eternity. He was specifically concerned about the way in which some of the Corinthian Christians understood Christian liberty. There was a great deal of confusion about eating food offered to idols.

² According to the US Geological Survey found at <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/eqinthenews/2004/usslav/#summary/>.

³ *Houston Chronicle* on 12/27/2005, p. A2.

Lesson

In our lesson today, we learn some practical directions regarding the proper use of our Christian liberty. Let's learn about this as follows:

1. Seek the Good of Others (10:23-24; 32-33)
2. Eat Marketplace Food (10:25-26)
3. Eat with Unbelievers (10:27-30)
4. Do All for God's Glory (10:31)
5. Follow Paul's Example (11:1)

I. Seek the Good of Others (10:23-24; 32-33)

The first practical direction regarding the proper use of our Christian liberty is to seek the good of others.

Paul said in verse 23: **“All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things build up.”**

You may recall that Paul used the slogan **“all things are lawful”** earlier in 1 Corinthians 6:12. Apparently, some of the Corinthian Christians were asserting that their Christian liberty enabled them to do anything they wanted to do. So, they believed that they were able to eat food offered to idols.

Now, there is a measure of truth to the slogan that for the Christian **“all things are lawful.”** Christians have great liberty in Christ. However, Paul reminded them that Christian liberty is qualified by two further statements. Although **“all things are lawful”** for the Christian, **“not all things are helpful”** and **“not all things build up.”** Liberty in Christ should be governed by a desire to do that which is helpful and builds others up.

And so, to make sure that he was not misunderstood, Paul said in verse 24: **“Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.”** The purpose of Christian liberty is never self-serving but it is always other-serving.

All people want a measure of joy in their lives. And far too

many Christians don't know how to experience joy in their lives. Someone once said that one of the ways to know and experience true joy in our lives is to turn "joy" into an acronym for serving **J**esus, **o**thers, and **y**ourself. If we serve in that order, we will experience true joy in our lives. However, if we change the order—as we are so prone to do—we lose the joy of the Lord in our lives.

Christians should always seek the good of others, regardless of our station in life. This was illustrated during the annual Alfalfa Club dinner in February 2011 where the elite of Washington, D.C. saw a dramatic demonstration of servanthood. This black-tie event had White House senior advisor Valerie Jarrett seated at the head table. Many attendees were seated while others were still shuffling through the crowded room to find their places. Jarrett, who was not wearing her glasses at the time, glanced back and saw a man with stripes down his pants and asked if he could get her a glass of wine. Unbeknownst to her, she had just asked the second-highest ranking general of the United States Army to serve her like a waiter. When it became clear what had happened, Jarrett was mortified, but Four-Star General Peter Chiarelli, the Vice Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, secured a drink and brought it to her.

The apostle Paul would exhort Christians to follow General Chiarelli's action by serving and always seeking the good of others.⁴

But *why* should Christians seek the good of others? It is so that they may be saved. Paul said in verses 32-33: **"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."**

Paul noted three groups: **Jews, Greeks, and the church of God**. He mentioned these groups because each raised different considerations. Both **Jews** and **Greeks** were unbelievers, and **the church of God** were believers. In all cases, Christians are to **give no offense**. Christians are to seek the good of all. And the reason is

⁴ See *abcnews.com*, February 3, 2011.

that they may be saved.

In other words, everything that Christians do must be with an eye to bring them to faith in Christ, or, if they are already Christians, to encourage them in their faith in Christ. The ultimate good of others is that they may be saved.

So, the first practical direction regarding the proper use of our Christian liberty is to seek the good of others.

II. Eat Marketplace Food (10:25-26)

The second practical direction regarding the proper use of our Christian liberty is to eat marketplace food.

Paul said in verse 25: **“Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience.”**

A portion of the meat that was offered in a sacrifice to the idols was sold by the priest to merchants in the marketplace. They in turn sold it to customers.

Jewish rabbis placed many restrictions on Jews who lived in pagan cities like Corinth. Jews had to be sure that they bought meat only from shops that sold kosher meat. In fact, even today certain Jews will only buy kosher food.

But that was not Paul’s policy. Paul said that believers could **eat whatever is sold. . . without raising any question** about whether the meat had been sacrificed to an idol. Paul supported his policy by referencing Psalm 24:1 in verse 26: **“For ‘the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.’”**

Jews quoted Psalm 24:1 prior to eating any meal, and so they were familiar with that verse. Paul used it to assert that everything in the earth belonged to Lord and believers were now to receive everything from the Lord with grateful and thankful hearts. All the Old Testament dietary and ceremonial laws regarding what could not be eaten were done away with in the New Testament. Christians are free to eat anything.

Practically, that means that is no such thing as food that God

has said is prohibited to the Christian. We do not need to abide by any “kosher” laws. Of course, we would be wise to follow sound advice on nutrition and diet for the sake of our health. But, God has not forbidden any food to the Christian.

So, practical directions regarding the proper use of our Christian liberty are to seek the good of others, and to eat marketplace food.

III. Eat with Unbelievers (10:27-30)

The third practical direction regarding the proper use of our Christian liberty is to eat with unbelievers.

Paul’s practical direction regarding eating with unbelievers is similar to his practical direction regarding eating marketplace food. He said in verse 27: **“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.”**

Christians serving as missionaries are often likely to encounter a situation like this. They are visiting in the home of **unbelievers** and food is set before them. Sometimes missionaries struggle to eat the food because they are not used to it or don’t like it. But, Paul says, as a rule, Christians are to **eat whatever is set before them**.

But, the situation changes completely **if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice.”** (10:28a). In that situation, Paul said, **“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”** (10:28b-29a). What does Paul mean?

Knowing that the food has been **offered in sacrifice** raised the issue of the unbeliever’s **conscience**. Several reasons have been offered as to what Paul meant in this section. It seems to me that the best explanation is that if a Christian ate the food after learning that the food was offered to an idol, he would be encouraging the unbeliever to continue in his sinful practice of idolatry. The unbeliever might think that there really is no distinction between his

god and the Christian God, and that there really is not much difference between his religion and Christianity.

Paul asked two questions in verses 29b-30 that are somewhat difficult to understand: **“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?”** It seems that Paul is simply reiterating that the scruples and needs of unbelievers determine the actions of Christians. It is a way of serving them, and it is also a way of limiting our Christian liberty for the sake of the gospel and loving our neighbor.

So, practical directions regarding the proper use of our Christian liberty are to seek the good of others, to eat marketplace food, and to eat with unbelievers.

IV. Do All for God’s Glory (10:31)

The fourth practical direction regarding the proper use of our Christian liberty is to do all for God’s glory.

Paul said in verse 31: **“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”**

This verse is one of the proof texts for the answer to the First Question in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. The question is, “What is the chief end of man?” And the answer is, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”⁵

Not only in **whether you eat or drink, but in whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.** The glory of God is the ultimate goal and purpose of every Christian. You should do everything in life with an eye to the glory of God.

John Piper has preached and written a lot about the glory of God. In one of his sermons, he said the following:

If you asked my four sons, “What’s the most important thing to your dad?” and they said, “I don’t know,” I’d be really disap-

⁵ *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: With Scripture Proofs.*, 3rd edition. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

pointed. But if they said, “I don’t care,” I’d be crushed—and angry. It ought to matter to a son what a father regards as ultimately important. It ought to matter a lot to us what God is committed to with all his heart and soul and mind and strength. What is the impulse that drives the Almighty? What does he pursue in all his plans?

God did not leave us to guess in this affair. He answers the question at every point in redemptive history from creation to consummation.⁶

And then Piper surveyed some of the high points of Scripture to see what God has to say about what is important to him. For example, why did God create us? God says in Isaiah 43:6b-7, “Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory.”

And Scripture after Scripture points us to the truth that God has made us for his glory. And everything we do in this life is to ascribe glory to God.

So, practical directions regarding the proper use of our Christian liberty are to seek the good of others, to eat marketplace food, to eat with unbelievers, and to do all for God’s glory.

V. Follow Paul’s Example (11:1)

And the fifth practical direction regarding the proper use of our Christian liberty is to follow Paul’s example.

Paul said in verse 1 of chapter 11: **“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”**

Paul looked at his own life and he saw that he had been consistent in the way in which he fulfilled his service to Christ, particularly in this area of Christian liberty. And because he had lived a consistent Christian life, he was able to call the Corinthian believers to follow his own example.

⁶ See <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/is-god-for-us-or-for-himself--2>.

Challenges Christians Face

Of course, Paul was following the example of Christ. He gave up many liberties in order to serve others. In fact, Paul reminded the Philippians in Philippians 2:5-8 of Christ's humble service, when he said, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." And he did all of this in order to save others.

Christ's great sacrifice is the perfect model of love and concern for others that Christians are to model in the exercise of Christian liberty.

So, practical directions regarding the proper use of our Christian liberty are to seek the good of others, to eat marketplace food, to eat with unbelievers, to do all for God's glory, and to follow Paul's example.

Conclusion

The following letter was written by Southern Baptist Missionary to Iraq, Karen Watson, prior to leaving for the Middle East. The letter was dated March 7, 2003. Karen was killed, along with four other missionaries, on March 15, 2004.

Dear Pastor Phil and Pastor Roger:

You should only be opening this letter in the event of my death.

When God calls there are no regrets. I tried to share my heart with you as much as possible, my heart for the nations. I wasn't called to a place. I was called to him. To obey was my objective, to suffer was expected, his glory my reward, his glory my reward.

One of the most important things to remember right now is to preserve the work. . . . I am writing this as if I am still working with my people group.

I thank you all so much for your prayers and support. Surely your reward in heaven will be great. Thank you for investing in my life and spiritual well-being. Keep sending missionaries out. Keep raising up fine young pastors.

In regards to any service, keep it small and simple. Yes, simply, just preach the gospel. . . . Be bold and preach the life-saving, life-changing, forever-eternal gospel. Give glory and honor to our Father.

The Missionary Heart:

- Cares more than some think is wise.
- Risks more than some think is safe.
- Dreams more than some think is practical.
- Expects more than some think is possible.

I was called not to comfort or success but to obedience. . . . There is no joy outside of knowing Jesus and serving him. I love you two and my church family.

In his care,
Salaam,
Karen.⁷

That is what the apostle Paul wanted from believers. He wanted Christians to understand that we are to share the gospel so that unbelievers can hear and be saved. And sometimes Christians will limit our Christian liberty for the sake of the gospel and for love of others.

Can that be said of you and me?

⁷ “Keep Sending Missionaries,” *Baptist Press*, March 24, 2004.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org

PRAYER:

O God, you have given us new life in Jesus Christ. We have been transformed by the good news of Christ reconciling sinners like us to yourself. And now you have called us to make you known to others in our circle of influence. Help us to exercise our Christian liberty so that we do all for your glory and the sake of others.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and worship and serve the only true God who is faithful.