

1 Corinthians 10:23 - 11:1

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[0 : 00] So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

This is the challenge that Paul directs to the believers in Corinth and that he directs to you and me this morning. Let's call it the Corinthian challenge.

Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Now, as I was commenting in introducing the reading, last week we made reference to this challenge as we tackled the fifth sola of the Reformation, Soli del Gloria.

We were explaining what is involved in glorifying God and suggested that it is captured in the call to worship God. And that worship we suggested involves us acknowledging God, praising God, and living for God.

And then we further argue that to live for God's glory is to be both central to who we are and all-encompassing. And in the matter of such a focus being all-encompassing, we pointed to this text, what we're calling the Corinthian challenge.

[1 : 22] So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Now, what we didn't do last week was develop what glorifying God in whatever we do looks like.

And this is what I want to try and do this morning as we focus more carefully on what we have dubbed the Corinthian challenge. So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Now, I want to divide what I have to say under four headings. First of all, and this will be very brief, the challenge stated, but then we're going to move on, and this will take us very much into the passage that we've read, the real-life situation out of which the challenge emerges.

And we want to just describe that and try and get a handle on that real-life situation that Paul is dealing with. As I say, out of that we find the challenge emerging.

The third thing that I want to consider is the characteristics of a life that takes this challenge seriously. And we'll discover those characteristics in the real-life situation, in the advice that Paul gives to the believers in Corinth.

[2 : 42] And then finally, and it will be very briefly though, if we had chosen to, we could have given most of our focus on this fourth heading, but we're not going to. But the fourth heading is the example of one man who was up for the challenge of living life to the glory of God.

First of all then, the challenge stated. And that's simply what we read in the verse. And so, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

And I really just very briefly want to say two things about the challenge simply as a standalone declaration. First of all, that it is indeed very broad.

Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, you are to do to the glory of God. So it is all-encompassing. It is broad. It encompasses all of our existence, all of our life, our every waking moment, every activity that we engage in is covered by this challenge.

It is broad, but also, and it's maybe self-evident, but it's worth just stating, is that this challenge is universal. It is directed to all believers in every place and in every age.

[3 : 58] And for the avoidance of doubt, that would include you here this morning. So that's it in terms of the challenge stated. But let's move on to what we can discover from the real-life situation out of which the challenge emerges.

What we're calling the Corinthian challenge is not some catchy slogan that Paul came up with as he was struggling to sleep one night. It is rather a challenge that explains why Paul is advising believers to behave in a certain way in a real-life situation.

And his advice, Paul's advice, is intended to ensure that their decisions and their behavior would bring glory to God.

And so we need to just get a handle, at least in some measure, on the real-life situation that Paul was addressing in this part of his letter.

And it really revolved around what should the attitude and resulting conduct of believers be with reference to meat sacrificed to idols.

[5 : 12] Now I grant you that that is hardly at the top of the list of ethical dilemmas for believers in Scotland in 2017. But bear with me as the principles involved behind the advice or that undergird the advice that Paul gives are eminently practical and applicable to pretty much any situation you are likely to face today.

And this week that has begun as you go to work, as you go to college, in whatever you have before you in this week ahead. The situation is strange, it's alien, but the principles are applicable and practical.

The deal was that in Corinth, a lot of the meat that made its way to the marketplace and as a consequence to the dinner table was meat from carcasses of animals that had been sacrificed to idols.

Within that culture in Corinth, there was a great deal of idol worship. That idol worship involved sacrifices and many animals were sacrificed.

And as I say, the carcasses and much of the meat from those carcasses would make its way to the marketplace. That's where it would end up and it would be on sale to the general public.

[6 : 28] So, that was the situation. Now the dilemma was, what should the attitude and resulting conduct be of believers to that meat?

And believers, of course, were not to participate in idol worship, but what about the meat that had been involved in these rituals?

Now some felt that it was okay. It's just meat. It doesn't matter. It's history. It's just meat. If I want to eat it, I can eat it. That was Paul's attitude.

But others felt that somehow that meat had become contaminated and that it would be improper for them to consume that meat. And this was a problem of conscience for them.

Do I eat this meat given the way in which it has been used? That was the issue. And for those for whom it was a problem, for those for whom the feeling was, well, this is contaminated, there was another practical problem.

[7 : 31] And that was, how do I identify if the meat has this history? You see, there at the marketplace, some of the meat would have been offered to idols, but some of the meat wouldn't have been.

But there wasn't a label telling you which was which. And so for those for whom this was an issue, that was a problem. So what do I do? When I go to the market, do I need to ask? Do I need to make inquiries?

Do I just keep silent and just buy the meat and hope for the best? Or when I'm invited to somebody's home, I don't know where they got their meat from. Do I need to ask my host, see this meat, you know, what's its history?

Or do I just eat? This is the issue that the believers in Corinth are trying to grapple with and that Paul is giving advice on. And you can imagine all the kind of ins and outs of trying to work out what to do or what the right thing to do is.

So Paul is addressing this real life situation and in so doing identifies principles or characteristics that will guide or mark the believer who is seeking to live life to God's glory in everything he or she does.

[8 : 45] When they go to the marketplace to do their shopping, when they go and eat in a friend's home, in these real life situations, how are they to live to God's glory?

And that really takes us to this third element. We've kind of identified very fleetingly the situation out of which the challenge emerges. But now what we want to do is to identify the characteristics of a life that takes the challenge seriously.

And these characteristics of such a life drawn from Paul's advice.

Now, I do want to be clear here that what I'm going to do is draw out three characteristics of a life that is serious about living to God's glory.

I don't pretend that this will be exhaustively dealing with all that Paul says here. There will be significant things that Paul says that I'll leave unconsidered.

[9 : 48] But I do want to draw out these three characteristics of a life so lived to the glory of God. Such a life is marked in these three ways.

First of all, it's marked by resting in grace. Then it's marked by gratitude to God. And then thirdly, it is marked by loving others.

These three things we want to look at now in turn. A life that takes seriously this challenge to live to God's glory is marked by resting in grace, gratitude to God, and loving others.

First of all, resting in grace. Really this whole dilemma that Paul is addressing in Corinth revolves around the question of what is sometimes called Christian liberty, the liberty that the believer enjoys in Christ.

Now let me try and explain that a little more. In verse 23, the very beginning of certainly the passage that we read, Paul proclaims, it seems rather boldly, that everything is permissible.

[10 : 54] Now, you look at that in isolation, you say, well, that sounds a bit, you know, that can't be right, surely. Everything is permissible. Now, what's the origin of this slogan?

It seems to have become a slogan. What's its origin? Well, I think its origin is to be found in Paul's insistence that sinners are saved by grace, through faith, and not of works, so that no man can boast, to use his own language from the letter to the Ephesians.

In contrast to the Jewish religious leaders, and pretty much every religion through time and the face of the earth, that insists that salvation is to be earned by the keeping of rules, by the keeping of an interminable list of do's and don'ts.

If you want to be a good person, if you want to be right with God, you need to avoid doing these things, and you need to be careful to do these things.

And if you tick the boxes, if you live the life, then you should be okay. That kind of summarizes religion. It's about doing, it's about earning your acceptance with God.

[12 : 13] And Paul is saying that is not the gospel. That is not how a Christian is able to get right with God. Because for a Christian, it's all of grace.

We receive the gift of forgiveness. We receive the gift of Christ's righteousness. We don't earn it. We don't deserve it. We don't merit it by our actions.

And it's in that context that Paul says everything is permissible. Others will come to you with rules and regulations and prohibitions and demands, but not the gospel.

I'm not going to come with these lists for you to fulfill. You're free. You've been freed from that by the gospel. Hence, this language that does seem somewhat controversial.

Everything is permissible. Now, this of course is not intended as a license for sin, but a call to live in liberty, resting in grace and trusting in the one who has kept all the rules on your behalf, your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[13 : 25] The believer doesn't rest in his good works or his meticulous rule keeping. He or she rests in Jesus and in Jesus alone.

This is the big truth that underlies the seemingly controversial and suspect claim that everything is permissible. Living life to the glory of God is only possible when we are resting in grace.

That's the foundation, if you wish. So, that's the first characteristic of living and behaving to God's glory. We need to be resting in grace.

But a second element, and these things are very much interconnected, is gratitude to God. Notice how in verse 30 of our passage, Paul defends his conviction that it is right for him to accept a dinner invitation from an unbeliever and eat whatever meat he finds on his plate.

Notice what he says there in verse 30, if I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced? Because of something I thank God for.

[14 : 39] You see, his critics, and this is within the church, were saying, oh, Paul, that's not right. You shouldn't be eating there. You don't know where that meat came from. It's probably been part of some idolatrous ritual, and that is shocking that you're eating that.

And Paul defends himself, and he says, you have no reason to condemn me for doing what I do with thankfulness. Why am I denounced? Because of something I thank God for.

His thankfulness to God that he makes reference to there in verse 30 is in turn grounded in two fundamental truths that Paul identifies in verse 26, where he makes reference to Psalm 25 and the first verse of that Psalm.

It comes there in verse 26, Paul says, for the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. So that's the first verse of that Psalm. We'll sing it at the end of the service.

What's the logic here that Paul is employing? I think it's clear enough. He's saying, if everything belongs to God, the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof for everything in it.

[15 : 49] If everything belongs to God, then everything we have is a gift from God. And so it's only reasonable and right to be grateful to God.

And that's what he's saying. I'm simply showing my gratitude to God for His gifts. I can't be condemned for that. A life and indeed individual actions that glorify God will be actions that are marked by gratitude to God and are performed with thankfulness.

So characteristics of a life that takes seriously, doing everything to the glory of God are resting in grace, gratitude to God. But thirdly, and really what Paul dwells on more in this advice, is loving others.

The whole of this passage, strange though the scenario is for us, alien to us. What a strange situation is being painted here. But strange though it is to us, the whole of this passage is saturated with love for others, seeking the good of others, being sensitive to the concerns of others, sacrificing one's own liberty or rights out of love for others.

If you are to live life and do whatever you do to the glory of God, you need to get up every morning, brush your teeth. Yes, every morning, that's important as well.

[17 : 21] Look in the mirror and say to yourself with conviction, today in whatever I do, it's not about me. Today, whatever I do, my prime concern is not going to be my welfare, my convenience, my comfort, but the good of others.

Or perhaps even more importantly, you need to get up in the morning and get down on your knees and thank God for Jesus, the one who came not to be served, but to serve.

And say to God, help me today to be like Jesus. And we'll come on to that element or that aspect again towards the end.

Now, let's just explore this a little more as we look at what Paul recommends in this real life situation. And in this way, discover what loving others look like, looks like, or involves.

And I think that answering two questions helps to draw out the key elements. The first question is, what does loving others involve? And the second is, what does loving others pursue?

[18 : 30] And we'll start with the first one. What does loving others involve? Well, it involves sacrificing self. In the example that Paul is dealing with, and there are different situations that he deals with even though they're all kind of interconnected.

But in the example that he gives, the believer is required to sacrifice their liberty or right to eat meat out of concern for the other.

And particularly, we find that in verses 28 and 29. So, the picture is, you've turned up at this meal. You've been invited. You're a guest. There are other guests. And one of the other guests, it would seem, is a fellow believer.

They've also been invited. And there you are. You're sitting at the table. The food comes. And your fellow believer whispers in your ear. He says, Paul, or whatever the person is, see that meat?

That was sacrificed to idols. And Paul says, well, what do I do? Or what do you do if you're in that situation? You could say, ah, my liberty allows me to eat that meat.

[19 : 33] There's nothing wrong with eating that meat. I know my theology. I know all about grace. I can eat that meat with completely clear conscience. Yes, you can. But out of love for the other, out of concern for the other who would be offended, who would be hurt, who would be confused, you say, I won't eat it.

I won't eat it. And yes, that might offend my host. It might cause me social embarrassment. But I won't do it. Out of love for the other, I will sacrifice my liberty.

That is what loving others involves. Sacrificing your own rights on behalf of, for the good of others. And so you have this very strange sort of picture that's been painted or situation that's been described. But in terms of the implications, they are eminently practical for us today in so many circumstances that we might find ourselves in.

Christian charity, to use the old fashioned word, Christian love trumps Christian liberty. It is of greater importance to exercise, to show love than to claim your own liberty to behave in whatever manner you consider rightly to be legitimate.

[20 : 47] But the other thing, the other question that I want to pose and try and answer to help us get a handle on this business of loving others is, what does loving others pursue?

I think in verse 33, Paul is crystal clear about what ultimately he is pursuing in the love that he shows to others.

Let's read from verse 31. So, we've got the challenge and then he goes on to develop some thoughts around that challenge. So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks, or the church of God, even as I try to please everybody in every way.

For I am not seeking my own good, but the good of many, so that they may be saved. In this verse, Paul is crystal clear.

He is seeking the good of others. The same truth is threaded through the passage. For example, in verse 23, the claim that everything is permissible is moderated by the imperative of seeking the good, the benefit, or the building up of the other.

[22 : 01] Everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial. I think there the focus is not so much for oneself, but for others. Everything is permissible, but not everything builds up others.

What you're pursuing in this love that you are demonstrating to others is their good, is to build them up to seek their greatest good.

This really captures the essence of Christian love. Christian love is not in the first instance about affections, but about seeking the good of others.

What is the highest good that we can seek for others? Well, Paul isn't slow to tell us. He is seeking the good of many. What does he say?

So that they may be saved. There, the very end of chapter 10. So that they may be saved. And this, in a sense, closes the circle because that which brings most glory to God is the salvation of sinners who are brought to live lives where they themselves joyfully bring glory to God.

[23 : 15] This is his ultimate desire. This is what Paul is pursuing. This is what Paul is pursuing.

That men and women will be brought to faith in Jesus Christ. That they would be saved. And I say to you, my friend, this morning, if you're not a believer and you're with us today, and if you've not yet put your trust in Jesus as your Savior, then let me be very clear.

We love you. And because we love you, our greatest desire for you is that you would be saved.

That is the purest expression of our love, our desire for your greatest good.

That you would know Jesus. That you would trust in Jesus. That your sins would be forgiven. That you would be brought into the family of God. There is no greater good we could desire for you than this.

This is what loving others pursues. And maybe I can just pause and challenge those of us who are believers. Do you see Paul's undivided focus on and confidence in drawing others to faith?

His concern is for the many. That's the language he uses. For I am not seeking my own good, but the good of the many, so that they may be saved.

[24 : 30] His concern is that the many, and his conviction is that the many will be brought to faith through his God-glorifying life marked by self-sacrificial love.

So we have three features of a life lived to the glory of God. Resting in grace, grateful to God, and loving others. And you can pose these three features in the form of questions to test everything you do.

And so when you're thinking about something you're going to do, something you're proposing to do, something you're already doing, you can ask the question of it. In what I am doing, am I resting in grace?

Or maybe in what I'm doing, I'm trying to secure God's favor. Are you resting in grace in what you are doing? You could pose the second question.

Can I do what I am doing with thankfulness, with gratitude to God? You can pose this third question. In what I am doing, is love for others my preeminent concern?

[25 : 39] That third question might be posed somewhat differently in some circumstances. Would I be willing not to do this? Or to change the way I do this for the love of others?

During the week, I was chatting to somebody who was trying to apply last week's sermon to everything they do. Now, that in itself was very encouraging. But they were coming up with what seemed to be an almost comical scenario.

And the question was along these lines, how can I go to the gym to the glory of God? You know, they were analyzing everything they do. It says, whatever you do, well, I go to the gym.

How can I do that to the glory of God? And we smile and we say, well, that's a bit ridiculous, isn't it? That's a bit extreme. Well, let's apply the test of these questions that we've suggested.

Ask the question, am I resting in grace? Or am I going to the gym as my way of becoming the person I need to be in order to be attractive and of worth to others or even to myself?

[26 : 41] Because let's be honest, lots of people go to the gym for that reason. Because it's their way of increasing their self-worth, of feeling better about themselves, of having other people look at them and say, you are attractive, you are worthwhile, you are good.

Is that what you're going? Well, that's what you're doing. Well, that's what you're going. You're not doing it to the glory of God. You're not resting in grace. Am I going to the gym with thankfulness for a measure of health that allows me to do it, for my body, whatever shape it happens to be in, for the God-given resources that allow me to have that gym membership, for the patience of my wife or husband who allows me to go off to the gym two or three times a week or whenever it is.

I have no notion why anybody would want to do that. But that's really beside the point. Third question. Am I going to the gym with a loving concern for the good or welfare of others?

Now, what might that look like? It might involve inviting somebody else to go with you. Maybe somebody who's lonely. Somebody who you wouldn't naturally be attracted to.

You'd really rather go by yourself because that person, they're not really up to your standard and they'll slow you down and you don't really, it's difficult to have a proper chat with them. They're not really your kind of people, but no, I'm going to invite that person.

[28 : 01] Because my concern is for them above my own comfort. Maybe it's a willingness not to go, even though you really want to go, because you have the opportunity to love somebody, to serve somebody by not going.

And you say, I'm willing to sacrifice my weekly ritual. And I always go, I never miss it. Again, I can't imagine why anybody wouldn't want to miss going to the gym.

But again, that's beside the point. Are you willing to do that out of concern for others? Or are you in sitting on your right? It's my right. It's my time. It's my money.

It's my membership. I'm going to go. Because I want to go. Well, if that's your attitude, then you're not doing it to the glory of God. You're not doing something sinful. There's nothing sinful about going to the gym. But if that's your attitude, then you're not doing it to the glory of God.

Or maybe if you're focused on going to the gym is because you see it as an opportunity to meet people, to form friendships that will allow you to in turn share with them something of the good news of the gospel.

[29 : 06] Then that surely comes under the category or is characterized by this concern for others that is intrinsic to living life, doing whatever you do to the glory of God.

Well, let me just close by the final heading. But before I do, just one thought on this matter of how, and I find this very interesting, how as we explore this real-life situation, living a life to the glory of God actually finds expression in the service of others.

And I find that interesting because I sometimes hear people criticizing the Bible and God. They say, this God of yours, he is so self-obsessed. You know, he's so needy. He's so in need of self-affirmation that he would have all you Christians live life to his glory.

What kind of God is that? And yet when we actually look at what living life to God's glory looks like, it's all about serving others. It's all about serving others.

Now, I find that an interesting insight. The final heading, the example of one man who was up for the challenge. What does Paul say in chapter 11? We've already thought about it a little bit with the children.

[30 : 23] Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ. Jesus provides us with the most vivid and attractive example of living life to the glory of God.

If you want to know what living life to the glory of God looks like, then look at Jesus. If you want to experience what living life to the glory of God feels like, then live like Jesus.

The one who came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you for the good news of the gospel. We thank you for the manner in which we are granted not only forgiveness of sins, not only welcomed into your family, glorious privileges that these are, but we're given a life to live.

A life to live that is pleasing to you, that is of service and of blessing to others. And we pray that you would help us to live that life. We acknowledge that it is difficult for us. It's very difficult for us sometimes to rest in your grace.

[31 : 40] It's very difficult for us to be grateful. We so often imagine that all that we have or so much of what we have is earned, is deserved. Help us to be grateful.

Help us to acknowledge that all good gifts come from above. And help us especially in what is perhaps the most difficult thing for us to do, which is to live with a principle concern, not for our own comfort, not for our own benefit, but for the benefit, for the good of others.

And we pray in Jesus name. Amen.