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**GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS**  
#26

**PARTAKE WITH THANKFULNESS**  
**1 CORINTHIANS 10:23-11:1**

**INTRODUCTION**

In 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1 Paul is guiding the Corinthian church through the difficulties and temptations that come with living in a culture saturated in idolatry. Throughout these chapters, Paul stresses the true freedom that believers have because of Jesus. We understand Christian freedom as freedom from guilt and wrath which result from our sin. Additionally, we are free to approach God without dread and without fulfilling any ceremonial requirements. But Paul's emphasis in these chapters is the freedom of conscience. Jesus is Lord over the conscience; therefore, no other person has the authority to govern your conscience. Men cannot require of us what God has not required of us.

Within the context of this discussion, Paul forbids the Corinthians from attending feasts given in honor of false gods [10:14-22]. It's not that the idols or the food pose any real danger for they certainly do not. The problem is the *religious character* [Charles Hodge] of the service. Hodge writes, *all the provisions, the wine and the meat, were blessed in the name of the idol, and thereby consecrated to him*. Therefore, it is impossible for a believer to both eat at the Table of the Lord and the table of demons. But here in 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1, Paul tells the Corinthians there is no problem with eating the meat sacrificed to an idol apart from attending the feast given in honor of the idol.

There is a certain kind of person who has real problems grasping this kind of wisdom. That person would say, "if attending the feast is wrong, then eating the meat is just as wrong". Paul knows better and therefore reasons differently. Some people like everything to be cut and dry without any difficulties. Those people prefer to live by strict rules in a world where every thing is clearly labeled as right or wrong. The church is filled with such people and that is why there is a great need for wisdom to not only distinguish between what is right and wrong, but what is essential, important and non-issues. What is essential to Christianity? What is important, but not essential? What are the issues over which there is complete freedom to disagree? Christians must be able to answer these questions.

What are the essential aspects of Christianity? To put it another way; what makes us Christians? Certainly, we include the fundamental doctrines of the Trinity, including the deity and humanity of Jesus. Additionally, the doctrine of justification by faith alone must be contended for as fundamental to the faith. And to these we can add recognition of the unique authority of Scripture as a necessary part of the Christian faith.

What are the important issues within Christianity, yet not essential? The most immediate issue that comes to my mind is baptism. Committed Christians hold differing views of how and when someone should be baptized, yet those who disagree on this issue agree on the essential matters.

Baptism is an important issue, but it is not essential that we agree on the particulars in order to be called Christians.

What are the areas of doctrine and practice over which we are free to disagree? What are the issues that should be recognized as the least important? The answers to this question are many and varied. In this category we can include every issue not clearly commanded by Scripture. If Scripture does not provide clarity, then we are free to hold various opinions on any given topic.

This becomes important in 1 Corinthians 10 because here Paul said that abstaining from feasts given in honor of idols is essential to the Christian faith. Some things are just fundamentally incompatible with following Jesus. And here Paul also says that eating meat previously offered to an idol is of no importance at all. So we are back to the topic of Christian liberty in Paul's final words on the issue in 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1.

### **1. CHRISTIAN LIBERTY IS A GOOD GIFT FROM GOD AND SHOULD BE RECEIVED WITH GRATITUDE.**

God has freed us from sin's penalty and He has opened a way through Jesus that we can come to Him by faith alone. Therefore we must conclude that matters of food and drink are not essential to our justification. In such matters, everything God made for food is lawful to eat and everything God made for drink is lawful to drink (v23). In fact, all of creation is given us to enjoy and to promote our gratitude toward God (v26, v30). Whether we abstain from eating or drinking certain things or whether we partake has no bearing at all on our relationship with God. Particularly addressing the Jews, Paul had to make that point again and again [See Colossians 2:13-23 & 1 Timothy 4:1-5]. Paul repeatedly warns us against attaching undue spiritual significance to food or drink or any other thing that God created.

### **2. CHRISTIAN LIBERTY HAS ITS LIMITS: OUR OWN GOOD AND THE GOOD OF OTHERS.**

In one sense, our liberty is limited only by the revealed will of God; we may not cross the barriers God has erected to manifest His holiness and protect His people. The law of God remains the pathway in which we walk so that our lives are truly holy. But there are other limitations placed upon our liberty here in this text. First of all, we should not participate in any activity that does not build us up into holy individuals (v23). Some activities are not forbidden, neither are they helpful to our spiritual growth. But such things must be determined by the individual conscience and those decisions cannot then be applied to others. Secondly, while some activities may be perfectly fine for us, our participation in them may lead another into sin. Therefore, we must consider others while making decisions (v24).

Paul offers us two hypothetical, but very real, illustrations to help us work through such matters. First of all, if a Corinthian were buying meat in the market place, he should have no concern whether it had previously been part of a sacrifice to any false god (v25). His conscience should not even raise the question because it's of no significance. The meat was made by God and should be eaten with thanksgiving (v26) as quoted in Psalm 24:1. It is not tainted because of false religion and its ceremonies.

Secondly, if an unbeliever invites a believer to his home for dinner, the believer should eat whatever is provided without any concern for the meat's origin. Again, it simply does not matter if it was part of a sacrificial offering to a false god. But, if someone raises the issue that it was

offered in a pagan feast, then the believer should refrain from eating. The difficulty here is figuring out who raises the issue. If the unbelieving host informs his guest of the issue, then the Christian should not eat it because the host obviously believes eating such meat is incompatible with the Christian faith and the believer must not confuse him. If it is a weaker Christian who warns of the meat's origin, then the stronger Christian must not eat the meat lest he lead his weaker brother into sin (v27-30). To go ahead and eat it would provide an opportunity for slander regarding one's exercise of Christian liberty (v30).

### **3. THE GOAL OF ALL LIBERTY IS THE GLORY OF GOD.**

The goal of such a lifestyle is the glory of God (v31). In other words, believers are to be satisfied with God; we are to be so satisfied with Him that we can enjoy our liberty or we can give up our rights. We can partake with thankfulness or we can abstain out of concern for others. In all of this, we want to magnify God's goodness to us and not insist on our rights. So if we eat and drink, we do so for God's glory. If we abstain, we do so for God's glory. In all we do, we do it for God's glory. Our desire is to exalt God and not be needlessly offensive (v32).

### **4. PAUL AND JESUS PROVIDE RELIABLE EXAMPLES OF HOW TO LIVE FOR GOD'S GLORY.**

Both Paul and Jesus model such a lifestyle for us (10:33-11:1). They teach us what it means to live for God's glory. Paul, and Jesus to a much greater degree, teach us to lay aside our rights for the good of God's people and the glory of God's name [See Philippians 2:5-11]. When Paul commands us to *give no offense*, he means for us not to lead others to sin against their consciences. He does not mean that we can live in a way that never ticks people off.

Jesus and Paul were forever offending people [I am using *offend* here in its popular sense of making someone angry], especially religious people. But those offended at Paul and Jesus were most often not a part of *the church of God* (v32). Paul and Jesus were willing to accommodate questioning unbelievers and struggling believers, but they were not willing to accommodate legalistic, self-righteous people who lived their lives by adhering to man-made rules. Jesus never led anyone into sin, but he sure had a way of agitating self-righteous people who thought by obeying rules they would be accepted by God.

### **CONCLUSION**

Let's consider a few concluding thoughts: (1) God created the world and everything in it for our enjoyment. Thankfulness should result, not a list of rules a mile long. (2) While enjoying God's gifts, let's remember our weaker brothers and sisters and avoid any entanglements that distort our clear allegiance to Jesus. (3) Never let legalists set the agenda; that is a sure path to misery, not holiness. (4) Always look to Jesus, but make sure you look closely. We hardly ever are able to answer the question *what would Jesus do?*