

## **"When Personal Liberty Becomes Idolatry"**

*1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1*

*"Therefore my dear friends, flee from idolatry" (10:14)*

We ended the message last week on this but we begin with it for the rest of the chapter because it acts as a hinge pin to what he just said in vv.1-13 and now wants to apply more specifically in vv.14-11:1. I'm sure the people reacted to this verse the way the Israelites who heard Malachi's messages reacted to his words. For example in Malachi 1:6 he states,

*<sup>6</sup> "A son honors his father, and a slave his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the Lord Almighty. "It is you priests who show contempt for my name. "But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?'"*

Then God explains through Malachi that they showed contempt for God by bringing damaged animals for sacrifices instead of spotless, unblemished animals. In 3:8 God says through Malachi,

*<sup>3:8</sup> "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?' "In tithes and offerings. <sup>9</sup> You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me."*

Malachi explains to the people that they were disobeying God in this area, yet the people didn't see it. So here, in 1 Cor. 10:14 when Paul says flee idolatry, I'm sure a bunch of the stronger believers were thinking of saying to Paul, 'Idolatry? How are we committing idolatry?'

So Paul is going to summarize a lot of what he's said already about meat sacrificed to idols to those who had the knowledge aspect of it right but we're not seeing the damage that their freedom had caused. So here's Paul's argument so far:

*Can you eat meat that was once sacrificed to an idol? Answer, yes you can because idols don't really exist. So, if the meat purchased in the market came from an idol worship service, it's okay to eat.*

For some though, they took this too far. How? The thought process went like this. There's only one God. So I can eat the meat sacrificed to an idol. And if the meat is not an issue and the idols don't exist, I can return to the idol worship services and enjoy the food there with those people I used to do that with because they aren't really worshipping anything. Wrong, Paul says. Now you're inadvertently worshipping demons. And to help show how this is wrong he uses communion to make his point because you can't celebrate a communion feast honouring God and Jesus as your Lord and then go to a pagan feast and honour their supposed god because that is idol worship. You can't do both. That's called spiritual adultery.

So then, let's allow Paul to challenge us this morning with these questions:

### **Are We Blind to Our Spiritual Adultery?** **(10:14-22)**

Paul begins with some logic as a way to wake some of these believers who have allowed their freedoms to take them away from Christ and perhaps unknowingly.

<sup>14</sup> Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. <sup>15</sup> I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. <sup>16</sup> Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup> Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. <sup>18</sup> Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar?

Paul emphasizes 'participate' (3x) and partake (same root word). In Greek its 'koinonia' or what we call fellowship. It means unity, a relationship. In the ancient middle east to sit down with a meal with someone meant you were one, you were at peace and in agreement with. And Paul's point here is

### **Participation means identification (vv.14-18)**

When we celebrate communion we are identifying with the Lord Jesus Christ. We are all united to Him through faith. The communion meal (in Paul's day) was a uniting of fellow believers reflecting on their oneness based on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The cup of thanksgiving (or cup of blessing) was the cup that remembered Jesus' words that we are joined with Him through faith in His death and resurrection. The bread they all ate from (one loaf) identified you with the person of Jesus, His teachings, and all who He is as the bread from heaven which came down from the Father. We often limit it to the crucifixion but I think body refers to His whole life and everything He stands for and represents. That's why we are called the body of Christ; we continue to live in fellowship with Jesus because He continues to live.

In v.18 he uses the same principle for Israel under the Old Covenant. When they made sacrifices to God did that not identify them as God's people? When people saw them do that they knew they were followers of Yahweh. Participation means identification.

Now he brings that principle into their participation in idol feasts.

<sup>19</sup> Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? <sup>20</sup> No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. <sup>21</sup> You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. <sup>22</sup> Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

While idols do not exist, people still sacrifice to them believing they are real because Satan and his demons have convinced them they are. To worship anything other than God or more than God is a tactic of Satan to keep you from God. When they participated in these idol feasts (thinking it was only about meat and I'm strong enough not to let any of that affect me), Paul says you're identifying with pagan rituals and pagan worshippers. People see you doing that they identify you as an idol worshipper or worshipper of that false god. You can't do both Paul says. God is a jealous God. Paul warns them here:

### **Watch that your freedom does not lead to sin (vv.19-22)**

You think you're strong, Paul says, but you're not that strong. You've gone too far with your freedom. You are sending mixed messages; who do you really worship? God or demons. Now, hopefully, we respond, I didn't see it that way. I thought it was only about meat, or having a drink or how I observe the Sabbath principle. When we only think its about what I can do and not think about God or others we fall (10:12) into sin.

So, now Paul comes back to the basic principle when it comes to grey areas, things not clearly prohibited in Scripture, and reminds us that exercising our freedoms is not just about my preference. Here's another question we need to consider:

## **Do Our Choices Benefit Us More than Others?** **(10:23-30)**

*23 "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is constructive. 24 Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.*

*25 Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, 26 for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."*

*27 If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.*

Paul reassures his readers and hearers,

### ***Enjoy your freedoms (vv.23-27)***

If it you clearly understand Scripture doesn't prohibit it, enjoy, give thanks to God for it. Make sure your conscience does not convict you. If Paul thought some had felt he was now contradicting himself, no, that hasn't changed. However, the Christian life is not about you. We died to Christ when we accepted Him as our Saviour. Our life is about helping others see Jesus is alive and He's alive in us, modeling how His teachings are shaping the very decisions we make in life. Enjoy your freedoms then as long as

### ***It doesn't offend others (vv.28-30)***

*28 But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake— 29 the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? 30 If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?*

If someone points out your freedom as if it's question-able, they have not come to the conclusion as we have. So then what do we do? We can ignore them and think to ourselves, 'Too bad they are not as mature as me' [which of course is arrogant], or since we are the more mature in Christ [in our mind] we act like Christ and serve the other by not offending them with our freedom. That's the Jesus way. Others' well-being over our preference. Serve, not be served. The last will be first.

Paul says don't let someone condemn you for your freedom (even though they really have no right to, that's God's job) out of love serve them by just not exercising your freedom. Remember back in Ch. 6 when he encouraged those in the right not to take their brothers to court? He said, 'Why not rather be wronged?' for the sake of unity and God's glory. Is your exercise of your freedom such a big deal that you're willing to divide the body of Christ over? Paul says please don't, it's not worth it. We and our right to express our freedoms in Christ, is not the focus nor purpose of being united to Christ together. So here's the main question we must answer every day:

## **Are God's Purposes My Priority?** **(10:31-11:1)**

Now Paul gives us one of the greatest summaries of what the Christian life is all about in the context of deciding how we will exercise our freedoms:

<sup>31</sup> *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*

Whether you're trying to decide whether to exercise your freedoms verbally (opinions), internally (what we eat or drink) or visually (the choices we make about what we do and where we go), is what I'm about to say, eat, drink or do, am I doing to for God or for myself? Am I trying to make people see God or me?

### ***Is this glorying God (v.31)***

This has always been God's purpose since the creation of humanity, to reflect God to the world. We are made in His image so that people would see there is a God who is real, powerful and loving. Did we wake up today reviewing our purpose in life or did we think about all the things we want to do? When we're walking in partnership with the Lord and each other the things we want to do, will glorify God. They will show others our life is about making Him known.

*Ps. 115:1 Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.*

Paul continues reminding us about our purpose as Jesus' followers and God's image bearers,

<sup>32</sup> *Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—<sup>33</sup> 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.*

**11** <sup>1</sup> *Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ*

Is the practicing of our freedoms and preferences not clearly stipulated in Scripture

### ***Hindering my witness? (vv.32-11:1)***

Paul mentions Jews, Greeks or the church because he just said back in 9:20 he became like a Jew to the Jews, like a Gentile to the Gentiles and like the weak (believers not fully mature) to the weak believers in the church. He wasn't trying to please everybody in the sense of doing what they wanted but acting the way they needed to see him model Christ. And that made for a more effective witness. Seek the other's good so that those who are watching how we interact with each other would be helped in seeing Christ through us and not be hindered. That's the example Paul was modeling.

So Paul concludes his teaching on navigating those issues in our culture that are not specifically dealt with in Scripture. Essentially, he says, don't make it about your choice, your opinion and your freedom. Enjoy the way God has created you with different likes and dislikes. We're not right or wrong, just uniquely made with differences. Glorify God with our differences. Live together in the body of Christ so that people don't complain about us but rather see the love and care we have for everybody. The Christian life is about God being glorified and Jesus' message being made known.

Think of communion as a thermometer to measure your freedoms. Does the exercise of my freedoms and opinions as a believer lead me away from Christ and possibly into sin? Is my 'fellowship' with the world too close so that my fellowship with Jesus is unrecognizable at times? Or is taking the bread and cup this morning a great reminder and a good safety check to keep me communing with Christ more than communing with the people or things of the world which the enemy always tries to convince us is more satisfying?

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please  
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