

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Principles of Christian Freedom

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

Code: 1843

In 1 Corinthians 10 verses 23 through 11 verse 1, we have Paul's final statement regarding Christian liberty. And this morning we are going to be summing up and building on the things we've saying to you for several months since we began the study of chapter 8.

Because in our study of 1 Corinthians we are, in chapters 8 through 11 verse 1, dealing with one single subject. The subject of how does a Christian function within the framework of his liberty? How does a Christian know what is right or wrong when the Bible doesn't tell him? What does our Christian freedom allow us to do? And we've been covering that in detail and you're certainly more than welcome to get some tapes on that if you haven't been able to be with us so that you can bring yourself up to the understanding of the total message and lesson of this portion. But for this morning we're going to just pull all the things together that Paul summarizes in verses 23 through 11:1.

Now to begin with, by way of an introduction, this section contains one of the most important and essential statements in the entire Bible. In fact, it is a statement that is vital because it encompasses everything else in all that the Scripture says and brings it down to one statement, and it's in verse 31. It says...at the middle of verse 31..."Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Now that is the bottom line on the Christian life. That is basically the meaning of life for anyone. We are here for one primary reason, and that is to glorify God. "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." You can't make a more general statement than, "Whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God."

Now that leads me to want to talk about, for a few minutes, what it means to glorify God. Now if you know anything about me you know that's something I like to talk about because I talk about it a lot, and that's a little bit about what the Book is concerning itself with also. But for this time I want to approach it from a negative standpoint, something we haven't done, and I want to give you a clear understanding of what it is to glorify God by looking at what it is not, or how to un-glorify God.

Now there are only two things that an individual can do with his life. And with any given point in his life, or any given moment in his life, or any given day in his life. One is to glorify God and the other is to be a reproach to God. An unbelieving individual lives a continual life that is a reproach to God. He ignores God, he dishonors God, he un-glorifies God, if there is such a word. A believer glorifies God. That's the goal of his life. But sometimes he can also be a reproach to God. He also can dishonor God. So there are those two capacities.

Now let's begin by looking at what it means to dishonor God, what it means to be a reproach to God, as opposed to glorifying Him. Take your Bible and I want you to begin by looking at the 36th chapter of Ezekiel, Ezekiel chapter 36. This is a great prophetic chapter that some of us are very familiar with in reference to the future of Israel that God is going to bring Israel back into the land and God is going to establish Israel as His people in His land. God is going to conquer Israel's enemies and God is going to defeat those who would come against Israel. And God is going to place them in a place of blessing. And in this particular portion we find some very interesting truths.

But I would like to draw you all the way over to the 20th verse of Ezekiel 36. Now God has just said...reminding Israel of the history that they have endured..."I have scattered you throughout the nations." This is what is called the dispersion of Israel, the diaspora. Israel was, because of sin, scattered all over everywhere. They became a people without a land. They were disinherited at the times of the Gentiles in 586 B.C., the overrunning of Jerusalem, the hauling away of Israel. And Israel was then scattered throughout the world. And at this particular juncture in history they are beginning to be re-gathered. And we are seeing this beginning of the re-gathering of Israel that is consummated in the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ in the future. We're beginning to see it. So Israel is scattered. And this is what God has to say in regard to this, verse 20, "When they entered into the nations, to which they went, they entered into the nations to which they went, they profaned My holy name." Now let's stop there for a minute. God says, "Now when I scattered you, you dishonored or un-glorified, or profaned, or brought evil upon My holy name. You were really bad publicity for Me. You gave Me bad press." Now they said, "These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of his land." You know what happened? The Gentiles said, "Boy, that god over there in Israel must be some kind of impotent god. Look at His people. He can't even keep them in their land." In other words, the Gentile world had a plethora of localized deities and they assumed that the Jehovah God of Israel was just another localized deity, that He had a certain territory in which He had responsibility and He had evidently revealed by the dispersion of Israel. And the fact that they had been thrown out of the land, that he was impotent and couldn't even keep His own people in their land, some kind of God. He's even a failure as a local deity. Look at Him.

So verse 21, God says, "I didn't like that. I don't like getting that bad publicity that I'm an impotent local deity. I had pity for my holy name, not for Israel." Now notice this. The re-gathering of Israel is not nearly so much for Israel, as it is for God's name. "I had pity for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they went. Therefore, say unto the house of Israel, thus said the Lord God; I do not this for your sales, O house of Israel." Did you hear that? "What I'm going to do, it isn't for you. Not for your sake, but for My holy namesake, which you have profaned among the nations to which you went. I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in the midst of them; and the nation shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes." "How you going to do it God? How are You going to get back Your reputation? I mean, you've got Israel splattered all

over everywhere, and you're saying now, 'I'm not going to tolerate this. I'm not going to continue to be profaned. I'm going to get back the sanctity that My name desires.'" "How?...verse 24..."I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, you shall be clean from all your filthiness, and from your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart will I give you, a new spirit will I put within you: I will take away the stony heart of your flesh; give you a heart of flesh. Put My spirit within you, cause you to walk in My statutes, you shall keep My ordinances and do them, and you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and you shall be My people, and I will be your God."

God says, "You know what I'm going to do? Someday I'm going to gather you back. I'm going to bring you all back to the land. When you get in the land I'm going to save you. I'm going to plant my spirit within you. I'm going to make you an obedient people, and all the world is going to think differently about My power." And says, "I'm doing this, not for your sake, but for My sake." You see, the heathen seeing the miserable state of exiled Israel concluded that Jehovah was impotent. And Israel has brought upon God a bad press, bad publicity, a profaned name, a reproach. Because of their sin God had to chasten them. When God had to chasten them their life became so miserable that the rest of the world thought God was impotent.

Now this opens up to us a very important truth that I don't think very many of us have ever thought about. God is reproached when we sin, because when we sin He has to chasten us, and when He chastens us our life gets miserable. And when the world sees a Christian who is miserable they assume our God has got something wrong with Him. Lutha, said, and I quote, "Sin is not only evil in itself, but it compels God to do what men are bound to misunderstand. God's name is profaned, not only when His people sin, but when they force Him to punish them." end quote.

Look at people...they look around the world and say, "Aw, you say God is a God of love and God is a God of grace. Look at the mess the world's in." Do you ever hear that? You hear it all the time. "Look at all the people that are dying and the infants that are dying and babies that are born deformed," and on, and, and on, and on. And people say, "What kind of a God do you have? What kind of God is this? If He's such a loving, kind, and gracious, and merciful God, why does this happen?" Do you see what happens? Men sin, God is just and God must punish sin, and when He does it He gets bad press, bad publicity, His name becomes profaned. And, Beloved, that's one reason why the Lord says to His people, "You could help a lot if you just cool it on sinning. If you could just shape up, and I could at least bless your lives, and the world could see what you are, then maybe that would increase the possibility of Me being thought of in a different way."

I'm going to show you another Scripture, Numbers chapter 14, because this is very helpful in understanding this principle. I hope you're getting it. Numbers 14:15, the Lord is very upset at this point because of rebellion and unbelief in Israel. They were very, very...they were griping, and complaining, and bellyaching, and worshipping a golden calf...oh, it was awful. So the Lord finally

says, "I've had it." Verse 11, "How long is this people going to provoke me?" I mean, how long can any God take this. This is enough. Verse 12, "I'll smite them with the pestilence, disinherit them, and find another greater nation mightier than they." That's all for Israel. And Moses says, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, Lord." What did he say? Moses said to the Lord...verse 13..."Then the Egyptians will hear it. Do you want your reputation to float back to Egypt, you just took us out of?" "And they will tell it to the inhabitants of the land." They'll make a big announcement. "For they have heard that thou Lord art among this people, that thou Lord art seen face to face, that thy cloud stands over them...the cloud that lead them...and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of cloud, and a pillar of fire by night. Hey the Egyptians know You're here and that You're the God responsible for us, and You're the God leading us, and You're the God empowering us, and You're the God protecting us."

"Now...verse 15...if you kill all of us, like you would kill one man...just wipe the whole nation...then the nations which have heard the fame of You will speak and say...do you know what they'll say if you do that?...because the Lord was not able to bring the people into the land which He swore to give it to them, therefore He slew them all in the wilderness." "Impotent. He got them all the way out there, didn't have the power to bring them into the land so He wiped them out in the desert. Some God." And Moses says, "God, is that the kind of reputation you want?" See what Moses is appealing too? He's appealing to God's glory. "Do you want to be reproached God?"

Deuteronomy chapter 9 verses 23 to 28, says essentially the very same thing, and goes over the very same ground. He says in chapter 9 verse 27, "Remember your servants...Moses again... Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; look not onto the stubbornness of this people nor to their wickedness nor to their sin. Don't consider our sin Lord. Lest the land from which you brought us out say, 'Because the Lord was not able to bring them into the land He promised. And because He hated them He's brought them out to slay them in the wilderness.' Don't do it Lord because then they're going to misunderstand Your character. They're going to think You are incapable of fulfilling Your promise. You got over to the Promised Land and You didn't have the power to pull it off." Now you see God does not desire His name to be polluted, so God within His hand, didn't He, from Israel? And slew some of them. At least three thousand men died there in the slaying by the Levites, and more than that. But God withheld His hand because His reputation is important to Him.

Do you know God is so gracious that sometimes when you deserve something you don't get it just so he can protect His reputation? In Ezekiel 39, we find similarly that when God talks about the future, he's going to come in the tribulation time, and he's going to conquer Gog and Magog, which seems to be confederates army that descends on Israel from the north. God says, "I'm going to wipe that Gog and Magog out." This is the coming invasion that God is going to deal with. And he says, "When I've wiped them out they will know that I am the Lord... verse 7 of Ezekiel 39...so will I make my holy name known in the midst of My people Israel, and I will not let them pollute My holy name anymore and the nation shall know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel. I'm tired of bad publicity, and I'm going to reverse it some day." You see, a people can either reproach God or they

can glorify God. And God desires that we glorify Him. And if the world is ever to really see who God is it's going to be dependent, I think, upon our faithfulness in giving Him glory.

Now let me just add a footnote because you might think that if you prayed like Moses you could get out of everything and God wouldn't punish you. So the next time you do something bad you'll say, "Now Lord, protect Your name, protect Your name. See. Don't hit me Lord it'll just be bad for You because, you know, I'll cry a lot and people will say, 'Boy, what's going on?' And I'll say, "Well God did this to me, and that'll be bad."

But let me hasten to add that in Jeremiah 14:7, that's essentially what Jeremiah was going through. "Oh Lord...Jeremiah 14:7, Oh Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do it for Your namesake. Whatever You do Lord...we've really been bad...but whatever you do Lord, do it for Your own glory. Whatever you do, do it for Your own namesake. Our backslidings are many; we have sinned against thee. Oh the hope of Israel, it's savior in time of trouble, why should you be like a soldier in the land, like a wayfaring man who turns aside to tarry for a night? Why should you be like a man dumbfounded, like a mighty man who can't save? God, don't make people think that You just hang around a little while, and You've vacated the place. You've been like a soldier, to here and gone again. You've been like a dumbfounded man. You can't figure it out so You bail out. Or You've been like an impotent man; You're not mighty enough to save. Don't run away from us now, God, or nobody will understand Your character. Yet, O Lord, you are in the midst of us, and we are called by You name; leave us not. Don't go away Lord. Don't forsake us and leave us to the consequence of our sins."

Now what was the answer? "Thus saith the Lord unto this people, Thus have they loved to wander, they have not restrained their feet, therefore the Lord does not accept them; he will now remember their iniquity, and punish their sin." The Lord said to Jeremiah, "Do not pray for this people for their good. Stop praying for them. They're going to get it. When they fast I will not hear their cry, when they offer burnt offering and oblation, I will not accept it. I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and the pestilence. Then said I, Ah, Lord God." You say, "What happened?" Jeremiah said...tried to pray like Moses...said, "God, you can't do this." God says, "I have to do it." He was gracious to Israel as a nation, but do you know that the entire generation that sinned there were wiped out, weren't they, except for two of them. And here He's saying, "Look, I gotta do it. I know it's going to be a dishonor to me. I know the world isn't going to understand. I know it'll cast reproach, but I have to do it." You say, "Why God?" Because God is a God of what? Justice.

And God, in order to gain glory, never is able to bypass justice. And that's why in the world you could say, "Well God if you really want everybody to like you, why don't you just clean the place up? Why don't you eliminate the trouble? Why don't you stop the war? Why don't you solve all the problems?" And God is saying, "Yeah, that's fine for you to say, but I can't because My justice demands that I reattribute sin. The wages of sin is what? Death, and it has to be paid. So God is saying to the

Christian, "You could sure help a lot, if you just make sure your life isn't reproached."

God said to Israel, through Paul, in Romans, "Because of you My name is blasphemed among the Gentiles." That's sad, and it can even happen in a Christian's life. And because of the kind of life you live God's name is literally blasphemed because of you. Sad. Whatever you do in your life ought to be to glorify God.

In 1 Timothy...I'll show you a couple, just simple illustrations. Now this is so very, very practical here. First Timothy 5 is talking about young women. And this is assuming the young women had been widowed; their husband has died and they're still young. It says, "I will therefore that younger women marry again." A little early there. Get married. If you're a young widow get married again. "Bear children, lead the house, guide the house...the old author I said, "give direction in the household, give no occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. Don't you dare give Satan anything that is going to cast a reproach on God. For some are already turned aside after Satan." Do you know what he says? "If you don't get married, young women, you're liable to fall into sexual sin, and if you fall into sexual sin then you will cease glorifying God and you will cast reproach on God." Don't do that.

First Timothy 6:1 goes a step further. This is talking about employees. Now that includes a lot of us, doesn't it? All employees please listen. This is a bulletin for all employees. "Let as many employees as are under the yoke ...you say, that's us ...under the yoke." That means you're pulling somebody else's plow. That's an employee. "You do this, count their own masters worthy of all honour." You say, "You don't know my boss." That isn't the point. "Count him worthy of all honour." "Why?" That you might get a raise. "No, no." "That the name of God and his doctrine...what?...be not blasphemed." Do you know what'll happen if you're not a good employee? Your employer knows you're a Christian, sees you're not a good employee, and concludes that God's not a very good God, and God is dishonored. That's pretty practical stuff folks.

Titus chapter 2 verse 5...there's some more. We've got to get everybody in on this. Titus 2:5, now this to the young married women. You say, "Who fits in the young category?" You'd have to decide that in your own mind. Verse 4...youth is a state of mind, you know? Verse 4, "That they may teach the young women to be sober minded...that means to know their priorities...now you teach those younger women you older women...to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste...that means pure...keepers at home...that's good. Stay home once in a while...you're making those payments, you might as well use it...keepers at home, good or kind, obedient to their own husband...why?...why?...to keep harmony in the house...that the word of God be not what?...blasphemed." You see, a wife who doesn't live the way she ought to live casts dispersions on God - the God she claims to love. See this is the thesis of all of our Christian behavior.

Verse 8, "Young men...we've got to get you in here...young men...verse 6 says...be sober minded, show yourself a pattern of good works: in doctrine show uncorruptness, true doctrine, gravity...that's

dignity...sincerity, sound speech, that can't be condemned. When you open your mouth, boy, it ought to come out solid...sound speech...why?...that he that is of the contrary part...who's he that is of the contrary part?...anti-Christian, may be ashamed having no evil thing to say of you." You see that? Shut the mouths of the critics so God is not dishonored. Now there you are folks. You only have two options in life. One, glorify God. Two, reproach Him. You have to face that reality.

Now go back to 1 Corinthians 10:31, and what is Paul saying here? He is saying there's only one thing to do, and in whatever you do, do it all...what?...to the glory of God. Don't let it be a reproach on God." Now the command is very simple. Now let's put it in its context and take a look at the passage. One of the most urgent areas in which we must glorify God is in the use of Christian freedom. This is one of the most urgent areas. We must glorify God in the use of our Christian freedom, our Christian liberty. And by Christian freedom I don't mean the right to vote. I mean the liberty that you have in Christ to do things in the area the Bible doesn't talk about. Christian liberty. Now how are we going to glorify God in the use of our liberty? How are we going to say, "Well, look the Bible doesn't forbid this, or this, whether it's eating meat offered to idols, drinking wine, going to this entertainment, to that entertainment, shopping on Sunday, reading the funnies on Sunday morning, you know, whatever it might be that is in your particular cultural heritage that's something that may be approved or disapproved, whatever that gray area is for you. How do you apply this principle so that you can do everything that you do to the glory of God?" "I want to do that in the gray area. How do I do it?" You've got to know three things: No. 1, the principles, No. 2, the purpose, No. 3, the pattern. That's what I want to show you from these verses. These three things will enable you to glorify God in the use of your Christian freedom.

Let's look at the principles first: the principles, the purpose, and the pattern. Principle's No. 1. I'm going to give you four, and that's what Paul does. Four overlapping principles, and these four principles are given in order for us to use our liberty so that it glorifies God. Principle No. 1, edification over gratification. No. 1, edification over gratification. You say, "I can't even spell it, let alone know what it means. I'll give it to you slowly and carefully. Edification over gratification. Look at verse 23, principle No. 1. And Paul is summarizing everything he's been saying. "All things are lawful for me, all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things...there's the word...edify not." Now notice twice it says all things are lawful. Back in chapter 6, twice in verse 12 it said all things are lawful. This was a slogan of Corinthians we're using.

Apparently, when Paul had been there at one time he had used that phrase. "That all things are lawful." And they had made it a slogan. So whenever they wanted to go out and do anything, they said, "All things are lawful, all things are lawful." Somebody said, "You shouldn't do...all things are lawful. See? It became a little slogan. You know, "The Bible doesn't say we can't do it. Paul said, 'All things are lawful'" And this was their little deal. See? Everywhere they went this was their slogan. And the basis upon which they did anything, their general principle for all behavior was flashing the little slogan, "All things are lawful." And it probably came from Paul because it is true. In

the gray areas, it's not talking about evil, it's talking about the non-moral, the amoral. In that area, yes, all things are lawful. But there are some limitations. All things are not expedient, that means beneficial. All things to not edify, that means build up. So what you want find out is this: it's lawful, but is it beneficial and does it build up? You don't want to say, "Well I want to do it because it's neutral." You say, "I want to do it because it's positive." And if you've got a choice between a neutral and a positive you want to do a positive. And if all you've got in your life is choices between neutral and neutral you're not doing anything. There's not enough time to do that, just neutral things. So how do you deal with it? Is it expedient? That means beneficial. Is it going to build up? Is it beneficial? Will it build up? That's the key. That's edification over gratification. You're not trying to gratify yourself, you're not trying to satisfy your own ideas, you're not trying to do what pleases you, you're trying to do what builds you up and builds anybody else up who will be involved.

Now edification is a very vital word. It comes from the Greek word, oikodomeo, which literally means to build a house. What is going to build up? Figuratively/metaphorically it means spiritual growth. This is the issue: everything that I do, everything that you do as a Christian is to be to the end that we are build up, that we grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as Peter puts it, in 2 Peter 3:18.

Now the New Testament it's got gobs of information about building up people. But there are four basic tools that build us up. No. 1 the Word; read the Bible. Paul says to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 verse 32, "I commend you to word of His grace, which is able to...what?...build you up." The word will build you up. Secondly, preaching and teaching. Coming to hear the preaching of the Word of God will build you up. First Corinthians 14:3, Paul said to the Corinthian assembly, "Instead of speaking in tongues all the time, what you ought to be doing is prophesying or preaching, because preaching has the end of exhortation, consolation and edification." It'll build you up. The reading of the Bible and studying the Bible builds you up, preaching will build you up, love will build you up.

First Corinthians 8:1, "Knowledge puffs up, love builds up." And a fourth thing that builds you up is obedience, obedient service. Ephesians 4:12 says, "When the saints do the work of the ministry, the body of Christ is...what?...filled up." So what edifies? Study the Word, the hearing of the Word, love, obedience, service. These things build you up. Now, Beloved, you want to do what builds you up. So you want to study the Bible, you want to go hear the Bible proclaimed, you want to love, and you want to obey. And you'll be built up. Now this is really a very vital thing in our lives. In 1 Corinthians 14...we'll get into this in a week or two...into chapters 12 to 14, which is a unit...no, it'll be about a month, I guess. But, anyway... realistically right? Six months. No. First Corinthians 14:26, the end of the verse says, "Let all things be done unto edifying." Let everything you do have as end result that'll build you up. "All things be done unto edifying." Let it build you up.

Second Corinthians 12:19, same thing. The end of the verse, "But we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying." We do all things to build you up, all things to edify you. Ephesians chapter 4 verse

29, "Let no corrupt communication precede out of your mouth, but that which is good, as it fits the need of edifying." Everything you say let it build up. First Thessalonians chapter 5 verse 11, "Edify one another." Build each other up. Everything you do, build up. See, there you have it. The guide for our life then is to do what builds us up. It is edification over gratification that determines what I do with Christian liberty. So I ask myself this question. "Do I have the right to do that? Yes. Will it build me up and will it build up the people around me?" If I answer yes to both of those I'd do it. If I answer no I don't do it. Practical guideline.

Principle No. 2, 1 Corinthians chapter 10 verse 24. The first one is edification over gratification. The second one gets even more specific; others over self. Now you're saying, "Well, let's see. Is it going to build me up, um-hum, yes, but it's not going to build him up because he doesn't have that liberty. He's a weaker brother, it'll offend it. All right, then I don't do it. Because when it comes to choosing between what builds me up and what builds him up, I do what builds him up." Others over self, verse 24, "Let no man seek...what?...his own, but every man...what's the next word?...another's." And rather than wealth there I'd almost think you could use the word edification. Don't seek your own, but another's edification. "When it comes down to a choice I've got to choose. I could do this. It's not going to offend me. It's going to be a good thing. It'll build me up. If it's going to offend him then I don't do it." That's the second principle. And this is really the principle of love. I'm going to do what is spiritually beneficial for both of us if I can, but if I have to make a decision I'll do what's most beneficial to him and sacrifice my liberty. And in the long run that'll be most beneficial to me. Wont it? Because in loving him I have build myself up because love...what? Builds up. I may say, "Well I could do that and, boy, I'd build me up, that it taught me to enjoy my liberty, and it'd be good, but it'll offend him." Then don't do it, condescend to him, love him, and love will build you up more than if you exercise your liberty and tear him down because that becomes a sin.

All right every Christian then in his liberty has to be guided by a spiritual principle, and that is, "Love your neighbor as yourself." You know, it's hard, I think, for us to relate to this because selfishness is such a dominant thing. What have you ever done or what have you ever not done because of someone else? I was talking to Darryl Delhusay, the other day, and he was preaching out of Romans 14 and 15, the same theme, different passage. And he was saying after talking about, you know, loving the brother and sacrificing certain things for the brother he asked his congregation to have a testimony time at the end. We were all there and he said, "I'd like to have you stand up and share something you've given up for somebody else, for the love of a weaker brother." And so he said nobody did anything, you know, nobody moved, until finally some guy got up and said, "Well," he says, "I like to smoke and drink but I've given it up. I never to it around Christians." That's fantastic. "I only do it when they're not there." Really terrific sacrifice. Anyway...why'd you tell them then, you know? If you weren't going to do it just keep it quiet, you know?

But anyway. . .after that nobody bothered to say anything in this whole time and everything was getting kind of quiet. Nobody says _____. So when he was all done he said...service was over

and people kept coming to him. He said several people came and said, "You know, that's the first time in my life I ever realized I don't do anything for the sake of anybody else." That's pretty serious, isn't it? "That's the first time I ever thought about it," they said. What are you giving up for somebody else so they don't stumble? See, others over self. Say, "Well it's my liberty to do what I want, so, you know, don't push me into a corner." You have to crucify self and self-desire somewhere or you're never going to know what it is to really be fulfilled as a Christian. It's a disaster to the church, anyway, and to the fellowship of believers when everybody exercises their liberty and doesn't care about anybody else. That's what happened in Philippi. And everybody was going at it, and Paul says, "You'd better cool it. You'd better get likeminded and everybody better start thinking about somebody else." "Look, not every man on his own things but...what?...Philippians 2:4, on things of others...let everything be done in lowliness and meekness, each esteeming others...what?...better than themselves." And that's what he's saying.

So, principle No. 1, edification over gratification. "Whatever is going to build me up and build him up, that's what I'm going to do, but if it comes down to building me up or him, I'm going to do what builds him up if it means sacrificing something on my part. And because I've loved him and done that, that'll build me up anyway." Principle No. 3, liberty over legalism. And here's the balance, here's what creates the tension at this point. We could all get in a strait jacket pretty soon because there's somebody who's against everything. You know, if you look long enough you'll find somebody who won't do anything. You just go around like this all the time. "Am I all right? Am I all right? Right? Is that offending you? Oh, it's not offending you, okay. How's my tie? Does it _____? Okay." I mean, you could get to the place where, you know, there's somebody who's sort of got their little quirk on everything. Now how do you find your balance? Well one way is you don't run around asking everybody. "I would like you to turn in a list of things to me that offend you." No, no, just cool it on that and enjoy. See? Don't make...don't be too fussy about this deal.

Liberty over legalism, verse 25. Now here's how he illustrates it. "Whatever is sold in the market eat, asking no questions for conscience sake." If you go to the market don't say, "Say, Mr. Butcher...the word's shambles in the Old King James. It simply is the Greek for butcher shop, mockalan; butcher shop. When you go there don't say, "Sir, I would so like to eat this piece of meat. Where did it come from?" "Well I don't know. I bought it off a guy who..." "Oh, where was that guy? Have you seen that guy around? I must check with him." See? And you're going to trace this thing back and find out that long before the cow was even killed somebody put a hand on it and dedicated it to Zeus. "Oh I can't eat it. Here's your meat back." He says, "Ridiculous." If you're going to buy it there just keep your mouth shut. Don't ask any silly questions. Go home and eat. Enjoy. Don't be over scrupulous. Don't get picky. There's no sense in making a mountain out of a molehill.

Verse 26, "The earth is the Lord's anyway, and the fullness, thereof, he made them all." So eat em and enjoy em. If it isn't an issue, for goodness sakes don't make it an issue. Now Paul is already condemned going to an idol feast and getting into the celebration at the feast and the festival because

that's communing with demons. Remember last week? But when you go into a marketplace and it's detached from the idol feast it ceases to have any religious significance at all. He says, "Buy it, and eat it, and don't worry about it. There's no sense in putting burdens on your conscience. Don't ask needless questions. Enjoy your liberty. Don't give it up." And then quotes Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof, anyway." Don't be too fussy. Don't create difficulties. Everything is the Lord's. He made everything to be received at Thanksgiving. Right? First Timothy 4:4 and 5, "Just give thanks and eat it."

But you might have a different situation, verse 27, "If any of them that believe not...here's a unbeliever...some pagans...they bid you...and actually they bid you over to their house for dinner. You have a bunch of unbelievers that invite you to dinner...and you be disposed to go...and you say, "I want to go. I'd like to go over...that's my family or that's my old acquaintances before I was saved. I want to go...whatever is set before you eat, asking no question for conscience sake." The word is a legal term, meaning don't make an investigation. You sit down, you just eat it. You don't say, "Now about this food here, I'd like to know where you got it." Just eat it. You have freedom, folk, live it up. Don't ask stupid questions that are going to only cause your conscience problems. Nothing wrong... incidentally from this verse, there's nothing wrong with going to dinner with a sinner. You can go to a pagan's for dinner and it's a great idea.

The only thing the Bible forbids is in 1 Corinthians 5:9 to 11, it says, "You can eat with sinners, just don't eat with Christian sinners. Those that are living in sin as Christians need to be cut off from the fellowship. Eat with sinners not Christian sinners." And so go over and enjoy it, "For liberty Christ has made us free," Galatians 5. Stand fast in your liberty. Don't give up your liberty. Don't let anybody take your liberty. Paul says in Galatians 2:4, "They tried to spy out our liberty. We wouldn't let them." Enjoy your liberty. Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is what? Liberty. Enjoy it, not legalism. Don't concentrate on a...you go over to somebody's house and they serve you a nice meal. And you don't say to them, "Say, was this cooked in wine?" Eat it, just eat it. You want to, at all costs, avoid legalism. See, that's the point. Don't be picky. Now you don't want to offend the weaker brother, but at the same time you certainly don't want to make sure that all weaker brothers stay weak their whole lifetime because we all condescend to their level. See that's the tension here. You say, "Well how do you help the guy?" You restrict your liberty and then you get alongside of him, tell him why you restricted your liberty, and help him to grow up, so that he can enjoy his liberty. And then when he gets to enjoy his you'll enjoy yours too.

So when you condescend to that level, when you go down to that brothers level, and you go down to help the weaker brother, make sure that you build up the weaker brother so together you can enjoy your liberty, and he'll begin to realize everything Christ meant him to be. You don't want to make sure the legalists all stay legalistic because we all continually bow to them. We want to get down there, but we want to teach them why we're doing it, and we want to help them with their liberty so they'll grow out of that legalism. We limit our liberty, not to offend, but we certainly should teach the weaker

brother the truths of freedom so he'll grow out of his legalism. You see, it's very comfortable to be a legalist; cause you don't have to do anything internally, it's all in a box for you. You have a little list, "I don't, I do, I don't, I do, I don't, I do, sometimes I do, I don't, I do." You've got all your little lists there. That's a lot easier than living by the Holy Spirit's power because that you have to yield to in an internal way. So you want to take somebody out of the little box of rules and you want to allow them to have the freedom to operate and the freedom that God has given them.

All right. Three principles: edification over gratification, others over self, and liberty over legalism. And there's one other principle, condescension over condemnation...condescension over condemnation. Let's go back to this dinner at the pagan house, verse 28...you've got another Christian friend there. He's at the dinner too at the pagan house. And he says to you, "This is offered in sacrifice to idols." You're sitting there ready to dig into this nice piece of steak and he's saying, "Hey, that's offered to idols meat." You're saying, "Why'd you have to bring that up for? I'm hungry. I'm not one who would offend my host right? This really bothers you?" "I don't believe we can eat meat off of two idols." What do you do? Verse 28, it says what to do, don't eat it. "For his sake that showed it and conscience sake." Whose conscience? Not yours. Jump to verse 29, "Conscience, I say, not yours, but his." If it bothers his conscience don't eat it, You say, "Uh, what's my host going to think? Here I'm sitting...I'm sorry, it's lovely, I can't eat." You'd offend the host, you're right.

There is another principle. If you have to choose between offending a Christian and offending a non-Christian, offend the non-Christian. You say, "You're kidding me?" Nope, that's what it says. "If you have to choose between offending a Christian and offending a non-Christian, offend a non-Christian." You say, "We're trying to win him." The way to win him is for them to see the validity and the honesty and the purity of your Christianity. Right? And if you're sitting at the table fighting each other he's not going to get a Christian message no matter what you eat. You see? "The way to win people...Jesus said...is to love each other." Isn't that right? You love each other and the world's going to know we're his disciples. If you have to choose between offending a Christian and offending a non-Christian, offend a non-Christian. And make sure you maintain the unity of the love of the body of Jesus Christ because that's the greatest testimony that we have in the world. See, that's his point.

So condescension rather than condemnation. Don't do something that's going to make your Christian brother condemn you. Verse 29, "Why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience?" In other words, I certainly don't want to say, "Well, I'm going to do this and have him condemn me for it. I don't want to get in a position where my liberty...my act of liberty is going to be condemned by another man's conscience. The word judge means condemn. Don't let him condemn you. Enjoy your host, if you will. And you know what your host will see? He will see an act of love. And he will say, "If that man loves that other brother enough to make that sacrifice there must be something to that."

Verse 30 adds a further point. "If I, by grace, be a partaker...in other words, if I recognize God is giving me this food why would I be evil spoken of that for which I give thanks?" Now let me tell you what that means. It would be pretty ridiculous to say thank you Lord for the gracious gift of this food, and then go ahead and eat it while your brother was condemning you. That's inconsistent. Don't thank God and go out and do something that's going to make some other Christian condemn you for doing it. "Lord, thank you for the marvelous liberty that you've given me. Lord, bless this meal," and eat up and drink up and here's a Christian brother condemning you...condemning you. That's ridiculous. You can't thank God for something that another Christian brother's going to stumble over. So condescension over condemnation. If you have to choose between a Christian and a non-Christian, offend the non-Christian at that point, in order that your love might be made manifest to the world. And I don't mean that you should just run out and offend non-Christians just at will.

Just in case you might think that, verse 32 says, "Give no offense neither to the Jews nor to the Greeks nor to the Church of God." The basic rule, Beloved, don't offend what? Anybody. But if you have to choose, offend yourself before you offend a weaker brother. And if you have to choose, offend an unbeliever before you offend a weaker brother. But if you can don't offend anybody. Condescension over condemnation. Don't do anything that's going to cause somebody else to condemn you. Now there are the principles, Beloved.

Let's go to point two, the purpose. Why does he give us the principles? Why does he tell us edification over gratification, others over self, liberty over legalism, condescension over condemnation, verse 31, "Therefore...here's why...so that whether you eat or drink or whatever you do it will be done all... what?...to the glory of God." God is glorified when you do it with these principles in mind. You want to glorify God? Do you think it's important to glorify God or to be a reproach to God? To glorify. Do you want to glorify him follow the principles. What is the purpose...bang...verse 31, "That God will be glorified."

Lastly, the pattern. It's fine to have the principles, it's fine to have the purpose, but Paul closes with a very typical, practical word. He says, "Let me give you a model to follow." Verse 32, "Give no offense neither to the Jews nor to the Greeks nor to the Church of God." And there you have the three divisions, incidentally, of humanity: Israel, the Gentiles, and the church. Don't offend any of them. And here comes the pattern...even as...what's the next word?...I. Paul says, "I'm the model. I'm the pattern. Even as I please all men, in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many that they may be...what? Saved.

And here sums it up: Don't offend the unbeliever. The first idea was don't offend yourself. Do what builds you up. Second, don't offend the weaker brother. If you have to offend an unbeliever to keep from offending a weaker brother then offend an unbeliever. But finally Paul says, "If you can avoid it don't ever even offend an unbeliever. Do whatever you have to do that they may be saved." And, here is the sum of it, verse 1, "Be ye followers of me. Do it like I did it because I'm doing it like Christ

did it. Follow me I'm following Christ." Example is vital folks. No occasion, give no offense, no occasion to sin, no cause for stumbling, don't do anything that offends anybody: Jew, Greek, or the church. No action of ours should prevent a Jew from coming to Christ. No action of ours should prevent a Gentile from coming to Christ. No action of ours should prevent a Christian from growing to maturity and being built up. And no action of ours should prevent us from being built up. So Paul closes with a word of example. "Do what I do, I'm doing what Jesus did."

Let's pray. Thank you, our Father, this morning for this Word. Thank You for the truth that we find in these pages. Truth that is so very, very practical. And we pray that You would teach us by Your Holy Spirit to apply it, that we might, with everything that we do, bring glory to Your name, and never a reproach. Help us to avoid sin, so that we can avoid Your chastening, so that Your name will not be polluted in the eyes of the world.

Father, I pray this prayer, summing up the hearts of all of us here. Glorify Your name Father in us. In Jesus name. Amen.

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