

Paul has been addressing the need for unity in the Corinth community of believers based on their oneness in Christ. Our participation in communion reminds us that we hold the sacrifice of Jesus as our core belief and source of our love for God and one another. But some people had been using the excuse of freedom in Christ to justify offending others in the church family. Their mantra was that all things are lawful. They took the fact that we are no longer bound by the laws of Moses to act selfishly.

²³ *"All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up.* 1 Corinthians 10:23 The phrase may have been a favorite of those in the Corinthian church who proposed a more liberal view. Yes, we can eat the meat offered to an idol. But Paul asks, "Is it helpful. Does it build others up? What does that symbolize? Who are we joining with in doing so? Who might be affected seeing us do so? Is it helping anyone? Paul is not just telling them to do this or not do that, but instead is teaching the Corinthians and us that **in issues not made absolutely clear in Scripture we should always default to the law of love.**

There are two perspectives presented. One is the legalist who when a neighbor invites him to dine, he asks where the meat came from. Then learning it was from the temple he declines, thereby insulting his guest and with arrogant snobbery feels he has somehow pleased God.

The second is the liberal view. When the host declares the meat is from the pagan temple, expecting that a good Jew or Christian would decline, the liberal goes ahead and eats it thereby wounding the host's conscience. "After all," he says, "I am free in Christ whether my host knows it or not." The host then thinks he has caused the guest to sin. Both of these situations bring no glory to God. The guests are thinking of themselves and not about loving their neighbor, the host. The only way they can bring glory to God is to think of what is best for their neighbor/host and act accordingly. That is the law of love.

²⁴ *Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.* 1 Corinthians 10:24 The law of love is summed up in this verse. It is a great verse for the me-generation and for us all. Humbly put others first. Why? Jesus died for them! He loves them. As God's goodness leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4), His goodness seen in you may have the same effect. Paul teaches this in a number of different ways. He told the Philippians (2:3) ³ *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.* And to the church in Rome he wrote ¹⁰ *Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.* Romans 2:10 To the Thessalonians he wrote ⁹ *Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another,* 1 Thessalonians 4:9. We can see from these verses that it was a major emphasis of Apostle Paul, but if we look further we will find that it is because it was Jesus' emphasis, for God is love (1 John 4:9). The only way to break free from our self-centered condition is to live in the Spirit, led by the Spirit, with the fruits of the Spirit, the first of which is love (Galatians 5:16ⁱ).

²⁵ *Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience.* 1 Corinthians 10:25 The meat market might have meat offered to an idol along with other meat. Don't ask and it won't be an issue. In the market a person

won't be participating in the worship ceremonies of the pagans. It doesn't matter where it came from. It is just meat. But obtaining it in a pagan temple can be the participation and celebration of demons and the fornication that went on afterward that was defiling the believers. But if it came from the market and a guest whose conscience is weak asks if the meat came from the temple, you can honestly say you don't know.

²⁶ For “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.” 1 Corinthians 10:26 Paul is quoting Psalm 24:1 to show all things come from God. It was quoted in part of a prayer rabbi offered before eating kosher food. Paul is taking a jab at the rabbinical usage and saying the verse applies to all food. Perhaps he had heard of Jesus teaching that it is not what enters a man that defiles him, but what comes out of his heart (Mark 17:18,19ⁱⁱ).

Every physical God created thing was declared good by God (Genesis 1:31ⁱⁱⁱ). It is the way we misuse those things that is sinful. As we saw in the previous passage, when we prioritize things above God, they become idols. If our life focuses around anything other than God, we have made it an idol (Exodus 20:3^{iv}). God must be first, for we owe our existence and the forgiveness of our sins to His grace and mercy. This is a hard lesson, for the world is constantly offering us different gifts of God and telling us we will find fulfillment if we live for that thing. Our old nature is like that of Eve in the Garden, ready to listen to a self-exalting lie, wanting to be our own god, and lusting after what we see (Genesis 3:6^v). There is pleasure in sin... a fleeting pleasure (Hebrews 11:25^{vi}).

Every child of God must learn to enjoy the gifts of God while keeping Him in first place as the Giver of the gifts. We learn to enjoy His gifts with thanksgiving to Him and not over-indulging in them (1 Timothy 6:17^{vii}). It is the lesson of moderation and the good boundaries of God (Philippians 4:5^{viii}). And we all struggle with it in one form or another because we are all human.

²⁷ If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. 1 Corinthians 10:27 Don't ask your host where he got the meat, and it won't be an issue. This is the way of love. It is not about you or the meat but about being a loving witness to your host. If we are overflowing with the fruits of the Spirit, we bring the presence of God with us wherever we go. It is attractive (Proverbs 3:3,4^{ix}). People who are seeking the truth will be drawn to us (2 Corinthians 2:14^x). Notice that unbelievers invited Christians to dine with them. We must be winsome if we are to win some. If you are a pleasant person who is kind and genuinely interested in and concerned about those around you, you will find yourself invited to a meal or an event as others will naturally want to get to know you. If we only associate with believers, how will we ever share the gospel with them?

People are more isolated today than at any time in my life. I think the mask issue and the division in political views has become so divisive that people are afraid to just engage others in conversation. I noticed on airplanes everyone is on their screens with headphones and not talking to those around them unless they are a family. Look for those opportunities to open a conversation and ask about the person you are with. Let the Spirit lead the conversation. There will usually be an opportunity to share faith or a personal testimony. Avoid the controversial issues to have chance to show God's love.

²⁸ But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—²⁹ I do not

mean your conscience, but his. 1 Corinthians 10:28,29a But if they make it an issue, then don't eat it for his or her sake. He told you because he thinks believers shouldn't or that believers don't mind mixing what they believe with pagan activity. You give the host the wrong impression if you then eat it.

^{29b} For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? ³⁰ If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks? 1 Corinthians 10:29, 30 I believe these are rhetorical questions. Our freedom is not determined by the host's conscience but by our love for the truth of the gospel and our hope to win them to Jesus. We do not want to give unbelievers the impression that we accept other so-called gods along with Jesus.

Recognizing all comes from God and food is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer (1 Timothy 4:4,5^{xi}), means that no one can condemn me for what I eat, whether that means meat from a temple or non-kosher food. I am free in that regard, but I am also free to refrain from eating if it might wound my host's conscience or give him or her a wrong impression about believers (1 Timothy 4:3^{xii}). Paul answers these rhetorical questions in verse 31.

This comes up in numerous issues. Some abstain completely from any form of alcohol while other believers see no problem in a social drink or wine with a meal. Some believers are convinced that we are required to worship on the Sabbath, while others see every day alike (Romans 14:5^{xiii}). To shop on Sunday or work at an occupation is wrong for some and others see no problem. These are mostly differences among believers, but some overflow to non-believers. When an unbeliever curses in my presence, I don't rebuke them, for they have no conviction not to do so. While I don't drink alcohol, when I am with unbelievers or believers who do, I explain that it doesn't bother me at all if they do so in moderation (Philippians 4:5^{xiv}). The point is seeking the good of others and not offending them so we can show the love of Christ (1 Corinthians 13:5^{xv}).

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31 Paul answers the two rhetorical questions that may be raised giving us the best rule to go by. **Are we doing all we do to the glory of God? That is the gold standard. To glorify God is to publicly praise, honor, and make Him famous.** If our action is for His glory, to make known who He is, we are doing a good thing. If my conscience is bothering me - I shouldn't do it. If it would bother someone, I should give up my liberty for God's glory. To drink or not to drink, to eat the meat offered to idols or not to, is not simply do or don't. How does it affect the other person and thereby bring glory to God? That is what is most important.

What a great rule of conduct! It is one that only the truly born-again believer can live out. If you don't know how to respond to a situation, ask in prayer how it can reveal the beauty of God and be a light to those around us. Maybe it means just to be quiet and appreciative. Maybe it means to speak out and share a Scripture or testimony. If you are sensitive to God's Spirit and desire to glorify God, you will do the right thing, the thing which is pleasing to God (Hebrews 13:21^{xvi}).

Paul is saying we can bring glory to God in the simplest of everyday things. We can eat and drink to His glory. **All of life can be glory-aimed.** Are you convicted? I am! I think this way sometimes, but not all the time. However, we all should, for He is worthy to be praised in every aspect of life, whether our labor, leisure, or so called "time off."

When we belong to Jesus, our time is not our own. We are His joyful servants carrying out His will while we still have time to invest in heaven while here on earth. A big part of bringing Him glory is not stumbling our neighbor but acting in selfless love that they might know our Savior, Jesus.

³² *Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God,* 1 Corinthians 10:32 Jesus warned us against offending others. ⁷ *“Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!”* Matthew 18:7 “Temptations to sin” is a single Greek word that means to offend. When we offend someone by insisting on our rights or doing something in their presence that they think is sinful, we encourage them to violate their conscience or to be unjustly critical which can also be a sin. “Woe” is a warning of judgment. So what Paul is saying here is a little gentler than the way Jesus said it. Paul clarifies the scope of whom we are not to offend: Jews, Greeks, or the church of God, which was basically everyone. Jesus simply pronounces judgment upon those who offend unnecessarily. Jesus is saying offenses will come. It is inevitable. What you do with them is where the temptation comes in. You can judge unjustly or without grace even though you have received so much grace (Matthew 7:2^{xvii}). Or you can be gracious as God is with you. But we should never be the one who stumbles our fellow believer or anyone for that matter.

There is a time to tell a younger believer who is caught in sin the truth of their situation, but that should be done with gentleness and grace (Galatians 6:1^{xviii}). It may offend them, but Jesus and Paul are not referring to someone who is helping a person caught in sin. They are addressing someone who unnecessarily offends a person such as the above-mentioned situations in which we are seeking our own good and not that of another.

³³ *just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.* 1 Corinthians 10:33 Pastor Stephen Um summed this up so well, I will use his comments on this verse. *The call for Christians is to have an other-centered, self-giving love on a mission. It is to have more concern for the needs and interests of others than for one’s own needs (cf. Philippians 2^{xix}). It is also to be self-giving—not seeking one’s own advantage. Paul is calling upon the Corinthian believers to open up by allowing themselves to be disadvantaged for the sake of others. It is love on a mission: “that they may be saved” (10:33^{xx}). Paul can give out this call because he himself has lived out this call in his own life. This statement is a purpose clause. It is through our other-centered, self-giving posture that we can be good neighbors because we are concerned about their ultimate good, namely their salvation. Though this need not and cannot be the exclusive aim in the way we relate to our neighbors, it must be the primary aim. God is glorified when our love for our neighbors leads them to embrace him. Paul offers himself as a model of this kind of love. His ministry is a model for how one can adapt to all kinds of different settings in order to make the gospel of Christ compelling. But his model is based on the accomplishments and example of one who is even greater. The only way we can be moved out of our self-interest and self-centeredness and live lives of other-centered, self-giving love on a mission is to see that we are the recipients of God’s other-centered, self-giving love on a mission in Christ!*^{xxi}

It is for this reason that Paul writes, ¹ *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.* 1 Corinthians 11:1 This is the conclusion of the previous passage about being all things to all people to win them. It is not about Paul promoting himself, but his example of dying to himself to build others up with the love of God (Ephesians 4:16^{xxii}). He does everything to win more souls to Christ, and that often means setting aside our preferences and freedoms as Jesus did for us. Jesus set the example by eating and drinking with the tax collectors and sinners to introduce them to the Father (Matthew 9:10^{xxiii}).

When Jesus says, "I have glorified You in the earth," (John 17:4^{xxiv}) He is declaring that all that He did was not for His own glory but for the Father. That is why the Father exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him a name above every name (Philippians 2:9^{xxv}).

Could we say follow me as I follow Christ? I would be very hesitant to do so. My desire is to follow Christ without hesitation. Paul could say this though he did not consider himself to have attained (Philippians 3:13^{xxvi}). In some ways I wish the congregation would follow my example. I mean as far as to get up early and get in the Word and take time in prayer, seeking God's direction for each day, doing the things that need to be done around the facility, but this passage is about much more than that. It is about loving others with God's love, giving freely for their good both time and resources so that God, not the giver, gets the glory. Yes, I wish we all lived solely for the glory of God, not for reward in heaven or recognition now or in the future, but because He loves us and set aside His glory to serve us in love. It is finished. We need do nothing more. Resting in that abundance, we can deny our own rights and give freely (John 13:3,4^{xxvii}).

Once again in Pastor Um's wording: *It is immensely encouraging to know that because Christ has gone to trial for us, we are no longer on trial. As a matter of fact, the court is adjourned. We are free to love our neighbors and to glorify our God. We're no longer in the courtroom. We are newly motivated lovers because our affections have been steered by the beautiful picture of Jesus going to trial in our place and giving us all the advantages that he had. He gave up his rights so that we might utilize our rights not to be sectarian and to abuse or to ignore other people, but rather to lovingly serve them and to be disadvantaged for their good. We now can live a life of freedom that doesn't abuse our liberties but instead uses them for the glory of God by loving our neighbors.*^{xxviii}

By the grace of God may we come to place where we can say that all that we do we do for the glory of God. Why? Because He gave His all for us. He deserves the glory, and we are blessed to glorify Him.

Questions:

- 1 What was Paul's retort to "all things are lawful"?
- 2 What is the default go to when an issue is in question?
- 3 How can we break free from self-centeredness?
- 4 What was the irony in Paul quoting Psalm 24:1?
- 5 Go over the meat issue.
- 6 What are some similar contemporary issues?
- 7 What is the gold standard for action?
- 8 What does it mean to glorify God?
- 9 What did Jesus say about offending others?
- 10 Summarize the second quote from Pastor Um.

ⁱ **Galatians 5:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

ⁱⁱ **Mark 7:18-19 (ESV)**

¹⁸ And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.)

ⁱⁱⁱ **Genesis 1:31 (ESV)**

³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

^{iv} **Exodus 20:3 (ESV)**

³ "You shall have no other gods before me.

^v **Genesis 3:6 (ESV)**

⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

^{vi} **Hebrews 11:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

^{vii} **1 Timothy 6:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

^{viii} **Philippians 4:5 (KJV)**

⁵ Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord *is* at hand.

^{ix} **Proverbs 3:3-4 (ESV)**

³ Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴ So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man.

^x **2 Corinthians 2:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

^{xi} **1 Timothy 4:4-5 (ESV)**

⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,

⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

^{xii} **1 Timothy 4:3 (ESV)**

³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

^{xiii} **Romans 14:5 (ESV)**

⁵ One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

^{xiv} **Philippians 4:5 (ESV)**

⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;

^{xv} **1 Corinthians 13:5 (ESV)**

⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;

^{xvi} **Hebrews 13:21 (ESV)**

²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

^{xvii} **Matthew 7:2 (ESV)**

² For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

^{xviii} **Galatians 6:1 (ESV)**

¹ Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

^{xix} **Philippians 2:3-4 (ESV)**

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

^{xx} **1 Corinthians 10:33 (ESV)**

³³ just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

^{xxi} Stephen T. Um, *1 Corinthians: The Word of the Cross*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 191–192.

^{xxii} **Ephesians 4:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

^{xxiii} **Matthew 9:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.

^{xxiv} **John 17:4 (ESV)**

⁴ I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.

^{xxv} **Philippians 2:9 (ESV)**

⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,

^{xxvi} **Philippians 3:13 (ESV)**

¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,

^{xxvii} **John 13:3-4 (ESV)**

³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist.

^{xxviii} Stephen T. Um, *1 Corinthians: The Word of the Cross*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 193.