

SESSION 5

AN OUTWARD FOCUS

Leader pages on pp. 148-151

THE POINT:

BRING GLORY TO GOD BY
SEEKING THE WELFARE
OF OTHERS.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:23-33

MEMORY VERSE

²³ “Everything is permissible,” but not everything is beneficial.

“Everything is permissible,” but not everything builds up.

²⁴ **No one is to seek his own good, but the good of the other person.**

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²⁵ Eat everything that is sold in the meat market, without raising questions for the sake of conscience,

²⁶ since the earth is the Lord’s, and all that is in it.

²⁷ If any of the unbelievers invites you over and you want to go, eat everything that is set before you, without raising questions for the sake of conscience.

²⁸ But if someone says to you, “This is food from a sacrifice,” do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who told you, and for the sake of conscience.

²⁹ I do not mean your own conscience, but the other person’s. For why is my freedom judged by another person’s conscience?

³⁰ If I partake with thanksgiving, why am I criticized because of something for which I give thanks?

.....
³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.

³² Give no offense to Jews or Greeks or the church of God,

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

KEYWORDS

Permissible/ Builds up (v. 23)– Corinthians needed to consider other people and not just think of themselves. Even if something is permissible, it does not mean that it helps build believers up.

Food from sacrifice (v. 28)– Meat related to pagan worship, specifically leftovers sold in the

public food markets. Paul stated believers could eat this without sinning. In this instance, their consciences were not to be constrained or bound.

Glory of God (v. 31)– The Greek term is *doxa* and carries with it the idea of light and visual magnificence and majesty.

HOW CAN WE MAINTAIN OUR FOCUS ON HELPING OTHERS?

In February 2015, a user from Tumblr, a social media platform, posted a photo of a dress with the question: "What colors do you see?" The image went viral as people perceived different colors; some saw blue and black, while others saw white and gold. I remember seeing a blurry white color. Within hours, family, coworkers, and friends were arguing over the color of the dress. Over 11 million tweets in 24 hours surrounding the hashtag #TheDress generated many heated discussions.

There is a scientific explanation that a person's brain interprets ambiguous lighting differently based on individual perception patterns. However, the emotional response revealed a deeper human nature that we want to defend our perspective, even when it's meaningless. If we fight over trivial dress colors, imagine how much more insistent we are on matters that will affect our lives.

Sometimes, we insist that others see things our way. Paul understood this nature and taught the Corinthians an alternative: sometimes we are to voluntarily set aside what we want for the sake of others. In this passage, we will discover that one of the essentials for Christian living is doing what benefits others and letting go of what we want.²⁷

Stay with What Benefits Others

// 1 Corinthians 10:23-24

In these verses, Paul concludes his teaching about food sacrificed to idols, which he began in chapter 8. To drive home his point, Paul quoted a phrase that was likely a popular phrase in the Corinthian culture: "Everything is permissible." And who wouldn't like that phrase? It allows complete freedom to do whatever we feel like doing. Unfortunately, that was not just a first-century idea; the "anything goes" mindset rules strongly in today's culture too.

What happens if someone suggests that a certain behavior is not good or shouldn't be done? The other person will protest, "You can't tell me what to do," and rant about his rights and freedoms. Even

in civil matters, Paul's words that not everything is beneficial ring true. Our freedoms and rights must be exercised with great responsibility and consideration for how others may be affected.

We must consider this principle from Paul's context. He was addressing believers, those in the church. Paul had already referred to this statement, "Everything is permissible," in chapter 6. In that context, Paul's warning that "not everything is beneficial" and "I will not be mastered by anything" (1 Cor. 6:12) has a personal, individual ring to it. He wanted believers to see how sinful living negatively



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impacted them. In chapter 10, the emphasis is on how our actions impact others.

The notion that everything is permissible carries an element of truth for the follower of Christ. Christ has set us free from all the laws and rituals created to tell us what to do and what not to do. Yet that freedom in Christ must be balanced with a responsibility that we have toward others. We are free in Christ, yet that freedom must always be exercised in ways that build up others—not bring harm to them.

When the believers insisted that “everything is permissible,” Paul counters with the fact that not everything is beneficial nor builds up others. Paul made it abundantly clear what is beneficial and constructive: “No one is to seek his own good, but the good of the other person.” Yes, we have freedom in Christ, but we must exercise that freedom in a way that builds up and benefits others. Paul told us earlier that “each one is to be careful how he builds” (1 Corinthians 3:10).

Few things damage the church’s witness more than how we treat one another. We will make far greater strides when we stop insisting on our own way and start seeking the good of others. After all, you have no “rights.” You surrendered all your rights to Jesus, who calls us to follow Him in grace and love.

This means I have given up my rights. Not my civil rights as a citizen of my country, but my rights as a follower of Jesus. I’ve surrendered my “rights”—my insistence on what I want—to the lordship of Christ. Taking this stance doesn’t mean we make ourselves doormats for anyone and everyone to walk on; however, we are to be considerate of preferences and desires for the sake of others. “In humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others” (Phil 2:3-4).

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS THAT ARE PERMISSIBLE FOR YOU BUT NOT HELPFUL?

Strive Not to Offend // 1 Corinthians 10:25-30

The teaching in v. 24 that “no one is to seek his own good, but the good of the other person” can be applied to countless situations in our lives, but Paul tied it to two specific situations relevant to the Corinthian believers: the purchase of meat in the public marketplace and the opportunity to eat with unbelievers. Often, meat in the market had been dedicated to a pagan idol—but not all of it. And without a label announcing, “Offered to an idol,” the distinction was rarely clear.



DIGGING DEEPER EDIFY OTHERS

In 1 Corinthians 10:23, Paul states, “All things are lawful, but not all things edify.” The Greek word οἰκοδομέω (oikodomeo) literally means “to build a house.”²⁸ This construction metaphor is used throughout Paul’s letters to describe how Christians should interact with others. Paul compares our behaviors that are “permissible” with those that will “build up” others. This word appears over forty times in the New Testament, and eighteen times just in Paul’s letters. It’s about building up the community over personal preferences. A builder will not use unstable materials but supplies that create stability. Similarly, believers should choose words and behaviors that strengthen each other spiritually. When we edify others, we participate in God’s grand construction project, building His church. Every interaction with other believers is an opportune time to strengthen the spiritual community around us.

How can you be more intentional about “building up” others in your daily interactions?

Jewish people had a way around this. One of the restrictions placed on them was to only purchase meat in kosher markets. Even today, most Jews will only eat kosher food, those foods allowed in the Torah, and properly slaughtered and prepared.

The apostle Paul, however, had no reluctance regarding the food in the public marketplace. Kosher or not, dedicated to an idol or not, food was food to Paul. Jewish families often cited Psalm 24:1 as a mealtime prayer, “The earth and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants, belong to the Lord.” While they quoted the psalm as a prayer of thanksgiving, Paul used it to underscore the value of all foods. Meat is meat, and the fact that the meat may have been dedicated to a false god doesn’t alter its reality. It’s still meat created by the one true God. The Corinthian Christians need not raise questions about the meat’s history. One’s conscience was clear to simply enjoy the food on the table.

All of that changed if someone explicitly pointed out the source of the meat. Paul used the scenario of sitting in an unbeliever’s home. Obviously, Paul had no problem with sharing a meal or entering the home of an unbeliever. Some Christians today might want to guard their hearts and minds by severely limiting their interaction with unbelievers, but Paul’s passion for the lost was such that he embraced opportunities to eat with them. In Paul’s example, the believer is free to eat with an unbeliever and enjoy the meal! But that freedom changed “if someone says to you, ‘This is food from a sacrifice.’” The injunction is not to eat the meat. What changed? It’s still just meat.

We might consider why someone felt the need to point out that the meat was dedicated to an idol. It could be a weaker believer who had not yet come to the conviction that the dedication to a false god means nothing. Therefore, for the sake of the conscience of that weaker believer, the Christian was to set aside his “right” to eat the meat.

Another possibility is that the unbeliever who was serving the meal wanted his guest to know that the dedication of this meal was important to him and a matter of his worship and beliefs. This meal, then, was an extension of his worship. For the Christian to know that and yet eat would compromise his own witness, confession, and commitment to

the one true God. Continuing to eat would show acceptance of the unbeliever’s erroneous beliefs. Even worse, it could encourage the unbeliever to continue in his idolatry, and it might encourage the weaker believer to do the same.

Paul had freedom—and he was thankful for that freedom—but he would also gladly set aside that freedom for the sake of others. He didn’t insist on his freedom or argue against the judgment and criticism of others; instead, he chose to set aside his rights “for the good of the other person” (v. 24).

WHEN HAVE YOU CONSCIOUSLY LAID DOWN YOUR RIGHTS FOR THE SAKE OF ANOTHER PERSON?



Seek the Glory of God

// 1 Corinthians 10:31-33

As followers of Christ, our lives belong to Him, and every aspect of life is to be lived for His glory. Even how we eat, or drink will bring glory to God. As it is today in our culture, sharing a meal is a way to get to know someone and interact with them within their culture. I have discovered that my conversations with people are enhanced when chips and salsa are on the table. But if I eat that meal in a way that offends or hurts those present, I have failed to engage them in a way that builds them up and glorifies God.

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In making his point, Paul said something that might appear contradictory to other statements he had made. In an earlier letter to the churches in Galatia, Paul wrote, "If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10). Yet now he was telling the Corinthians, "I also try to please everyone in everything." Unfortunately, we have often acted like there is a dichotomy between pleasing God and pleasing people, as though they were on opposite ends of the spectrum. But they can go together! In other words, by seeking to please others, we can be pleasing God.

In Paul's desire to please others, he wasn't compromising his faith or practices. Paul sought to get along with people, build bridges, and ultimately benefit them by leading them to Christ. Many of us can look back to a particular individual who led us to Christ. Some of us may have even been resistant at the time to their words or actions, but now that we're saved, we are pleased that they did what they did! We can't say our actions bring glory to God if they are self-centered and fail to benefit others. On the other hand, those actions that support and encourage others in their own walk toward salvation and their walk with Christ definitely honor Jesus. Pointing others to Jesus will always bring honor to Him.

HOW DOES THE DESIRE FOR OTHER PEOPLE'S SALVATION INFLUENCE OUR DAILY DECISIONS?

DID YOU KNOW?

Muhammad Ali said "Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth." Ali, a professional boxer and one of the greatest athletes of all time, became a global icon with his stand against the Vietnam War and civil rights activism. Later, Muhammad Ali demonstrated service to others by visiting children's hospitals, paying medical bills for strangers, and participating in humanitarian causes. He traveled to Iraq in 1990 to help secure the release of American hostages, and he was a UN Messenger of Peace. He found happiness in his humanitarian service.²⁹ A Harvard Business School study found that spending money on others created greater happiness than spending on oneself.³⁰ This kindness triggers the release of endorphins, serotonin, and oxytocin, called the "helper's high."³¹ Muhammad Ali found more joy serving others, providing evidence that we were created for something greater.

Biblical Truth: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

How will you set aside your own needs to serve others today?

LIVE IT

How will you seek to simultaneously glorify God and seek the welfare of others?

To glorify God means to live in a way that every thought, word, and action reflects His goodness and greatness. Paul reminds us that in everything, even eating and drinking, we are to glorify the Lord (1 Cor. 10:31). This goes beyond weekly church attendance. It is a daily way of living, evident in our discussions and even our choices, when no one is watching. Living a life on mission means pointing others to Christ, through humility, service, and love, that He alone is worthy of honor and praise.

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- **Show Integrity.** Live consistently in private and public. Let your actions and words align with your faith so others see Christ glorified, not self-promotion or insincerity.
- **Worship Daily.** View all tasks as an act of worship. Choose to honor God, whether at home or work, knowing that He is glorified when we live with gratitude and obedience.
- **Be of Service.** Look for opportunities to serve others sacrificially. When you care for people's needs with compassion, you reflect Christ's character and direct their attention to God's glory.

DAILY READINGS

1. CEASE AND DESIST// 1 CORINTHIANS 10:23

Cease and desist orders are issued by courts to command a person or entity to stop doing something. Cease and desist letters are less formal requests for to stop doing something allegedly harming someone or legal action will be next. Paul's letter to the church at Corinth reminded them that while so much is permissible, we should stop doing things that are not beneficial to others. If we use laws and rules as our measuring stick, we are free to do a lot of things in our lifetimes. But living a life inconsiderate of others leaves us with a worthless legacy. It also can ruin our living testimony of how committing to a life with Jesus Christ has changed us.

Strive to do what is glorifying to God and beneficial to others.

2. NO OFFENSE// 1 CORINTHIANS 10:32

Early in my career, I worked with a man who did not like the smell of scented lotions and sprays. He often shared in team meetings how much this bothered him. I remember thinking he had no right to think that he could dictate the lotion someone used. I am sure that I proceeded to use my favorite lotions at least once or twice while working on projects with him. I was too immature to realize that even though he could not tell me what lotion to wear, that I was offending him every time I did it. By offending him, I missed opportunities to share the kindness of Jesus.

Protect your witness by not offending others.

3. DO AS I SAY AND DO// MARK 10:45

The phrase, "Do as I say, not as I do" is one used to describe parents that lecture their kids to behavior to standards that they do not follow themselves. It asks children to ignore the bad behavior of adults and do what is right because the adult says so. Jesus is the master teacher on how to live a life outwardly focused on others. In Mark 10:45, Jesus speaks and says that the son of man came to

serve. In John 13:12, Jesus models serving others by washing the disciples' feet. We can follow Jesus's words because he lived on earth and provided countless examples of serving others. His entire earthly ministry was outward focused, and we should live the same way.

Living like Jesus means we develop the heart of a servant.

4. OPEN YOUR GIFT// 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-7

Bringing a gift is a part of many celebrations. You look forward to the moment the person opens it and sees what you have hand-picked for them. I recall my disappointment at a party once when I did not get to see the honoree open what I brought. I was really looking forward to watching the person connect with what I chose to bring. We are created in God's image and given different gifts. If we treasure earthly gifts, how much more should we treasure spiritual gifts given to us. As followers of Jesus, we should know our spiritual gifts and seek to cultivate them and serve God through them. What a shame to let such an important gift go unopened. We are blessed to be a blessing.

Know your spiritual gift and walk in it as the Holy Spirit empowers you.

5. HERE FOR YOU// JUDGES 4:6

Deborah served Israel as judge. In Judges 4:6, Deborah requested to see Barak and used questions to remind Barak that the Lord had commanded him to take troops and defeat Jabin's army. Barak agreed to go only if Deborah went with him. Deborah accompanied him into battle and King Jabin was subdued. There is value in biblical community. Deborah held Barak accountable to the Lord's command and was willing to stand with him. There are battles happening all around us and we need brothers and sisters to hold us accountable and stand with us. Look at the circumstances in your life and know that you have the gift of the body of Christ to stand with you.

The church community is here for you.