

To Offend or Not to Offend? 1 Corinthians 10:23-33

As Christians, it's very important for us to glorify God with our lives and we need to learn how to do that. So this morning I want to start with a few questions that have to do with what we think glorifies God the most in certain situations... What glorifies God the most? Please raise your hands...

- Driving a Ford? Or driving a Chevy?
- Drinking a Coke? Or drinking a Pepsi?
- Cheering for the Packers? Or cheering for the Vikings?

These are lighthearted things that people can have strong opinions about, but now let's get a little deeper and talk about some issues that people can take a lot more seriously. Please DO NOT raise your hands for these. What glorifies God the most?

- Dressing up for church, or coming "as you are"?
- Eating at a bar, or not eating at a bar?
- Watching a Harry Potter movie, or not watching a Harry Potter movie?
- Supporting the Republicans, or supporting the Democrats?
- Wearing a mask, or not wearing a mask?

Christians can have very strong opinions about these things, and I want us to think about them because they tie into the theme of our passage today. They all have two things in common: Each of them has to do with something the Bible gives us permission to choose either way. And each has to do with something Christians can offend one another with. In the passages we've been studying lately the spotlight has been on eating meat sacrificed to idols. That was an issue the Bible gave Christians in Corinth the freedom to choose either way and was a topic that they offended one another with. Some thought they should eat, others thought they should abstain. Which decision glorified God the most? What glorifies God the most in the issues I asked you about, or any issue that Christians disagree about that Scripture gives us freedom to choose?

It seems like Christians assume that what glorifies God most is to do what they think is right. To stand firm for what they believe and not back down, even if it creates an offense. "God wants us to do what we think is right regardless of how others may feel. In fact, to boldly stand firm in the face of opposition is especially

commendable and glorifies God even more.” So, if I believe it’s right to drink a beer or go to a bar, I’m going to go ahead and do it whether people like it or not. If I believe it’s right to watch a Harry Potter movie or celebrate Halloween, I’m going to go ahead. If I think it’s right to support and promote Republicans, I’m going to do that however I want to do it and it doesn’t matter what others say. If I think it’s right to wear a mask or not wear a mask, I’m going to do what I think is right whether people like it or not. If they get offended, that’s their problem. I’m going to glorify God by doing what I think is right.

This boldness feels commendable to us and like it’s honorable to God. And if we do the opposite and don’t stand firm but give in to social pressure, it feels like a lack of faith or a sinful compromise. “God is glorified when I’m bold and stand firm, but not if I back down,” we think.

Please understand that I’m not talking about things like murder, or adultery, or stealing, or worshipping idols. There are some things where the Bible does not leave room for disagreement. But there are many it does – probably more than we’re willing to admit. Is God glorified most when we stand up for what we believe even when it offends other people? Or is there something else we should aim for?

That’s the question for today, and Paul helps us work through it in the passage we’re going to look at. We’ve covered a lot of ground in the past three weeks, and the common issue has been about eating meat sacrificed to idols. So Paul is still dealing with that issue at the end of chapter 10, but this time he does it in the context of how they could glorify God the most in that situation.

He starts out in a similar way to how he started chapter 6, by quoting a common slogan in Corinth that was also being used in the church by people who were standing firm for what they believed when it came to eating meat sacrificed to idols. So in these first few verses, we see what Paul has to say about that.

1 Corinthians 10:23-24.

“All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. ²⁴ Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.

So the saying “All things are lawful” was being used by people in the church to argue that since the Bible didn’t prohibit it, they had the right to eat meat sacrificed to idols. But Paul pushes back against that idea. He says, “but not all things are helpful... not all things build up.” It might be lawful to eat meat, but sometimes it isn’t helpful to other people and doesn’t build them up. Sometimes it’s harmful to them. And Paul points out in verse 24 it’s more important as a Christian to seek the good of your neighbor than just your own good.

If a mom or dad gives their kid permission to practice drums in the house and the kid finds out their sibling isn’t feeling well and is trying to take a nap, they shouldn’t practice... “But Mom said I could!” It doesn’t matter! Just because you have permission doesn’t mean you should.

So Paul obviously didn’t think they had a good argument for eating meat sacrificed to idols. And then he gives some specific instructions about what to do in certain situations...

Read 1 Corinthians 10:25-27.

Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. ²⁶ For “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.” 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.

So he gives them permission in certain situations to freely eat meat from the market or at an unbelieving friend’s house without worrying about where it came from. You don’t need to find out if it was devoted to an idol or not. It doesn’t matter in that situation, just go ahead and eat. You’ve got permission. So this is what Christian liberty looks like and it’s very freeing. We don’t have to feel guilty in certain situations for doing something that others think is wrong, as long as the Bible doesn’t prohibit it and our conscience is clear. There are certain situations where it’s totally fine to eat the meat. But does that apply to every situation? Paul goes on to describe another situation that’s very different.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:28-30.

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. For why should my liberty be determined (judged) by someone else's conscience? ³⁰ If I partake with thankfulness, why am I (why should I be) denounced because of that for which I give thanks?

So this is a different scenario. Someone makes a point to let you know that the meat was sacrificed to idols. It's assumed in this case that it's probably a fellow believer with you at the unbeliever's house who believes eating meat is a sin and they're warning you about it. Now all of a sudden you realize that if you go ahead and eat meat, you're going to be offending them. But you also realize you're right and they're wrong. You've got permission. Should you still eat in that situation and try to show them their error? Should you stand up for your rights even if it offends them?

Paul says, "No." When it's obvious that eating meat is going to cause them to struggle because of their conscience, you should not do it. Yes, it's lawful and the Bible doesn't prohibit you from eating, but if you eat, you are going to offend that person. They are going to struggle with you and think you're sinning. And Paul says "why do that? Why put yourself in a position where you cause that person to "determine," or cast judgment on what you're doing? If you love meat and eat it with thankfulness, why should you set yourself up to be denounced for doing it? Don't let eating meat become an offense between you. It's not worth it. Give it up in that situation and then when you get home, you can fire up the grill.

There are certain things in certain situation that you just shouldn't do around certain people, even if you don't have any problem with it. And it's not ok to not think about where they're coming from. We should always think about where others are coming from and be willing to lay aside our freedoms for their sake.

So you can see his instruction from verse 24 playing out: "*Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.*" Even when you know you have permission, don't eat meat if it's going to offend the other person. He finishes by making it clear what glorifies God in those situations.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:31-33.

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ³² Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, 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.

It doesn't glorify God when you boldly do what you want to do in matters of Christian liberty when you offend other people... It's not commendable or honorable to him. What glorifies God in those situations is when you give no offense to the people who disagree with you. And that goes for believers and unbelievers. Paul said he would try to please everyone in everything he did, not seeking his own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

So when it comes to matters where the Bible give us permission, God is more concerned that we leave the doors open for people to come to Christ than to do what we think is right if it's going to put a barrier in their way. Therefore, God is most glorified when we choose not to cause offense – when we seek the good of others instead of our own.

So does it matter if drinking a beer or going to a bar offends other people? What about watching a certain kind of movie or celebrating Halloween? What about putting political signs in our yards or posts about divisive political issues on social media? What about wearing or not wearing a mask?

What's more important – to do what we think is right with these issues? Or to not offend other people? What glorifies God? I hope Paul's words have brought some clarity and direction for you. And I hope we'll be more careful with how we handle these matters of Christian liberty.