



All for Him

Introduction:

As we saw in a previous part of the letter, Paul addressed some issues of Christian practice that the Corinthians were either concerned about, or point-blank, failing at. Instead of drawing hard and fast lines on every matter, Paul wanted to teach them about what grace and freedom looked like in practice. He did not want them participating in pagan festivities, but he gave them helpful guidance on how to exercise their freedom responsibly when dealing with meat that was sacrificed to idols. He wanted them to develop a Christ-honoring, responsive conscience that would exercise wisdom, rather than law. At times, it would be wise to refrain from certain things, in order not to offend an unbeliever, or to prevent a weaker Christian from falling into sin. Paul taught them how to exercise their freedom responsibly, for the benefit of all others, and to the glory of God. It seems to be a human issue to want hard-and-fast rules for everything. Morally, the lines of behavior for Christians are clear. But in other areas, where it is not clear, we tend to draw our own lines, and even impose those lines on others. We either worry about being tainted by the world, and so we withdraw and then completely lose our mission and purpose to the world, or we 100% blend in with the world, and lose our distinctiveness. Paul calls us to live in the tension of grace and truth, freedom and responsibility, which requires thoughtfulness and wisdom.

Today's Scripture Text

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

Sermon Points

In all we do, our freedom in Christ, is for the glory of God and for the good of others.

In helping us to make Godly decisions, we should ask the following six questions:

#1. Is this allowed?

We know that not all things are lawful.

As believers, we need to look to 3 areas to test whether something is right for us to engage in:

1. Scripture – for example, if we wonder if it is fitting for us to get drunk, we can search the scriptures and find a clear answer: “NO” (E.g. Ephesians 5:18). There are many other clear instances of prohibited behavior, such as lying, gluttony, adultery etc.
2. Conscience – the scriptures leave many decisions open to our consciences. For example, drinking alcohol. The bible only prohibits *drunkenness*. However, for some believers, drinking any alcohol pierces their consciences, and therefore to be obedient to it, they refrain. Then there are times when drinking alcohol could be a stumbling block to a weaker believer, perhaps someone who struggles with alcoholism, or just generally struggling with sin in this area.



When a mature believer is around a weaker believer, their conscience is likely to ask them to refrain from drinking in the company of the weaker believer, to protect them and their struggling consciences. The key to being able to honour God through obedience to our conscience, is to make sure that our consciences are kept alert and attuned to scripture and an ongoing flourishing relationship with God. Overriding our consciences, and sinning, erodes away at our conscience's sensitivity and effectiveness.

3. Law of the land – the law is clear. If it says don't do it, it's a "NO". Some of us have become extremely arrogant (and therefore sinful) in this area, and we need to repent. Regardless of what is happening around us, GOD has told us to submit to the law of the land. We are not to adapt the law to how we feel, or what we think it should be. For example, if the law tells us to drive at a maximum of 120km/hour, it is not up to us to feel we can handle more, and therefore shift the speed to 140km/hour. We are not the law makers. As believers, we are to be law abiders. Other examples may be whether we can avoid some of our taxes, or if we can drink more than one and still drive, or if we can download movies illegally. The law of the land is clear: "NO".

#2. Is this helpful?

Paul then pushes us even further, and gets us to ask ourselves whether or not we *should* do something, even though it may be lawful to do so. He wants us to check our motives and consider how our choices will play out. This requires some honesty with ourselves. We could ask ourselves the following type of questions: will this hinder, hurt or make me go backwards in my relationship with Christ? There will be many things we are allowed to do, but just because we are allowed to, doesn't mean it will be useful, beneficial or helpful to us or others.

#3. Is this loving towards others?

The next thing this text gets us to consider is how our decisions affect others. Putting others first means that we may need to lay down what we want to do for the sake of someone else. For example, refraining from that glass of wine, because of the conscience of the other person. If I am unable to lay something down for another person, then it means I am not free from it myself, and I need to get some help.

#4. Is this a good witness?

This is where many of us have lost our way. In exercising our freedom, we have not been mindful of our witness and how our lives are a testimony to the holiness and love of God. If what we engage in will discredit our witness for Christ, then we should not engage in it. Once again, this requires us to ask honest questions of ourselves. If this is an area that you really struggle to let go of and are not sure, ask your spouse or a good friend if your witness is compromised in this specific area of your life. Allow their insight to shape your decision.

#5. Is God glorified in this?

The next thing we are to consider, in whatever we do, is if it glorifies God. We have the opportunity to reflect God's character in every single thing we do. Our everyday actions and reactions all reflect something. How we eat, drink, drive, exercise, work, shop, talk, text.... all has the potential to glorify God.



#6. Would I want this imitated?

Our behavior, seen or unseen, should be able to be imitated without shame. Would you want the rest of your gospel community to behave in the way you behave? Would you want them to copy the way you treat your home employees, the cashiers at the grocery store or the way you drive? Would you want your children to speak to their spouses in the same way you speak to yours? Would you be happy if others copied your texts, or Facebook posts, or even looked at the same web pages you view? Would you be happy if your children copied your spending habits? Would you want others to imitate the way you react to stress or adversity? If the church had to copy the way you lived your life, what would the church look like?

Discussion Questions:

- ♣ Why is it important for us to first ask if something is lawful or not?
- ♣ Why do you think that freedom means the ability to engage in OR let go of something?
- ♣ Why is it true to say that if I am not willing to lay something down for the good of someone else, that I am not free of it myself?
- ♣ Why does conscience, as a believer, play a role in our decisions?
- ♣ How do we know if our conscience has been seared and no longer responsive to God?
- ♣ *Person reflection: In what area of your life have you continually overridden your conscience because you wanted to engage in the behavior it was trying to lead you away from?*
- ♣ Why is it important to ask if our choices, decisions and behavior is helpful and loving towards others? Give an example of how this kind of thinking on your behalf might impact your current work situation/environment.
- ♣ What does it mean to be a witness to Christ?
- ♣ *Person reflection: How cognoscente are you of living your life that is a witness to Christ?*
- ♣ In what areas of your life have you allowed your witness to Christ to slip and what are you going to do about it?
- ♣ What does it mean to glorify God in your life? How is God glorified in the details of our lives, such as the way in which you text, drive, eat, speak etc.?
- ♣ Go around the room and let each person answer the question with a yes or no, and then come back to the why, once they have all had a turn, and discuss what it would look like for us to live a life worth imitating. “Would you be comfortable for us to imitate your life as one who imitates Christ, intentionally?”