

# DO ALL FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

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1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

## Introduction:

### LUTHER ON SWEEPING STREETS LIKE MICHELANGELO

Martin Luther was approached by a working man who wanted to know how he could serve God. Luther asked him, "What is your work now?" The man said, "I'm a shoemaker."

Much to the cobbler's surprise, Luther replied, "Then make good shoes and sell them at a fair price."

Luther didn't tell the man to make "Christian shoes." He didn't tell the man to leave his shoe business and become a monk.

Six months before he was assassinated, Martin Luther King spoke to a group of Jr. High School students at Barratt Junior High School in Philadelphia and this is what he said: "If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, sweep streets like Beethoven composed music, sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say: 'Here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job well.'"

*(From a sermon by Monty Newton, Bowed Knees, Confessing Tongues and God Glorifying Lives, 12/24/2010)*

In 1 Cor. 10:31 the Apostle Paul says it very succinctly – *read it*. He goes on to say – *read vv. 32-33; 11:1*. Those are Paul's concluding remarks to a rather long and roundabout discussion of an issue that was causing division and controversy in the church in Corinth.

In order to keep those comments in context, we need to back up to see how Paul arrived at that conclusion. Before we look at 10:23-11:1 this morning we need to look back to the previous chapters as they all fit together in Paul's argument.

## Review – Christian Liberty and Responsibility

This discussion all began with a question about whether it was appropriate or acceptable for a believer in Corinth to eat meat that had been offered to idols. Paul's response to the immediate question was that, in itself, meat that was offered to idols was not in any way defiled

or contaminated, and that since an idol has no real existence or power, eating such meat is not spiritually harmful.

However, having said that, he goes on to examine a number of extenuating factors which must also be taken into account if we are to live effective and fruitful lives as followers of Christ. There are three specific areas that we must consider. We have looked at these over the past weeks, so I am just going to review them very briefly this morning.

1. What effect will the practice of my Christian liberty have on other believers?
  - new believers – perhaps just coming out of a life of idolatry
  - weaker believers – whose conscience easily condemns themPaul's instruction is that we must never do things that will cause others to stumble and fall into sin in their walk with God.
2. How will my Christian liberty and my rights as a believer and a servant of Christ affect unbelievers and their response to the gospel? Last week, Justin spoke from Philippians about Paul's focus on the advance of the gospel. Even though Paul was in prison when he wrote to the Philippians, he said even the things that have happened to me have served to advance the gospel. To the Corinthians – if demanding my rights, or living out my freedom in Christ is going to hinder the gospel or put up a barrier to people responding to the gospel then I will not do it – 9:12b, 22-23.
3. How will the practice of my Christian liberty affect my own walk with God? In chapter 10, Paul points out that it is one thing to have freedom to practice certain activities, but it is quite another to allow those activities to lead us into sin. It is so easy for liberty to become license. Christian liberty can easily be used as an excuse to lead us into activities that are idolatrous. For the Corinthians, it is one thing to eat meat that came from a pagan temple ceremony. It was quite another thing to engage in the pagan ceremonies, identifying with the idols and heathen gods.

## A Summary Regarding Christian Conduct

We are not going to spend long going through this passage because I really want to get to the bottom line which is in vv. 31-33.

But let's take a quick look at vv. 23-30. In these verses Paul returns to where he started – the question of meat offered to idols. He makes several important points to consider:

1. Not everything that is legal, or permissible, is the good or right thing to do – v. 23. “All things are lawful.” This seems to be an axiom that the Corinthians used to justify their behavior. This is not the first time Paul has referred to this phrase – see chapter 6. His argument is that just because something is permitted, it does not mean it is helpful for spiritual growth.
2. Thinking of others is important. In Paul's letter to the Philippians he wrote in 2:4 – *“Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”* Spiritual life is really about body life. As believers we are part of a body - the church, the body of Christ. If something we do causes harm to others in the body, everyone suffers. (We'll get to a lot more of that in chapter 12.)
3. Some practical advice:
  - a. v. 26 - Go ahead and enjoy the meat you buy in the market. Don't ask questions about its origin. Realize that it is good meat that the Lord has provided for you.
  - b. v. 27 – When served a meal in the home of an unbeliever, eat what you are served and don't make an issue where there is none.
  - c. v. 28-29a – But if someone (presumably a weaker believer) makes an issue about the food being offered to idols, respect his conscience and refrain from eating it, for the sake of his conscience.
4. v. 29b-30 – My liberty is not determined by someone else's conscience. Paul is clear that he may voluntarily choose to limit his freedom in order not to offend a brother in Christ or cause someone else to sin, but he still has his freedom in Christ and should not be condemned or censured for what he does with thankfulness to God.

## The Bottom Line

So, what is the bottom line in all of this? When it comes to debateable issues—questions about what is appropriate or permissible for a Christian, how do we bring this all to a conclusion?

*Read v. 31* – there you have it. The final deciding factor is the motive and purpose behind everything we do. The question that must always be at the forefront of our minds is whether our actions and behaviors are designed to bring attention to ourselves or to bring glory to God.

Paul again adds some clarification to that statement – *read vv. 32-33. Briefly discuss the concept of pleasing others vs people-pleasing...*

Paul's ultimate goal was always that God would be glorified in his life, and that nothing about his life would hinder the advance of the gospel or put a barrier before people that would deter them from responding to the gospel call of God.

He concludes this section with a simple instruction – *“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”*

Inasmuch as his desire was to be more and more like Jesus, he could call other to follow him in that desire – see Philippians 3:10.

If our constant longing is to be like Jesus, and our desire is that everything we do be for the glory of God, then we will have no problem determining whether some activity of behavior is appropriate for us as Christians. When our desire is to please Him, the desire for earthly things fades.