

Introduction

We resumed our study of the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church in chapter 8. Paul has been educating them and us to recognise that sometimes we limit our liberty for the sake of others and for the sake of the gospel.

In chapter 9 Paul examined more deeply what that might look like in practice. He recognises that the church is meant to be an Academy of heaven. A base camp from which to spread the message of the coming Kingdom. Our priority then is to not pleasing our selves but doing whatever it takes to make the gospel known to others.

We began to think about what our priorities were individually and as a church.

Last week we looked at the beginning of Chapter 10 – Paul drew lessons from the history of the formations of God's people - The Story of the Exodus.

The strong warning out of this passage and others like it is "Don't think that just because you are a Christian you are immune to the temptations of your age." Jesus did not die so that we could then live our lives independently from God. The way God has provided so that we can endure temptation is being immersed in Him. We applied this by thinking about the idolatry which pervades our own culture tempting us with offers of acceptance, security, significance, worth and identity in return for our worship.

Exposition/Application

Today we come to the end of chapter 10. We see Paul drawing together his argument: Everything is permissible but not everything is beneficial.

There is huge liberty in the Christian faith. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. He has given it to us to enjoy. Paul maintains freedom of conscience for the individual Christian. We are not compelled to restrict our behaviour because someone else has a weak conscience. We are free to eat any meat but he is willing to give up his rights in order to avoid harming an immature believer.

He unpacks what is **beneficial** in three ways

Everything is permissible but not everything builds up the church

Beneficial means building up the body of Christ.

We can compare what Paul says to the Roman Christians about the same issues...

Romans 14

¹⁵If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died. ¹⁶Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. ¹⁷For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, ¹⁸because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.

¹⁹Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. ²⁰Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. ²¹It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.

²²So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves. ²³But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

We need to focus on our priority of the work of God and be prepared to give up our rights to do so. What leads to peace and mutual edification.

Application: We have seen how Paul has drawn these principles out of the specific problem the Corinthians faced but we should also bear in mind where he is heading. He is heading towards a discussion of the Corinthian Churches gathered worship: communion, gifts of the spirit and the meaning of agape love. So the principle we will be asked to apply in these areas will be the same. We have liberty but we would be wise to use that liberty to fulfil our purpose which is to build up the church.

No one should seek his own good but the good of others.

Second we need to temper our liberty by considering the needs of others and in particular the unbeliever and the new believer.

Application: Not just the songs or style of worship **we** like but what will help others too. We try to have a range of songs and elements in our service. No one will find everything helpful. Don't switch off for the bits you don't naturally enjoy – decide to join in for the sake of others. Our behaviour impacts all those around us.

Come tonight. We are offering a service in which to think about the different things and people that influence your life. I have tried to make it a service which is suitable for everyone youth and adult. We will conclude by remembering Jesus in bread and wine, reminding us that we are one body though unlike in so many ways. Come not just for your own benefit but for the good of others. It is permissible to withhold our money, time and presence but is it beneficial to building up the church or helpful to good for others.

Whatever you do, do for the glory of God.

Do not live an unconsidered life. Think about what you do. Make choices and know why you do what you do. Then do what you do wholeheartedly.

Application: Work, Rest and Play. Giving thanks. Recognise that whatever your activity you can do it with thankfulness and hence for God's glory. One of the insights of our age is that all of life can be worship. That should **not** diminish our desire to gather and share our thanksgiving but should breakdown the sacred/secular divide between what we do here on a Sunday and what we do the rest of the week. We need to bring into this place not just our monetary offerings from the week but also our experiences and memories. We need to take out into our week a renewed heart and transformed mind so that we live differently next week to last.

When we live in these ways we are imitating Jesus who laid down his rights to seek the good of others and did everything for God's glory – being guided by what He saw His Father doing.

Response

What will you do this week?

Will this build up the body of Christ?

How might you focus on the good of others and not just yourself?

In what way might that be for God's glory?