

19. All to the glory of God

October 14, 2018

You may have noticed that I like shooting and firearms. Over ten some years ago, one of my friends, another gun guy, and I went to the Shot Show which is the biggest gun show in the world that was held in Las Vegas annually. I've never been in Vegas until then. I heard about the reputation of loose living and the immorality of the place. But I didn't realize how bad it was until I got there. I heard that it is worse now. I don't know how they could manage to make it worse, but they did and will get worse. Whenever I study the Books of 1 and 2 Corinthians, I automatically think of the city of Corinth, much like Las Vegas.

The city of Corinth was full of temptations, especially for immature Corinthian Christians at every turn outside of the churches. To help these spiritually young believers, our apostle Paul set up stop signs, because if they kept going in the same direction, what had begun as a celebration of liberty would have ended as a lamentation of bondage to sin.

So far, Paul is just warming up. But from here on out, he does not hold back any punch, he just let them have it all the way. I firmly believe that the Holy Spirit is going to speak to us how to fight against the temptations that we face for the glory of God through this Book.

A. FLEE FROM IDOLATRY

1 Corinthians 10:14-22 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? 17 For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread. 18 Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? 19 What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? 20 Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. 22 Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?

In the original Greek language, there is an article "ho" before the word "idolatry," literally saying "the idolatry." Paul is specifically referring to the idolatry at the Corinthian pagan temples.

The apostle felt strongly about this issue because he understood its implications. He knew that the Corinthians' association with idolatry would lead to grieving God's heart and destroying their fellowship with Him, like the ancient Israelis who escaped Egypt did while they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. To support his command, he tells them why it's so important to flee idolatry.

Since the Corinthian Christians tended to pride themselves on their "wisdom," Paul challenges them – if they are truly wise – to carefully consider what he says here.

In the rest of chapter 10, we see the same word "partake" popping up 3 times. Some of your versions may say, "sharing". KJV and NKJV render "participation" as "partaking" of which Greek word is "metecho." It is a parallel word with the Greek

word "Koinonia" for 'communion' in 1 Corinthians 10:16 and 'fellowship' in 1 Corinthians 10:20.

Just as the Christian practice of communion speaks of unity and fellowship with Jesus, so these pagan banquets, given in the honor of idols, speak of unity with demons who take advantage of misdirected worship. To eat at a pagan temple banquet was to have fellowship at the altar of idols.

In that part of the ancient world, eating at the same table with someone indicated friendship and fellowship with that person. Since you ate of one bread, that made you one body, because you both shared of the same food at the same table. So to eat at the table of a pagan temple restaurant was not as innocent as it seemed.

"The cup of blessing" was the last cup presented in the Jewish Passover ceremony; this was the cup that Jesus blessed at the Last Supper, and the one interpreted as "*the new covenant in My blood.*" When early Christians took communion, they were aware of its connection to the Passover, and with the last supper of Jesus with His disciples.

It is a horrible mistake not to know about the background of their idolatry and their idol sacrifices. True enough, the gods of the idols have no existence whatsoever. But something does exist behind the scene, something that is far more terrible and far more hideous than these pseudo-gods, namely an entire kingdom of darkness which is hostile to our God, a host of demons who ruled by the greatest of their number, namely satan. Without knowing it, idol worshippers are glorifying demons in their sacrifice.

The unwitting fellowship of some of the Corinthian Christians with demons, by participating in the dinners at the pagan temples, will provoke the Lord to jealousy. He has a right to all our worship, and has a right to be offended if we give our fellowship to demons. It doesn't matter that the Corinthian Christians didn't intend to worship demons at these heathen feast in pagan temples.

After a woman married to a man, if she starts to date another man, what will the husband think? That marriage would be a disaster, wouldn't you think? Remember this, please. As the bride of Jesus Christ, we are not to give any spiritual relationship with any other dieties than our Lord Jesus. Dungeons and Dragons games, Quija board, tarot card, crystal ball, tea-leaf, palm reading, psychics, fortune telling, horoscope, the Oriental Ying-Yang, and Feng Shui, all of these are straight out of the pit of hell. All born-again Christians should stay far away from them.

You may remember the incident at the top of Mount Carmel from 1 Kings chapter 18. The people of Israel has been serving Baal, a Canaanite false god. The prophet Elijah demanded the people to make up their mind whom they should follow:

1 Kings 18:21 And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him."

Make no mistake about it. God will not share your heart of adoration with anyone.
Deuteronomy 4:24 For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

B. TO GOD BE THE GLORY

1 Corinthians 10:23-33 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. 24 Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. 25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; 26 for "the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness." 27 If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. 28 But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness." 29 "Conscience," I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience? 30 But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for the food over which I give thanks? 31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, 33 just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

I don't do camping. I did all that when I was young and was in the military. My idea of camping is staying at Hilton Hotel with a high speed internet connection. I am a hopeless city slicker. But for the sake of a sermon illustration, let's pretend that we all went camping. Can I stay near the camp fire to warm myself from cold night air? Certainly. But would it be beneficial for me to play with fire by throwing a can full of gasoline into the camp fire? No! Why not? I may not only burn myself, but also I can start a forest fire to burn many, many acres of National Forest and put other people in danger. You are thinking, "Let's never take the pastor camping." Thank you!

The Corinthian Christians, with their focus on their own "rights" and their own "knowledge," were immature. Just because something is permitted does not mean that it is beneficial. The Corinthians were not seeking the helpful things, or the things that would edify others. Essentially, instead of wanting to go forward with Jesus as much as they could, they wanted to know how much they could get away with and still be Christians. That's a terrible and obnoxious approach!

Some of you might ask me, "What is such a big deal of eating meat for the apostle Paul to go on in several chapters of this Book?" Ladies and gentlemen, it is not about the meat we are concerned about, rather it is about the principle of the personal liberty that might cause another to stumble.

Corinthian Christians did not consider how their actions could harm others. Infant baby or young child does not care what is going on around him. He wants what he wants, when he wants, not later. Some children grow up to be adults, but they don't grow up to be mature. They remain selfish and childish. True Christians should be people with childlike faith, not a childish mentality.

Simply because the meat itself isn't "infected by demons," and can thus be eaten. The sacrifices lost their religious character when sold in the meat market, so it was permitted to eat meat that may have been sacrificed to an idol at a private table.

At the butcher shop, some of the meat was sacrificed to idols, and some of it was not. Paul says, "if you aren't going to partake of the atmosphere of the pagan temple, the meat itself doesn't matter. Don't even ask, and it won't even bother you." I guess, it is a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy.

Whatever you eat, ask for God's blessing on it and be thankful to Him that you have it whether it is a fantastic meal or another Taco Bell dish.

Here, Paul has in mind the setting where a Christian is warned about the food by his unbelieving host, or a Christian host with a sensitive conscience. In that case, it is clear the person thinks it is wrong for Christians to partake of meat sacrificed to idols, so don't eat it – for the sake of conscience, not your own, but that of the other.

Before the Lord saved me from my sins, I used to drink beer occasionally. I liked the taste of beer. Ever since I got saved, I have not had any alcohol in 30 years with the exception of a couple times of the communion wine in Bulgaria during our short-term mission trips. I don't even drink near beer or opening fortune cookies in a Chinese restaurant for other people's sake. Because they might think that I am drinking beer or take an advice from those fortune cookies after I talk against psychics or fortune telling. Again, it is about liberty within the limits of love.

The purpose of our lives isn't to see how much we can get away with and still be Christians; rather, it is to glorify God. If the Corinthian Christian would have kept this principle in mind from the beginning, how much easier it would have made everything!

There is a great verse that should go with v31:

Colossians 3:17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

I was watching one of those military reality programs from the National Geographics channel a few years ago. They were showing what went on during the US Navy SEALs Hell Week, one of the hardest physical and mental training anywhere in the world. With very little sleep, over 5 and a half days, the men who want to be SEALs will run, swim, carry boats, tread in freezing water, crawl through sand, and more. Many of those that start do not make it through and ring a bell to signal their departure. There was one recruit who never complained, never used one vulgarity or profanity during the entire Hell Week and other training period. The SEALs instructors nicknamed him "preacher." Trust me, unbelievers watch how we handle ourselves.

God has given each of us certain abilities, talents, and resources. The question is, what are you doing with them? Are you seeking to use them for His glory? Are you offering your resources and future to Him?

I'm not saying that you have to be a pastor. But whatever you do, whether you are a doctor, a stocking person in a grocery store, a plumber, a secretary, a truck driver, a builder, a police officer, or something else, you should want to serve the Lord and do it for the glory of God. That is what matters. Your life can be a testimony and a witness for Jesus.

How about you? Are you concerned about others more than your own benefit? Do you try to behave yourself, so that they may not stumble because of your freedom in Christ? We all should.

C. APPLICATIONS

1) Our Christian liberty should be within the limits of love for others.

2) Whatever we do, we should do all for the glory of God first and the love for others.