


How we lovingly deal with the conscience of others, 
to God's glory

Corinthians Explained

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 10:28-29
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Congregation, the main text for this morning's hour is from 1 Corinthians 10:28 and 29.
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28 But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: 29 Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?

So far.

"How we lovingly deal with the conscience of others, to God's glory." The theme for this morning how we lovingly deal with the conscience of others, to God's glory. Four thoughts. In the first place, lovingly, I hope to show you from the Bible from this chapter that there is love behind that. Secondly, our own conscience, how we feel about it. Thirdly, the other's conscience if there's a different opinion. And in the fourth place, the glory of God. So how we lovingly deal with the conscience of others, to God's glory: lovingly; our own conscience; the other's conscience; and to God's glory.

Congregation, it's kind of strange maybe that the Apostle Paul is dealing so long with this topic about giving offense, and about sacrificing meat to the idols, and eating the meat that was sold afterwards. Three chapters. Three chapters he goes on and on and on, I mean, not getting sick of it? Don't we say, "Paul, it's enough. We know it now. Let's talk about something more important. Let's talk about love or so, right?" But in 1 Corinthians 13, he speaks only one chapter about love and three chapters about not giving offense. So apparently it must be very important to the church. He must have been convinced that for the unity of the church and the love of God we must pull together and just have one front and one face in the church.

So let me show you in this chapter, first, a few verses where I see the love and then elaborate on that. What about verse 14 and 17? I mean verse 24, "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth." Verse 24, do you see that? So not seek his own but the other man's wealth. Or 29, "Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other." And

verse 33, "Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved." So a few times in this chapter, he, the Apostle Paul, talked about it's not about you, it's not your profit, it's not my profit, it's their profit. It is for their sake. He talks about being unselfish and loving and giving it over in the hands of the Lord, giving none offense to others.

So what's behind that? Well, let's go back to paradise. We resemble God, we are made in his likeness, in his image, we look as God's people, we look as God, and we don't interpret that like the Mormons do, the Mormons state that God has a human body and therefore we have a body and we look like him. No, we say we look like God in holiness and righteousness and knowledge, but you know what happened on the third page in the Bible, right? There was so much love and unity between Adam and Eve in paradise also with the Lord, such harmony and peace, and they broke it in pieces the third chapter already. And they became unloving individuals and therefore they were hiding in the thicket and the Lord called out, "Where art thou?" And they started blaming others and said, "The wife thou hast given me," right? Where's the love? Blaming, the blame game, and also indicating that it is, "The wife thou hast given me. She deceived me." And Eve also was blaming the serpent. So you see it right from the beginning after the fall that the love is missing and that there is much tension.

In the 13th chapter, the Apostle Paul writes, "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." The greatest is love. Hope, faith, love, love is the most important one. Love implies a relationship. It refers not to the love for money and the love for reading and whatever it is, but the love for God because God loves his people first and therefore they love him, and love is seen in loving your neighbor as well.

So that's why we read in Romans 12 and that's also the background of our chapter, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." So that's what we need today, don't we? In our families, in churches, in society, as much as is in you, live peaceably with all men. Sometimes bent over backwards, sacrifice, do it lovingly, take the lowest place, be humble, right? That's the background of this chapter, live peaceably with all men as much lieth in you. Not just a little bit but as much as you can. As much as you can, live peaceably.

Psalm 34:14, "Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace and pursue it." Seek peace and pursue it in the congregation as well with all the differences in opinion, in families and among families and there are many sensitive issues in today's society in church. So depart from evil, do good, seek peace, seek peace and pursue it.

Is that love not a mark of grace? Is it not so that God's children all have something in their heart like that? "Blessed are the meek." Have you been made meek? Is that our friend? "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." I believe that's the background of this chapter, to be meek and to be a peacemaker. That does not mean that you agree with everything. That does not mean that you are a pushover. But yet within certain limits and guided by the Lord's word to be peacemakers.

You know, one of the aspects of the life of the Christian is to sacrifice and that's hard. Sacrificing, for example, in the area of offense, giving offense, you say, "I don't see the problem," right. But, "I want to pursue peace. I don't see the problem but I would like to belong to the meek. I want to be a peacemaker." That's important for church life, loving fellow members is key in this chapter and let me also show that from 1 Corinthians 13, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity," that's love, right? So I can speak like an angel but I miss the charity, "I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." So I can be outwardly the best Christian, I know it, I know the truth so well and I can speak about it and I can explain those things, but I'm nothing if you miss the love. "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."

So it's essential to be a peacemaker, to pursue it, to do my utmost to live peaceably with all men and when the Lord gives his Holy Spirit, one of those things is that he pours out love, right, love for the Lord, for Christ, for the word, but also for people. When the Lord gives a new heart, you begin to love people, not only the Jews and the Gentiles, also the church. You connect better. You become a humble person and you want to not hurt people. You want to please God and you want people to walk in his ways in that togetherness, in that unity with God's people.

Lovingly. Let's go to the second thought already: our own conscience. You know, this chapter speaks a few times about conscience, for example, verse 25, "Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake." Do you see that, for conscience sake. In verse 27, "If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake." And verse 29, "Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other." Well, what is your conscience? Your conscience, children, young people, is that small voice within you, right? Your father and mother are not home and there is something you'd like to do, you'd like to watch, you'd like to eat, and you're not supposed to and you steal or you're doing something wrong and you feel kind of miserable. Then when your dad comes into the house and he may see it in your eyes that you have something to hide, you have a conscience that's speaking, right?

So we all have a conscience. Although we fell deep, although we fell in sin, right, in Genesis 3, yet we are not only callous, not only hard, not only indifferent, there is still a sensitivity in all people, there's still something tender in all people. Even the Gentiles in the bush, in the jungle, they still have laws. They still feel sometimes guilty. They still have some idea of good and evil. They have still some idea of God. It is the innate knowledge of God. And after the fall some glimmerings have been left so we all feel sometimes our conscience speaking, don't we? Even unconverted ones, anyone.

So that's good, it's good that we have a conscience. Suppose we won't have a conscience anymore, what would society be like? Suppose that we would not care whatsoever about

the law of God and about morals? It would be so chaotic. But we still have a conscience and because we have that conscience we also have no excuse, right? No excuse. Now that conscience may sometimes accuse us, then the conscience begins to speak. Think of John 8:9. There was a woman caught in adultery and they blamed her and they condemned her and they brought her unto the Lord Jesus and they said to the Lord Jesus, "What should we do with her? Should she be stoned?" Remember? The Lord Jesus was writing in the sand and he asked that they that are without sin should cast the first stone. "And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst." So those Pharisees, those legalistic Pharisees, those hard Pharisees, hard-nosed people, they had a conscience and their conscience was speaking that they were not free themselves. They were guilty so they left.

Now it is possible for people to harden their conscience. To harden it. To live over it. To ignore it. So then you get so used to that voice talking about your sin and that's wrong, that it does not make an impression anymore and you just harden your heart like Pharaoh, right? Pharaoh knew it was wrong what he did, he should let those people go, but he hardened his heart, he hardened his conscience. So to sear your conscience. I like to warn you, younger ones, older ones, to not get used to sin and not sear their conscience. Don't muzzle it but listen to it.

A conscience is not only something that you receive by birth, it's also formed partially by upbringing. So if your father and mother always say, "This is wrong. You should not do that." Big chance that that enters into your conscience and that makes a lasting impression and for the rest of your life you feel it, "I can't do that. My parents never did that. My dad would never approve of that." And that goes a long way sometimes in people's lives, their conscience yet speaks because it was formed partially by the upbringing. And especially what parents say, what parents do, how parents act, makes such a huge impact on the conscience. So, parents, use your time well and talk and be an example, and have contact with your children, and form, mold their conscience.

But especially when the Holy Spirit comes again, he doesn't only pour out love, right, as we have seen before, that he makes you a peacemaker and that you pursue it, and that as much as it is in you, you like that unity, but the Holy Spirit also brings it home and wounds your conscience. Wounds it. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 23, "though my conscience accuse me that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still prone to all evil." Do you recognize that, that your conscience accuses you that you have sinned against all God's commandments, transgressed, grossly transgressed? That makes people feel brokenhearted and you receive a contrite spirit.

Now our conscience can be wrong. You know, sometimes people say, "I just feel in my heart I can do that. I have no problem with it. I have prayed about it and I have a free conscience if I do that." It's possible that you don't see the problem and you have no guilty conscience concerning certain aspects of this life and you say, "I think that this is okay. I don't see the problem at all whatsoever. I feel liberty. I feel freedom to do that."

But your conscience can be wrong. It is possible that you say, "I see a real problem with that. That is so wrong. It is grieving the Lord and grieving God's people. I'm convinced about that." You might be wrong and also the other way around, right, that you say, "I don't see the problem that we have freedom," and you might be wrong.

Now previously as seen 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul writes about some people with a weak conscience and some people with a strong conscience, right? What is a weak conscience? A weak conscience is when people are so strict and so sensitive that they can't handle anything; they become so precise with their weak conscience, often beginning believers. Not only but often beginning believers. Some will have just recently been drawn by the Lord and they don't want to grieve the Lord anymore and they fall back into the workhouse, right, as we say, the workhouse, and they, according to Calvin, cannot step over a piece of straw because they love the Lord and they don't want to sin anymore, and if they have the remotest feeling that something is wrong, they just stay away from that because they don't want to sin against the good-doing God anymore. And there might also be something else kick in that they also have the feeling kind of, "I have to do my best. I have to earn points. I have to earn salvation." And that's a weak conscience.

For example, when people objected to eating meat sacrificed to the idols. As you know and as I now repeat, the Apostle Paul did not see the problem. Was that meat sacrificed in the temple of Jupiter or wherever else? The meat did not change. Those idols did not even exist. So when he was visiting somewhere and he was invited for dinner with a few more people, by an unbeliever, and there was a steak on the table, meat on the table, he would not ask, "Hey, where did you get that? Where did you buy it? Because if you bought it in the temple of Jupiter I'm not going to eat it." He didn't ask. He didn't ask. He just ate it because the world is of the Lord, the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. So that meat is a gift of God. He did not see the problem. But if someone else, if someone else commented on that who had a problem it would be different.

So some had a strong conscience and others had a weak conscience, so we have seen that the Apostle Paul does not go so far that he allows to participate in the sacrifices, not that, remember that? So when they were invited to a temple feast and worship services in the temple of Jupiter or others, the Apostle Paul said, "Don't go there." But Jupiter doesn't exist. "That's right but the devil exists. The devil is behind that so don't feast with the devil at the table." So you remember the application of that, let me just repeat that. You don't believe in drinking but hang out with people that are getting drunk, that is also the same sin.

So listen to your conscience and let your conscience be molded by the word of God but keep in mind that sometimes that conscience is just tender. You know, some people have a tender conscience and you may interpret that as legalistic people. Now maybe they're legalistic, maybe there is no warmth and no love at all for the Lord and his service, maybe just like the rules, but it's also possible that there is tenderness there. You don't know that. You cannot judge that. So some people have a weak conscience that you view as legalism.

So did Christ have a conscience? Yes, he did. He was equal to men in all things, sin excepted, and his parents must have seen that. He was subjected unto them. He could not sin but he consciously obeyed the Lord and therefore he can save us who have acted against better knowledge. So maybe we have hardened our conscience. Maybe we are still hardening it and the Lord can save people yet although they harden their own conscience.

But back to verse 23, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not." Now look at that verse, "All things are lawful for me." Really? All things? Everything is okay? If all things are lawful for me, there is no sin. No, that's not what the Apostle Paul means. He means that of all those things you cannot prove from the Bible you have a certain liberty. So all those things are lawful for me but everything that's lawful for me is not per se helpful and expedient, and understanding that all things edify not.

So how we lovingly deal with the conscience of others to God's law, we talked about lovingly and we talked about our own conscience, so now to the third thought: the other's conscience. So we read that in verse 27 and 28, right, let's read it again, "If any of them that believe not," an unbeliever, "bid you to a feast," invites you, "and ye be disposed to go," you're willing to go, "whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But," if you have someone else at the table, a weak Christian, "if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake," so you can eat it but you don't eat it for his sake, "that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other," that's key, verse 29, right? "Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other." So do I have to listen to the conscience of someone else, then? I have my own conscience. Is that not enough? So I just study a subject and I don't see the problem with it and I don't feel guilty about it and I just don't see why not, I have a free conscience, so who is stopping me? Who is telling me what to do? So does the Apostle Paul now say, "Now you listen not only to your own conscience now listen to someone else's conscience." Is that what it says? You know, what I often hear and maybe also in practice is, "You know, if I see a problem, I don't do it. But if I see the problem, I won't." But that's a personal matter, right? So you have your personal matters and I have my personal matters. If your conscience says no, then don't do it but don't tell me what to do. That's not how the Apostle Paul reasons. The Apostle Paul says, "I don't see the problem but I don't do it for his conscience's sake." I can't make anything else of it, you?

So he is again talking about the other like in verse 24, "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth. Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?" And verse 33, "Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved." Can you think of something, can you think of something you have no problem with it at all, you feel free to do that, you feel free to do that, to say that, to think that, to wear that, whatever it is? Can you think of something you have no problem with and yet you still won't do it for love, to pursue it for the other's conscience? "You know, I'm too

proud for that. I hate that. I hate doing something or not doing something for someone with a weak conscience. I don't like that, you?" In our own life, in our own individuality, we are all individuals so why be bothered with the conscience of someone else? But yet that's what it says, right?

"Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other." Let me ask you the question again: is there something that you don't do? May I make a proposal? Think it through today, this week, if there is something you have no problem with that you'd better not do just for the peace in the congregation, the peace among God's people, to the glory of God, out of love. You know, when I started preaching this series of 1 Corinthians, I didn't think of this chapter. I don't think I would ever have chosen this chapter. It's too difficult for me. I have a hard time understanding all the implications of it but I had to preach about it, right? I couldn't skip this chapter. So I don't know all the answers either but I want you to think about it. And I asked a few people this week, you know, when you think of 1 Corinthians 10 what item do you think of? What surfaces in your mind? And the answer was quite similar. I'm not going to tell you what they are because if become too precise here and say, "This is the problem and you'd better do this," then I will hear, "The minister said that is wrong and the minister said that's right." I want you to see it. I want you to read this Bible chapter. I want you to make the right choices. I want you to be peaceable with all men.

So maybe you can also decide that almost at a certain point you will from now on be humble and loving and don't do it. And maybe others with a weak conscience, right, who are upset about things, really upset, maybe in the right way, maybe there is love there, may I ask you to tone down and to really think it through, "Is this really what the Bible says or is this similar to the Apostle Paul's meat problem, that some people said, 'You can't eat that,' and the Apostle Paul said, 'Yes, you can?'" Right, so think that through for yourself as well.

So when there is a problem you have to decide on whether you will do that or not do it, that you will go there or not go there, eat it or don't eat it, wear it or don't wear it, or you name it, in the first place you have to study the Bible, right? But after that, you're not done. Maybe after studying the Bible on a certain issue you say, "Now I know it. I understand it now. I don't think it is a sin or that is a sin." So you have studied that but you're not finished now. You can't say, "It's not a sin so keep your mouth shut." "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient." So it is lawful, you think, but although it is lawful, it does not mean that it is helpful. "All things are lawful for me, but all things edify not." There are certain things that edify not. You know, more mature Christians, sorry, maybe I don't need to say sorry, more mature Christians have an easier time doing something or not doing something for someone else. They are stronger, more humble, more loving, and not so overly sensitive. They seek unity.

So the Apostle Paul did not always reason this way, right, there were also other things. Sometimes the Apostle Paul said, "Timothy, you'd better be circumcised." And he said to Titus, "Don't be circumcised." Because if something becomes in the way of the right doctrine, if something is interpreted as doing good works and to seek or to earn salvation

with that, then the Apostle Paul says stop it. No. It did all of a sudden become very clear as he was also clear to the Apostle Peter who was eating with the Gentiles and then the Judaizers came in and he walked away from the Gentiles and he pretended to belong to the other party, and the Apostle Paul withstood him in the face. So there are also situations that we don't budge and we say it's not wrong, we may not push it so hard.

So ask yourself what the Bible says, ask yourself what God's will is, and then ask if it is possible that if you do God's will yet it would be wrong because it is possible that you do something that's allowed and that's yet wrong because it's technically not against the Bible but in your circumstance it's not loving, it's not edifying, it is not expedient. So ask yourself what is most loving. So if there is no problem with it, what is most loving and what creates unity and is the doctrine at stake or not.

o how we lovingly deal with the conscience of others, to God's glory, let's go to the fourth thought. The Apostle Paul is ending this subject in the last verses of chapter 10 and I think the first verses of chapter 11 belongs to that, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved." So he's mentioning God's glory, that if you eat or don't eat, drink or don't drink, this or that, whatever it is, it always should be to the glory of God. And is that not how the Lord Jesus lived on earth? Let me just quote you something about the Lord Jesus that fits with the chapter, to the glory of God. "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart and you shall find rest unto your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." So the Lord did also in this area, in this subject says, "Take my yoke upon you." That's humbling, right? That's serving. That is sacrificing. So can you place sacrifice in a few more areas for the unity and the love and humility?

"He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets." See that the Lord Jesus Christ, he had the liberty to do anything and he was laying down his liberty and said, "I'm not doing it. I don't stand on my rights." So maybe you say, "This is my right. I don't let my rights be taken away." The Lord Jesus didn't do it like that.

"Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom I so delighteth, I have put my Spirit upon him and he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry nor lift up nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets. He made himself of no reputation and took upon himself the form of a servant." Do you have that grace and do you live accordingly to take upon yourself the form of a servant as he was made in the likeness of men?

One more, "For even he unto were ye called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth but when he was reviled, reviled not again, and when he suffered, he threatened not but committed himself to him that judges righteously."

So if you can think of something that is no sin but yet controversial, you might have to think on it. What's the best now, right, for lovingly, for the unity, to be humble, to be an example because if the world sees that we are fighting about things, then that is an obstacle to outsiders in mission work and in outreach. I think that's why he says, "but the profit of man that they may be saved." So it is also good for people looking from the outside inside the church if they would see that those people, they love one another, they just want to make it work, they just stick to one another, they just sacrifice to one another. There are even people there and they don't see the problem and yet say, "I'm not doing it because I'm part of this congregation."

You know, I remember in my former congregation about something else, let me not mention it. Well, why not. It was about television and with another elder we visited the people, the family, and we explained to them as much as we could from the Bible that it was not the smartest idea to raise a family with a television. And we talked about it until we were blue in the face and we did not do anything there and he said, "You didn't convince me." Okay. Then we looked at the thing from another side, from the side of church authority, the rulers of the church, that they care for your souls. And they were quiet and then he spoke on 1 Corinthians 10, that it gives offense also, and that although they don't see the problem, can they not just get rid of the thing for others? And they thought about it and not too long after they said, "We got rid of the thing. We don't see the problem but we'd like to have the unity in the church."

I think that was really humble and I think that's a good example, and I'm not going to make the application about things this morning. You bow your knees and you say, "Lord, is there something in my life that I should give up? Is there something in my life I'm too sensitive about that I have to let go?"

So Christ was rich, right? He became poor. He was the Son of God, he lay down all his freedom and he became a servant, he emptied himself, he was not too proud to suffer. So could you relinquish your rights, then? "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things." That's quite a text, verse 33, but then chapter 11, verse 1, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." Are you a follower of the Apostle Paul? He is a follower of Christ. He wants to resemble him. He wants to be as loving, as sacrificing, as perfect as he was.

Now this is a specific subject. I hope this is not your major subject in life. I hope it's not so that the only thing you can talk about is about 1 Corinthians 10 things, about controversies and challenges and how we create unity. The most important thing is, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." Do you follow Christ because we have only one life as we have seen also in the last few weeks, also younger ones die, right, in their 50's, in their 60's, family members, and we are reminded of it time and again that we have only one life and must stand before the judgment seat of God, and then one of the things that will be examined is if there was love, charity, because we can have the gift of prophecy and all those things and miss charity and we will be a sounding cymbal and miss the point.

So seek the Lord Jesus Christ and follow in his footsteps and I hope you have a tender conscience. You know, is there someone here just not too long on the road, recently drawn out of the darkness, recently maybe a few months ago or a year ago drawn by the Lord and confronted with sin? You know, you are brokenhearted, you have a contrite spirit, you have a hard time believing you can be saved when you look upon yourself, do you know what's a danger for you? That you become too sensitive and legalistic and in the workhouse, and that you try to qualify somehow with those things of this life. You know, don't go that route. Be levelheaded and seek salvation not because you are doing the good things and because you don't do this then and such, but seek your salvation only in Christ Jesus who suffered and died. He was willing to die. Think of him on the cross saying, "In thy hands I commit my spirit." And he hung his head and he breathed out the last breath and he died that the death of Christ might motivate us to seek him, and maybe for that reason love him and also have a humble walk with God. Amen.