

# Glorifying God in the Way you Handle Your Liberties

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*Taking the Next Step With Joy*

By Steve Viars

**Bible Text:** 1 Corinthians 10; 1 Corinthians 11:1

**Preached on:** Sunday, August 1, 2010

## **Faith Church**

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Well, have you ever been in a situation where there are two people are, maybe two groups of people who are at some sort of disagreement with one another and just couldn't come up with a solution? So some authority was brought in to make a determination and maybe it was a parent, maybe a teacher, a boss, a policeman or a judge. But they had to figure out what needed to be done. And that person listened to both sides. They gathered all the facts and then they waited a period of time before rendering their final decision. And everybody was waiting for what? To see whose side he is going to take. See who is going to win the argument and who is going to lose. Then finally the decision comes down and everyone kind of shakes their head and says, "You know, he didn't really take either person's side." Everybody else wants something and everybody just gave something up. He determined that the truth lies somewhere in the middle.

And I am not suggesting, by the way, that every case ought to end like that, but sometimes the test of a good decision is when no one is totally pleased, huh? For the individual making the ruling didn't take either person's side, at least not entirely.

We see that in counseling a lot where a married couple comes in and the assumption by one or both if they don't know is this. Well, this counselor is going to take one person's side against the other. So I have to spend an inordinate amount of time convincing this counselor that it is all my spouse's fault and I have to figure out some way to get the counselor to agree entirely with me.

I tell people all the time. Look. There is plenty of sin to go around here. In fact, I said to a couple this week with a smile on my sweet face, "I believe in equal opportunity whacking in this room." What I meant by that is I am not going to take sides. I am just not going to do that, unless we want to count taking God's side based on what he says in his Word. And so that includes, by the way, not just finding ways that the husband needs to change and ways that the wife needs to change. It also includes finding ways that the counselor might need to change or the people who are sitting there with us in training might need to change. There is plenty of sin to go around.

Another way to say that would be one of the characteristics of immaturity, expecting someone else to entirely side with you as if you are all right and the other person is all wrong.

And I understand there might be isolated situations where that would be the case, but not as often as we seem to think.

I actually struggled with that issue early in the ministry because there was many times where I knew that the right decision in a particular situation would satisfy no one. You go through this mental process of thinking, you know, if we choose option A one group is going to be happy and the other group is going to be mad, at least disappointed. Conversely, if we choose option B then the first group is going to be mad and the second group is going to be happy. To complicate matters, really neither option A or option B is bets. Option C is the one we really ought to choose. But the problem with option C is that no one is going to like it. No one is going to be entirely pleased. That is why I, as a pastor, don't like option C very much.

The longer I have been in this position the more I have come to realize sometimes that is the exact proof that that particular decision is best, because usually there is truth on both sides of the issue where both groups are at least partially right. So by not taking either group's side entirely, really, a balanced decision was just rendered and reasonable people, I think, will actually appreciate that.

Now I think you would say, "Well, ok, I get that. I mean, I understand that premise, but why are we talking about it? Did you have to make some hard decision that is going to honk everybody off?"

No, not that I know of. At least not this week. Here is why I even mention that to you this morning. That is where the apostle Paul lands the plane on the issue of Christian liberty. By choosing to not side entirely with either group that had posed the original question. And in so doing, he gives us some very important truth about how to make Christian liberty decisions.

With that in mind, open your Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 10. And if you didn't bring a Bible with you or you just have trouble finding your way around the one you brought, pull out the one from under the chair in front of you and turn to page 135 of the back section. That will take you to 1 Corinthians chapter 10 this morning.

So that is where we are studying, 1 Corinthians chapter 10, page 135 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you.

We are doing a series this year at our church called "Taking the Next Step with Joy." It is a verse by verse exposition of the book of 1 Corinthians. Right now we are working through a very crucial section of this book, chapters eight, nine and 10 which all form a single unit. You understand when these books were originally written they didn't have chapter divisions. They didn't have the verse numbers. That helps us. They are handy.

But sometimes it breaks up a flow of thought. In fact, we are going to see that clearly at the break in chapter 11 because I think chapter 11 verse one actually belongs with the thought that is completed in chapter 10. I will talk to you about that in a minute. But we are talking about chapters eight, nine and 10 in the last several weeks which all form one primary unit about this matter of Christian liberty.

Well, what is that? Well, that is areas of the Christian life that are not specifically spelled out in Scripture in black and white terms. So you have freedom there. That is part of what we were singing about this morning, the freedom that we have in Christ in Christian liberty. You have freedom to navigate between certain established parameters or buoys.

Now this morning we are going to complete our study of this particular section of the book. We are going to end with chapter 10 and, as I said, chapter 11 verse one. But I realize we have some folks who are brand new with us today. That is true every Sunday, so if that is your situation, we are really glad you are here. And, frankly, we prepare what we have done with you in mind in part. Plus, I understand this time of year a lot of people have been in and out with vacations. Nothing wrong with vacations. I am not the vacation scrooge. Some people seem to like them more than I do, but nothing wrong with vacations.

So I understand even if you have been part of our church for a long time you have probably been in and out and that is ok. So here is the essential summary. I want to be sure you are best prepared to get the argument we are going to have here from the end of the chapter. So here is the essential summary of where we are so far.

Again, Christian liberty deals with decisions that we all have to make every day where the Bible does not specifically speak in black and white terms.

Paul has told us there are two essential dangers when it comes to these kind of decisions that you need to watch out for its effect on others and its effect on you. Think about that. You could exercise your freedom in a way that might harm somebody else spiritually. Do you know that? Either a younger Christian or even a person who doesn't know the Lord.

And what that means—and this has been argued all sorts of ways so far in this text—you have to avoid the issue of insensitivity, not caring about how the exercising of your liberties might negatively impact somebody else. And that is the problem with the way some people exercise their freedom in Christ so-called. They really don't care about other people and they are going to flaunt their freedom. They don't really care if it is going to impact another person negatively.

And Paul would say, "Listen. That is not of God."

Clearly in this text, over and over, you have to think about the way you make those decisions, how that might impact somebody else. But then Paul gives a real zinger at the end of chapter nine because he says the other great danger is its effect on you. He said

you can end up, mark it down, you can end up being disqualified. That is the word he used.

So, you see, it is not just the impact on somebody else. It is the impact on you. That is where chapter 10 verse 12 fits into all of this.

“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.”<sup>1</sup>

Now that is an important verse for a lot of reasons, but always remember. That verse was given in the context of making decisions about Christian liberty. So don't be insensitive to others and don't be overconfident regarding yourself.

You see, just because you have the freedom to do something, doesn't mean it is best for you to do that. It may not be best in a given situation for others. It may not be best for you. That is the point thus far.

Now last week's verses from the first half of chapter 10 brought critical information to the table because Paul starts talking about the issues of the heart. The key part of that argument comes from verse six where he was speaking about the experience of the children of Israel in their wilderness wanderings and he said this.

“Now these things happened as examples for us.”<sup>2</sup>

In that case for the Corinthians and for us, for us.

“Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.”<sup>3</sup>

In other words, the issue with these kind of decisions is not what you do with your hands. It is what you want with your heart that is crucial to understanding this entire topic. It is not what you do with your hands. It is what you want with your heart.

We are not always careful enough to slow down and evaluate our desires. There is the understatement of the morning. We don't slow down and think about our motivation, why we are making the choices we are making. But that is exactly what Paul has been teaching in chapter 10. That is why I said—and I just picked one of the many Christian liberty issues that we can talk about, the way we dress—and I said last week regarding the issue of those who dress provocatively in order to draw attention to themselves, that is what they want. That is what they want. In order to receive the approval of people or maybe even to incite the jealousy of others who aren't as attractive as they are, whatever it is, the issue isn't the tight jeans. Do we get that? The issue isn't the short shorts. The issue isn't the revealing top. The problem is an unrestrained and ultimately idolatrous heart.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:12.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:6.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

And Paul says that is how you disqualify yourself. It is not all about the body stuff. It is not about the externals. It is about the way you make decisions about the body, the way you make decisions about the externals, what that reveals about the nature of your heart.

Ultimately you disqualify yourself because desires that are not carefully guarded can easily become idols that are illegitimately worshipped. This is a worship issue.

Earlier we were talking, singing about how we are worshipping Christ. Really? That is good. We ought to sing about that on Sunday morning. What about the rest of the week? Because the decisions we make about these areas of Christian liberty, that, too, reveals who we worship. And the question is: Is there consistency between who we say we worship on Sunday morning and who we really worship or what we really worship the rest of the week in all of these Christian liberty type decisions.

Now here is what is about to happen. Paul is now going to go bring all of this around full circle essentially. Remember. This started when the Corinthians had posed a series of questions to him about whether it was ok to eat meat that had been offered to pagan gods. And the questions were things like this. Well, can I buy it in the market place, this meat that has been offered to these pagan gods, because it is offered many times at the market place at a cheaper price? Why can't I just buy that and save some bucks? Or whatever it was they used. And then, also, can I attend a banquet or a private dinner with an unsaved friend where I don't even know? Is the meat that is being served, has it been offered to some pagan God before it got to my plate or not?

Some of the Corinthian church said yes. You can do that. you are free to do that. Others said, no, it is sinful if you do that. They were arguing about it and judging one another about it and fussing just like the immature Corinthians would and just like many American churches would today, frankly. And they wanted Paul to take one side or the other.

That is why I introduced this the way I did. They wanted Paul to take one side or the other.

Well, guess what Paul did? Yeah, he took neither side. I am sure his answer honked off a whole lot of people in the Corinthian church. It might bother a few of you. I don't know. But Paul did not take either person's side.

And there are some very significant principles for you and me if we understand where that takes us.

Now with all of that in mind, look at 1 Corinthians 10 beginning at verse 14.

“Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:14-15.

Now just think about that for a minute and notice the tone. Boy, there is something that is missing many times in our Christian liberty discussions. I am going to talk to you a about in a minute, but are you picking up on the tone? You are not planning lunch right now, are you? Right now we are talking about God's Word. If you pay that attention like half attention to what I was just saying that is ok, maybe. But now we are talking about God's Word so this gets all of our attention, right? And I am going to tell you something else. The argument that is about to be taken in this text is very nuanced. And if you don't lock onto it, you will miss it and you will miss a very important point, not just for Christian liberty, but for Christian life. But you have got to focus on the argument, because God assumes you love him enough to pay attention to his Word.

Was that a right assumption in your case? All right, then.

Verse 15, again.

“I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say. Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ?”<sup>5</sup>

What? That is talking about communion. That is talking about the Lord's table. Listen to the argument.

Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar? What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?<sup>6</sup>

Now, if you say, “I have no idea what he is talking about,” stay with me. It is my job to explain all of that. That is why I make the big money, ok?

So we will get it. Everybody here can get that argument. We are just going to have to work through it. And aren't you glad God trusted you with some material that you have to wrestle with a bit? That is good, is it not?

All right then. Verse 23.

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:15-16.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:16-22.

All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor. Eat...<sup>7</sup>

Now here is the bottom line. You are going to be amazed by this, I think.

Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience' sake; FOR THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S, AND ALL IT CONTAINS. If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything...<sup>8</sup>

Slather it with A-1. Big deal. But don't ask questions. It is the theological equivalent of don't ask, don't tell. And you may say, "I can't believe you said that." I can't either, but that is what this text is saying. You have got to deal with the text. That is my job.

Verse 28.

"But if anyone says to you..."<sup>9</sup>

Aha. You say, "He took one person's side."

Keep reading.

Verse 28.

But if anyone says to you, "This is meat sacrificed to idols," do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience' sake; I mean not your own conscience, but the other man's; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks?<sup>10</sup>

Now here is the voice we all know, but we seldom consider it in its context and this is why we just sang the song we just sang.

"Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."<sup>11</sup>

If you do that, you are going to get the decision right and if you don't, if you have a different motivation, you are going to get it wrong every time.

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:23-25.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:25-27.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:28.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:28-30.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:31.

Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved.<sup>12</sup>

We have seen that so many times in this text that I might win some, so that they may be saved. And I think chapter 11 verse one is actually the conclusion of the thought.

“Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.”<sup>13</sup>

What a great passage of Scripture for us this morning. We are talking about glorifying God in the way you handle your liberties. And with the time we have remaining let's focus in on three summary principles to guide the way we make Christian liberty decisions.

Here is where Paul starts. Learn to build up those around you. You saw that Paul eventually rendered his decision on these matters and I am going to break that down for us in just a minute. But what I want you to notice right now is how he did it. He built them up in part by the way he addressed them. He called them beloved.

See, I am going to give you the bottom line in a minute, but I want to remind you that I love you.

See, isn't this true? Sometimes people get into some of these Christian liberty discussions and as you hear them talk about it, or really, probably better, as you hear them argue about all these Christian liberty issues, music issues, dress issues, entertainment issues, blah, blah, blah, you listen to them, you just sit back and listen and it is like they hate each other.

If you don't stack the music issue up exactly like I do, we are enemies. I can only get along with, I can only love people who stack everything up exactly like me. I would just want to ask you. What is heaven going to be like then? I mean, do you really think there is going to be a hymns only section of heaven and people who are all into the hymns they are going to be over there and they don't cross pollinate with people who like contemporary music and they have to have staggered dinners times because the hymns only people can't get along with the contemporary music people? I mean, please tell me heaven is not going to be like that.

And yet some people... feel free just to speak out whenever you want. I did ask a question. That is a fair statement.

Let me answer the question. No, that is not what heaven is going to be like. We have got to learn to love one another even when we differ on some of these preferential matters. And when we are going to talk about some of these matters that the Scripture does not specifically address, we have to do it in a loving way and if you cannot do that in a loving

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<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:32-33.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:1.

way, you have just disqualified the value of your position, because you have just demonstrated that you are a person who majors on the minors. And I am going to tell you. That is the scourge of the Church. And God deliver this place or any other place from people who just major on the minors and cannot discuss their differences in a loving way.

In fact, let me just warn you against what I think ought to be called fringe thinking. That is the way many people relate to one another. I run quickly to the fringes. So they have common ground on like 95 percent of what they believe or 95 percent of what they do, but they don't talk about that. They don't celebrate that. The first question they have when they are considering another church or considering another Christian or considering a school or considering a what ever, it is really quickly how do I disagree with them? How do I...? I want to run out to the fringes and start arguing. I want to run out to the fringes and start judging. I want to run out to the fringes and start proving that I am better than the, blah, blah, blah, blah. That is what fringe thinking is all about.

Listen. Don't be a fringe thinker, ok? Be a centered thinker. And here is what that means. We are going to start in the center. We are going to start by establishing common ground. That is where the love is developed. And we are going to start with the common ground. We are going to start with all the things that we agree on and we are going to celebrate that together. We are going to lock arms together. And then on the basis of our common ground we are going to move out into the fringes. But as we talk about those things about which we might disagree, we are going to do it in a loving way. We are going to do it with the clear impression and the clear understanding that, listen, we might have something about which we disagree, but there is tons of things on which we agree. Let's not blow this friendship, let's not blow this relationship because there is a few things that we don't agree with one another about. And some people cannot get along with anybody who differs with them on anything. That is why they have so few friends.

In fact, I wonder about people like that. What do you do if you ever change your mind on something? Then you realize you can't even get along with you. That would be a rather interesting position to be in every day.

I am just saying that Paul, he built other people up in part by referring to them as beloved. Also he said this to the Corinthians. He called them wise men.

“I speak as to wise men.”<sup>14</sup>

That is another bad habit we can fall into, treating people who differ with us on something as if that automatically means they are dumb. Right? If you were as smart as me, if you were as spiritual as me you would obviously agree with me on every issue. Words like that and the thought pattern behind them are just dripping with pride, aren't they? That goes back to verse 12.

“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:15.

You might want to pause for a moment and just ask yourself that question. When it comes to the tone that you take to Christian liberty discussions with your family members, with your friends and with other people at church and your extended family, does your tone edify? Does it convince other people that you love them? Does it build them up?

I mentioned earlier many of you have been on vacation. Vacations are good. I am not fussing about vacations. I am not the vacation scrooge. Some people get fired up about it more than I think they should, but, anyway, I am not going to get into that this morning.

So even on vacations, family trips, that sort of thing, you know what some Christians do when they go out on a family trip and they have some sort of a discussion or some sort of a time with extended family members? They are all the time arguing about Christian liberty matters, fussing about Christian liberty. They just get into an argument. And there will be people who will hear this sermon this morning where the fact of the matter is you just ruined a family vacation and you hindered a relationship with another person in your extended family. Why? Because you just had to get it to that one again.

And I am not talking about the fundamentals of the faith and I am not talking about the essentials of the gospel. I am talking about Christian liberty matters that really don't matter a lick and yet you had to get into that one again and you have damaged the relationship and you treated that person in an unloving way as if they were not as smart as you, not as educated as you, not as refined as you, not as spiritual as you because they disagree with you on one of those matters.

And I would just want to love you if you are that kind of a person as your pastor and tell you, you need to change that. That edifies nobody. It hinders relationships in ways that they ought not to be hindered.

Paul didn't do that. Paul is a pretty passionate guy, but Paul didn't do that.

Now let's drill further into this argument and this is where I really need you to lock on because you will miss the point unless you really pay attention to the development of the logic in this text. Here is what Paul is saying. You edify people by understanding the connection that we have in the Church to Christ and to one another. And Paul is talking about the Lord's table now. In fact, we are going to be celebrating that tonight as a church family, church family night, the first Sunday night of every month. So we have one tonight. I would invite you to be with us at five tonight for that. You don't have to be a member. We do a lot of things together, a lot of body life stuff. It is great stuff. It will all be helpful to your spiritual growth, but one of the things we always do our church family nights is celebrate the Lord's table together.

And do you realize Jesus commanded you to do that? Some Christians are very disobedient because they don't ever open themselves up to that opportunity, that

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<sup>15</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:12.

ordinance. Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” So I want to encourage you to be back at five as we do that together this church family night.

But anyway, here is what is about to happen in this text. You notice as I read the text that Paul talks about the Lord’s table. He uses it as an illustration. Then he is going to land the plane on these questions regarding Christian liberty. Then in chapter 11 he is going to give a rather extended discussion about the role of men and women in the Church which means what do you think we are going to be studying, Lord willing, next Sunday right here? The role of men and women in the Church. That is my assignment seven days from right now. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus.

But if he doesn’t, be back a week from now and we will have fun together. Then the very next day I am leaving the country and that is a fact. My bags are packed and so what happens is, as I said, in the rest of chapter 11 then Paul gives an extended discussion about the Lord’s table and pastor Dutton will be speaking that day and you are actually going to be observing the Lord’s table on Sunday morning on that particular day. You will enjoy that. Now back to the point.

There is nothing mystical being transferred when we take communion, but it is a very powerful reminder of the body and blood of our Lord which has both secured our salvation if we have trusted him as Savior and Lord and also draws us together as brothers and sisters in Christ. That was the point of this.

Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ?  
Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since  
there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of  
the one bread.<sup>16</sup>

Now, ok, I get that. But what does that have to do with anything? And here is the answer. Edify others by understanding the connection that unsaved... same kind of sharing that unsaved men and women have to the idols that they have chosen and the former connection that younger Christians may still sense for the idols that they have forsaken. See, that is why Paul said:

“What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God.”<sup>17</sup>

They are connected to them. Just like you are connected to Christ, they are connected to those demons and I don’t want you to become sharers in that...

Now it is crucial that we get this. Lock on. Remember, the so-called stronger brothers were saying, “Listen. Idols aren’t real. Why shouldn’t I buy cheaper meat or eat that meat at the parties?”

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<sup>16</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:19-20.

Paul is saying, “You know, on one hand, I agree with you. The idol isn’t anything, except here is the crux of the argument. Except in the heart or the mind of the person who is worshipping it and because that person considers it to be so powerful, they are connected to it, just like you are connected to Christ. So it is better for you to avoid that so you don’t confuse them.”

Because why? One of the bottom lines of this entire discussion, 1 Corinthians 10:28:

“But if anyone says to you, ‘This is meat sacrificed to idols,’ do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience’ sake.”<sup>18</sup>

And so Paul doesn’t take sides with the so-called stronger brethren who said they could eat it at any time they wanted because idols weren’t real gods. The point is, why risk intensifying the connection a weaker person or maybe even an unsaved person has to idols that they consider to be real in their hearts?

Now I realize I will probably lose you if I don’t make that practical in like five seconds. I get that, because that is a very nuanced argument. I get that. Let’s just do that. Let me give you a couple of scenarios where that truth might intersect with where you live because it is very, very important to how people who don’t know the Lord or people who are not living well could become as connected to their idols as you could be, you hopefully are connected to Christ. Here is a couple of ways.

I think of a situation from another state where a man’s teenage boys were caught molesting a young girl that was just gross, no question about it, a heinous situation. And one of the questions I had for them was, well, where did these sons get these wicked ideas? How could you possibly get that thought in your brain as you would molest a little girl like that? And I remember that father hanging his head and saying, “Well, we haven’t been very careful about the kind of movies we have brought into our house. We have watched some things in our home with our children that weren’t pleasing to God.”

Now did you see what just happened there? As a father he believed that he had liberty and in a sense he was right. The Bible doesn’t have a specific list of movies that are in and movies that are out. But he exercised his freedom as a father not in a way that built his sons up. That is the point of this text thus far. He exercised his freedom not in a way that built his sons up, but that tore them down and the desires that maybe his father could handle as he watched that movie became idols of the heart in his sons’ lives. That is what it is. So much so that they would treat a girl in such a heinous fashion.

And here is the principle. I hope we all get it. What might be a hobby to you, may become a god to somebody else. Do you get that, the connection issue? What might be just a hobby to you, could become a god to somebody else. What might be an avocation or a casual interest, even a pleasure that you could handle without sinning may for your child end up being a god that will rule their hearts. You could inadvertently be in a

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<sup>18</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:28.

position where somebody that you know or love or influence is going to be more connected to that idol as a result of your choice. Why would you ever risk that?

Here is another example, these sports leagues. While I am just fussing about things, let's say a word about these sports leagues. Many of these leagues have no interest in all in being sensitive to the worship habits of the kids and their families. I have got to have my kid in AAU whatever all summer long. I will see you in the fall. So a parent justifies missing week after week of church saying, "Well, the Bible doesn't say that is wrong."

I think they are wrong about that, by the way, but generally when we are justifying sin we can start ignoring things and we enjoy sports as a family and our child is so good he is going to get a full ride scholarship and then play pro and make us all rich. Until you do that for a season or two and now your child has no interest in the things of God and you wonder what happened.

Let me tell you what happened. Sports became their god and now your child doesn't care about the things of God and what they got out of participating in that sport has become their god. And I am saying what might be a hobby to you, may become a god to somebody else. It might be an avocation or a casual interest, even a pleasure that you can handle without sinning. Maybe for your child a god that will rule their hearts or for somebody else in your sphere of influence become a god that would rule their hearts.

Why would you take that risk?

Now you might say, "Well, there is. I mean, there it is. Paul sided with the weaker brothers and sisters. He told the stronger ones to stop eating meat that had been offered to idols."

Well, that is not all he said, was it? That was not all he said, because the other piece of this puzzle was: Learn to enjoy your freedoms when it is appropriate to do so.

I think the position Paul took in verses 25 to 27 is absolutely fascinating, because he said, "You may not like this answer, but it is right there in the text, multiple times. He said there are a lot of situations where the best option is simply to not ask. There it is. Don't ask, don't tell. Why make that an issue?"

And that was clearly his conclusion with this meat sold in the market place.

"Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions."<sup>19</sup>

Don't even ask if it was offered to an idol or not. Same thing in an unbeliever's dinner party. Again, if you don't like it, it is right in the text.

"If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience' sake."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:25.

In other words, there are some senses in which the stronger brothers and sisters are right. Christ did die to purchase incredible freedom for us. So why make that an issue when it doesn't have to be. Don't even bring it up. Leave it alone.

There is a lesson some Christians would be helped in learning. Just leave that alone. Enjoy your freedom and major on the majors. And I think that is a crucial principle of any person who really wants to make a difference for Christ. I really believe that.

Some men and women are so wound up about all these Christian liberty issues. They are constantly arguing about those kind of things. They are constantly worrying about those kind of things. They are constantly judging other people for taking different positions than them when all of that is not really central to the redemptive heart of God that prevents them from participating in things that are really going to matter from the perspective of eternity. Just leave that alone. Don't ask, don't even ask.

The day I was preparing this message I was reading over a newsletter that I had received in the previous day's mail from two people. If you have been around this church for a long time you might remember this name, Jerry and Karen Hine. Jerry and Karen have given their story, their testimony many times from this pulpit so I am not gossiping about them. But Jerry and Karen are from Minnesota and 25 years ago Jerry and Karen's marriage was in deep trouble, so much so that Jerry actually moved here for a period of time to Lafayette and received counseling from our former senior pastor, pastor Good.

What is interesting about Minnesota, some of you are from Minnesota or you know some things about that Christian culture. I will try to be kind about this, but let me just say it this way. There is a Christian sub culture up in that part of the country that can be fairly wrapped up in the minors. Can I say it? And you are saying about minors, I am not talking about mining iron ore. I am talking about M I N O R, majoring on the minors. There is an entire history of people in churches up there just separating from one another on all sorts of petty issues. And it is a part of that culture and it is a shame.

Well, anyway, Jerry received the help he needed. God miraculously put their marriage back together. In fact, they started coming back to Lafayette every February sort of a celebration of their reconciliation and they would go through our week long biblical counseling training program. They started bringing their friends year after year. In fact, there is no couple that I know of that has been to that conference more than Jerry and Karen Hine.

Well, not surprisingly, now God has given them a counseling ministry in their local church up in Minnesota. And their church has started an outreach ministry with residential treatment program up there that deals with people who are dealing with drugs and alcohol and pornography addiction and that kind of thing. In fact, they have separate facilities, one for men and one for women. And the way this particular organization does it, after a person is graduating from their program, they partner those residents up with a

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<sup>20</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:27.

covenant church that will build an ongoing mentoring relationship with that person long term. And Jerry and Karen's church has become a part of that. So Jerry and Karen were telling in this newsletter about all the kind of people that they are having the opportunity to serve.

How did they get there? In part because somewhere along the line Jerry and Karen decided we are going to major on the majors. We are not going to organize our lives around all these petty arguments that don't really matter from the perspective of eternity. And I realize it might frustrate you a little bit, but the apostle Paul doesn't land on this is the way it always has to be. But what he is saying is, listen. If you are majoring on the majors, then you don't have to have precise answers on all these minors that fit every last person in the church. Celebrate the fact that some people are going to stack some of these things up differently than you and get busy as a group of God's people learning to accomplish the mission that God has given you. And Jerry and Karen are doing that. They are making a difference in the lives of people who are hurting because they are not going to get involved in all of these petty fusses.

And I wonder if I might be looking at a person or two or maybe more who need to hear that big time. And this is a really good time and I didn't go through this when I was planning this series at the beginning of the year, but in the providence of God this was a really good Sunday for us to be having this particular chat. And here is why. We are done with vacations now, ok? I mean, we all had our vacation. We had multiple vacations. Everybody is happy about vacations. And I am not the vacation scrooge. Did I mention that?

But now it is time for us to get at the mission. This is new year's day in a lot of ways for our church because when you have a university in your town, a lot of the calendar it just cycles around the school calendar. And this is the beginning of the ministry year for us. And the question for us is: Are we going to major on the majors? Do we really care about seeing how many people we can win to Christ from this community this year? Do we? And do we really care about having ... because you notice in this text what Paul kept doing. He kept bringing it back to, that I might win more.

Chapter 10 ends with the words, "so that other people may be saved."

I am not going to get so wound up in all these Christian liberty discussions that I miss opportunities to get things done that really matter. And we have a great opportunity. I want to talk to you about it, Al. You will see it in your bulletin. It is called Faith Community Institute. And you have a brochure in your bulletin about this. Faith Community Institute is a series of classes that we have around here on Wednesday nights. They start up in the next couple of weeks and I want to thank pastor Oakwyn. He has done a fabulous job of putting together a series of very creative classes that ought to appeal to many people in this community about what the Word of God says about all sorts of practical areas of Christian living.

Now I believe God can... we are not just doing stuff to do stuff. I believe God can use that to draw other men and women to Christ. Do you?

Ok, let me try that again.

Do you believe that? And now the question is: Is your lifestyle going to match that? Because I want to know. And, seriously, I want to ask you straight up. Do you have a passion for people who don't know the Lord who might live in this community that God might want to use you to draw them to Christ? And do you have a passion for people who have just come to know the Lord, but maybe don't have a church home yet and maybe haven't been connected and you could have a positive impact on their life this fall. That is the major. Ok, that is the major. And what I am asking you straight up in your face: Do you care about that?

And here is the thing. Now I tell you when you are good and I tell you when you are bad. That is my job. There is a lot of good things about this church, but here is a bad one. There is a trend and the trend is when we have things like this, we will have tons of people from the community because they get it. They are interested in it. But we have fewer people from our church family who actually want to participate.

Now if you say, "I am not interested in any classes," that really is not the issue. The issue is: Is there a potential for ministry there? And if the answer to that is yes, then who cares whether you are interested in one of the classes. And I am asking you: Do you get it? I am asking you: Are you fired up about the mission that Christ has given you this fall and is that what you are going to organize your life around glorifying him by drawing men and women to Christ?

And I am challenging you right now as your pastor to grab some of these brochures and, by the way, we used to do it. We have one that we print in the newspaper. That has already gone out. And we used to just print more of those and give those to our church members to hand out to their friends and then we had some of our church members fuss about that. Well, those are too big and bulky. I fussed back, but I decided to do it out in a cornfield by myself. So I already had that conversation and it wasn't so nice because sometimes... well, anyway. But we printed one professionally for you that is smaller because we love you, ok? Are you feeling it right now? Because this is about all I got. And so... but here is the thing. Now I am serious about this.

Now it is time for you to do your part. Pastor Oakwyn has done his job. Arvid and Christina Marsh who designed this, they did their job. They have had... they got better classes than ever and this was put in a very attractive format for your neighbors and your friends. I am asking you straight up. Are you going to do your job this fall? That is it. Do you care about the majors? That is it. And I want to challenge you to get down on your knees. And you ask God to give you a heart that really loves people this fall. And I want to challenge you to get a fist full of these on the way out at that table and I want to ask you to plan to come to one of these classes.

You say, “I am not interested in any of them.”

It doesn't matter. Come to one of them. And then I want to encourage you to invite your neighbors, invite your friends, invite your coworkers and then tell them, you know what? I will sit with you. I want to build a relationship with you this fall that could help you spiritually. You are not going to say that with your mouth, but you are thinking that in your mind. And I am encouraging everybody from this church to really be about the mission this fall and not just to say, “Glory to God.” We are not just going to talk about that. We are going to do that. And that is the way this text ends.

“Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”<sup>21</sup>

Glory is something that is worthy of praise or exaltation. Do you believe that about our God? Surely you do. It is scripturally there is two aspects of that, his inherent glory. He owns it. He has it, possesses it. But also the ascribed glory.

And what we are saying this morning is when you choose to make all these Christian liberty decisions not on the basis of, well, I want to win the argument or I want to prove to somebody else that I am right and they are wrong or I am smart and they are dumb or I am spiritual and they are not. When in your heart you make all of these Christian liberty decisions about your dress, about your entertainment, about that use of your discretionary time, et cetera, when you make that from the perspective of I want to glorify God. Whether, therefore, I eat or drink or whatsoever I do, I want to glorify God. You are likely to make the right choice in that specific situation.

Now if you are here this morning and you don't know Christ, listen. What I am talking about this morning is not going to make sense, being concerned about other people and making decisions that are going to protect them and protect you. You first have to have Christ as your Lord. And I would encourage you to sit down with somebody, send us an email, make a call. We will sit down with you from the Word and show you how you can know for sure that you are on your way to heaven.

And, Christian friend, it has been good for us to talk about Christian liberty. It might bother you a little bit that the apostle Paul didn't come down on one side or the other, but the fact that he did it made an important point. And I hope we will be the kind of people this fall who will learn what it means to major on the majors and glorify him by seeking to win others.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

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<sup>21</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:31.