

Others-Focused¹

Learning to Live Unselfishly

Discovering the Kingdom (1st Corinthians) Series [A] - Part 16

1st Corinthians 10:23-11:1

May 7/8

Introduction

- **God-Centered & Others-Focused** - There's a difference between being self-focused and self-centered, but it's only one of degree, not kind. I don't think either is healthy and I want to cast a vision for a God-CENTERED life and an Others-FOCUSED orientation.
- **A Self-CENTERED Problem²** - We cannot live a life either centered nor focused on ourselves. It must be on God and others to survive³.
 - **On God** - **Because we do not contain the source of life in ourselves, a self-centered life will shrink our world and lead us further into dysfunction.** It is for this reason we must be God-Centered. His abundant life pouring into us and through us expands our world and brings health with every breath.
 - **On Others** - **Because a focus on ourselves only reveals more and more flaws that lead us to greater insecurity and doubt, and because our own thoughts cannot reach outside of our experience, a self-FOCUSED life is not just unfulfilling but ultimately depressing.** It is for these reasons that we must turn our eyes outward to blessing others. We make more sense to ourselves when we are in the practice of serving and loving other people. Our gifts make more sense, our abundance makes more sense, our doubts come into perspective and a host of other healthy elements.
- **A Vision for Living God-CENTERED and Others-FOCUSED⁴** - So what would it practically look like to live more God-centered and others-focused?
 - **Instead of seeing our paycheck** as a means to solve our needs and wants, we see it as a gift to steward for the Kingdom of God.
 - **Instead of seeing our home** as a retreat away from people, it can be seen as a safe place of hospitality.
 - **Instead of seeing our faults** and weaknesses as something to hide due to embarrassment, they can be seen as opportunities to allow other people to emerge from the shadows.

¹ "We are still so lost in our rights and freedoms, but Christians live for God and others. Our decision matrix has to change." Pastor Brian Kiley Insights

² "Martin Seligman, the father of cognitive psychology has done extensive research into the modern epidemic of depression. His primary assessment is that the meteoric rise in depression - especially among teens - is due to the fact that we have elevated the "self" to a place that is was never designed to hold in our lives. It has become pre-potent in our modern world - what Seligman calls the "maximal self". We have become preoccupied with the self. The problem is that the self was never designed to carry that kind of load. His contention is that the self is a very poor site for meaning. He believes that people have over invested in importance of the self, have experienced a diminished sense of community, and have lost a sense of meaning. He suggests the need to attach themselves to something as large as possible (though he stops short of saying "God"), that they need to lessen their investment in themselves, and that serving and sacrifice for others is a prime way an individual can do that (M. Seligman, *Learned Optimism*; pp. 282 - 289). This is what Paul is advocating is the way of Jesus, is his own way, and should be the way of the Corinthians." Pastor Paul Thome Insights

³ "So many of us live in a selfish what that is only trying to figure out what is best for us. How much can we get away with? How much can we get? How much can we do without being caught for sin? But that is such a selfish way to live." Pastor Brian Kiley insights.

⁴ "Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others." This is the first appearance of this formula in Paul's letters, but it is so basic to his understanding of Christian ethics that it probably had long been part of the instructions he gave to his churches. Both in Rom. 15:1-3 and Phil. 2:4 he bases such a stance on the example of Christ, which is precisely how he approaches it at the end of the present argument (10:33-11:1); later in the letter he will use the formula as part of his description of love (13:5). For Paul the death of Christ, in which he gave himself "for us," is not only God's offer of pardon for sinners, but also the only proper model of discipleship."

- **Instead of seeing other people** as avenues of advancement, we can see them as fellow travelers to minister to.
- **Instead of seeing our calendar** as something to fill, we can see it as something to intentionally plan margin in for Divine Appointments.
- **Instead of seeing our job** as something to either endure to abuse, we can see it as a means of connection with others and partnering with God to create.
- **I think you get the point...**
- **The Practical Ramifications = From Truth to Love as one holistic pathway** – I think that for too many of us we only make determinations based on what’s right for us. But **once we break out of that mindset and start thinking about God and others around us, we tend to stumble on another broken road. We tend to see Truth vs. Love as opposed to one continuous, unbroken pathway. Ultimate Truth, will always lead us to God and God will always lead us to Love.** Truth and love are never in conflict. However, it is tempting to stop at Truth when our eyes don’t go past our nose.

Whether Something is Right or Wrong is Only the BEGINNING⁵

- **3 Chapters on Pagan Temple Issues** - For 3 Chapters Paul has been talking to the Corinthian Church about how to interact with their secular (albeit religious) community around them. Specifically, he’s addressing a key issue about eating in pagan temples and eating the food that was sacrificed there. **Here’s the gist of the problem:**
 - **Pagan Temples were a normal part of society.** They were built in honor of other so-called gods and goddesses, which aren’t really real, but demons take advantage of the situation and the people. The structures and activity in the temple was designed around worshiping these powers. That’s clearly not a good thing. But the rest of society was so used to polytheism, they would engage in all sorts of activities and events at the temples.
 - **How it worked** – a pagan worshiper would go to a temple and want to do something either personally (like rent a banquet room for a party or business event⁶), or for worship of the false god/goddess. They would go up to the temple and order meat which the priests/priestesses would prepare for them. One small part of the meat order would be burned up on an altar in worship of the god/goddess. One small part would be made into a meal for the god/goddess (so they would be blessed while the worshipers were eating), and the rest would be either prepared for the party guests in a meal or sold into the meat market to recoup costs.
 - **Corinthians were doing it too** - The Corinthian Christians were interacting with all of this dynamic and some of them were even going to the events at the temples⁷ and engaging with the worship meals. Paul was calling them out on it. He artfully and masterfully laid out an argument explaining why it was bad to go to the temple and eat food sacrificed to idols/demons, during these events and parties. Christians have no business honoring

⁵ “Determining whether or not something is right or wrong is only the beginning of questions we should ask. The next and most important one is – what would glorify God here and the follow up is: What is best for the people around me?” Pastor Brian Kiley Insights

⁶ “the temple meals, which functioned for them as “restaurants” NICNT, Gordon Fee

⁷ “Paul has absolutely forbidden attendance at temple meals...” NICNT, Gordon Fee

demonic activity, regardless if they think it doesn't affect them and they can justify how it's not a big deal (because they have freedom in Christ and there's no such thing as other gods/goddesses). Paul explained that it's not about them, it's about honoring God. He's the main character of the story not us.

- **A few more elements** – Paul, here in this passage is wrapping up his explanation of how to handle all of this and touch on two final elements. He is answering the questions:
 1. **Can I still buy the temple meat at the market, or is it demon meat now?**
 2. **What if I go to a friend's house for dinner and they have some of that meat?**

Lesson

- **Half the Battle**

- **Personal Rights and Freedoms Don't Change Community Love Mandates**

- **1 Corinthians 10:23-24** - *"All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful⁸. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up⁹. 24 Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor."*

- **Corinthian Slogan: "All Things are Lawful"** – The Corinthians were arguing with their pastor Paul about theology (which is rather comical from our point of view). They argued that because of what Jesus Christ did on the cross and the extreme grace and forgiveness provided, that it didn't matter what they did in this life. They argued that they had freedom in all things, that all things were lawful (not against the law).
- **Yes, But** – Paul's response was, *'kinda...'* It is true that Christians have extraordinary freedom in Christ. It's true that our actions here on this planet don't alter our status as children of God, once we are His. BUT, and this is a big deal for Paul, that's not the end of the conversation. What you are going to do with the freedom is the next crucial part.
- **Not all Things Build Up** – Just because we may have freedom in an area, spiritually and relationally with the Lord, doesn't mean that our choices, behaviors, actions are helpful to the people around us. There are a lot of things that may be ok for us but not ok for others.
- **Neighbor BEFORE Self** – Don't seek your own good, but the good of others. That's a key part of Christianity. Why? Because it's how Jesus lived. Jesus, the King of all Creation, didn't come to 'be served but to serve' the Bible says. If the founder of our faith lived with that mentality, shouldn't we? Over and over Jesus told stories and parables and made analogies and commands telling us to follow His example. For the Christian, we are on the back burner and our fellow humans are our focus.

- **Ghostbusted Meat**

- **Meat Sold in Markets is Fine**

⁸ "not all things are helpful (sumpherei - "to bring together", to collect and connect - the opposite of divisiveness?)" Pastor Paul Thome Insights

⁹ "ot all things build up (oikodomei - to build up – edify)" Pastor Paul Thome Insights

- **1 Corinthians 10:25-26** - *"Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. 26 For [Ps 24:1 says] "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof"¹⁰."*
 - **1st Question: Market Meat¹¹** – Paul tackled the first question they had about eating meat that once was used in a temple, but then it was sold later in the marketplace. He answers it concisely and soundly. It's all good.
 - **The Answer** – It's safe and fine to eat. Don't sweat it. God made the meat in the first place by creating the animal and if we eat something in thanks to Him, it's now a connection to Him and nothing else¹². That makes it all good.
 - **The Rationale** – Paul had argued and explained prior that the atmosphere, the environment, shifts meaning of activity. He explained that normal bread and wine, in church, suddenly becomes meaningful as Communion (Eucharist, Lord's Supper) and connective with Jesus. Normal water, in church, suddenly becomes meaningful as baptism and connecting with Christ. In the same way, normal meat, in a pagan temple, offered in worship of demons, becomes meaningful as a pagan celebration and connective with the demonic. But, once it's broken from that environment, it's broken with that meaning, and the connection is lost (it's no longer a 'holy' item). That reduces the items, the meat, to normal meat.
- **Demon Meat Meal**
 - **What to do When Invited to Dinner**
 - **1 Corinthians 10:27-11:1** - *"If one of the unbelievers invites you¹³ to dinner and you are disposed to go¹⁴, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on*

¹⁰ "On these matters one is truly free, especially in matters of food, since in the prayer of benediction alluded to in v. 30 one acknowledges that the ultimate origin of all food, no matter who butchered it or where it appeared in process, is God himself (which is the point of the supporting text in v. 26). On the other hand, such freedom is not the ultimate good in a believer's life." NICNT, Gordon Fee

¹¹ "The reason for addressing this issue is that what was sold in the *macellum* often contained meat butchered by the priests, much of it having been part of the pagan sacrifices. Since such meat was expressly forbidden to Jews, and since in their earliest days followers of "the Way" were considered to be a sect of the Jews, the whole issue of the Christians' relationship to the meat market was a thorny one.²² As with circumcision, Paul takes a decidedly "liberal" stance on this issue. If the Jewish law allowed one to eat meat before it was offered to the idols but not afterward, Paul contended that its ultimate source was God himself (v. 26) and that it was therefore irrelevant whether it had been sacrificed or not." NICNT, Gordon Fee

¹² "Ps. 24:1: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." This is the passage used by the rabbis to support the contention that a blessing must be said over every meal." NICNT, Gordon Fee

¹³ "(ei + indicative - situation of assumed fact)" Pastor Paul Thome Insights

¹⁴ "As he has already implied in 9:20-22, the acceptance of such invitations is perfectly legitimate (another place where he would be treading on sacred Jewish traditions); it depends on whether "you want to go." NICNT, Gordon Fee

the ground of conscience. 28 But if someone¹⁵ says to you¹⁶, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience-- 29 I do not mean your conscience, but his¹⁷. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? 30 If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?"

- **Dinner with an Unbelieving Friend** – Let’s say that you have a friend from work who isn’t a Christian yet and does their pagan worship at one of the temples, and they invite you over for dinner. It’s likely that the meat they are serving at dinner was offered to idols but you can’t be sure of it.
- **Eat it Without Problems** - By the prior explanation of meat offered in the marketplace, it just sitting on the table for a normal meal, has altered the environment and therefor the meaning and the meat is just fine to eat. It has no connection with demons.
- **If They Mention It** – BUT, if the host or someone at the table mentions specifically that the meat on the table had been sacrificed to idols/demons, don’t eat it. Clearly, they are pointing it out for a reason. It **could be that the host** was telling you in a way to re-honor the false god/goddess/demon and thereby it alters the environment (to worship) and the meaning (worship). **OR**, it could be **another fellow believer** who is at the meal and freaking out about the meat. They are putting you to a test. If you eat it in front of them, and they think it’s demon meat and bad, then you are not only offending them but they may end up feeling pressured to eat it, or even worse they may be emboldened to rebel against their conscience (your conscience was clear, but theirs wasn’t). The

¹⁵ “More difficult to determine is what kind of person Paul envisages with this “anyone.” The options are: (1) the host; (2) a pagan fellow guest; (3) a fellow believer. Each of these has its strengths and weaknesses. Least likely is the possibility of a fellow believer. Although the concern for this person’s “conscience” has some affinities with 8:7, where a fellow Christian is in view, nothing inherent in this context suggests such here. Indeed, in v. 32 the possibility of offending non-Christians is explicitly mentioned, and in v. 33 Paul’s own actions, which are to serve as a paradigm, reflect 9:20–23 and the clear concern that non-Christians might be saved. But what is most difficult for this option, and accordingly favors one of the others, is that Paul’s hypothetical interlocutor speaks from a pagan point of view by referring to “sacrificial meat” (hierothyton) rather than the standard Jewish-Christian designation “idol meat” (eidōlothyton), which Paul had used earlier in these chapters. It is possible, of course, that a person could be reverting to his/her prior pagan vocabulary; but that misses the fact that this is a Pauline creation, not a report of an actual event. Since Paul himself composed it so that the person speaking uses pagan terminology, it seems unlikely that he would thereby have understood the interlocutor to be a believer. Of the other options, it is less likely that he intended the host since he repeats the indefinite pronoun “anyone.” Had he intended the same subject as in the preceding sentence, either the demonstrative (“this one”) or no expressed subject would be more appropriate (cf. 7:36). We may assume, then, that Paul intended a fellow guest who was himself a pagan. But that leaves us with two further questions: (1) What does Paul envision to be the motivation behind such an informant? (2) What is the relationship between the believer’s forbearance and the pagan’s “conscience”? Or to put that in another way, How would a pagan’s “conscience” be affected by what a Christian did or did not do? Although the answer to the first question may ultimately be irrelevant to Paul’s own concern, it seems likely that he envisions the pagan as trying to “help the Christian out” rather than as putting him/her to the test, as it were. It is not difficult to imagine how such a thing could have happened since all Gentiles would know about Jewish scruples over such food, and since they would also think of Christianity at this stage as a basically Jewish sect.⁴⁶ But the second question is more difficult. Paul’s point is that one should forbear “both for the sake of the one who told you and for conscience’ sake,”⁴⁸ which is immediately clarified in v. 29a: “by conscience I mean the other person’s, not yours.” The clarification itself seems necessary; otherwise the proviso in v. 28 not only limits freedom but allows what he has already twice disallowed—namely that food can have anything to do with Christian conscience. But how can it have anything to do with a pagan’s conscience? Probably very little at all. The clue lies in the meaning of “conscience,” which is not to be understood as “a moral arbiter” but as “moral consciousness.” The one who has pointed out the sacrificial origins of this meat to a Christian has done so out of a sense of moral obligation to the Christian, believing that Christians, like Jews, would not eat such food. So as not to offend that person, nor his/her moral expectations of Christians, and precisely because it is not a matter of Christian moral consciousness, one should forbear under these circumstances. If this is the correct understanding of the text, then what Paul is not referring to is a fellow believer’s conscience as restricting the actions of another, as is so often assumed. The significance of this observation is that Paul does not allow any Christian to make food a matter of Christian concern; he does not even do that in Rom. 14, where he does allow people their differences in such matters.” NICNT, Gordon Fee

¹⁶ “if they say it’s been offered to idols, don’t eat” (ean + subjunctive - situation of possibility - more hypothetical)” Pastor Paul Thome Insights

¹⁷ “To “give offense,” therefore, does not so much mean to “hurt someone’s feelings” as to behave in such a way as to prevent someone else from hearing the gospel, or to alienate someone who is already a brother or sister.” NICNT, Gordon Fee

context seems to suggest Paul primarily means another believer at the meal, but Gordon Fee, argues it's not. I would suggest either is possible.

- **It's not Your Conscience You Should be Worried About** – Paul clarifies that, if it's a fellow believer who is sensitive to these things, they aren't eating it because it's violating their conscience (even if it's a pagan making the comment it matters because, what if they see you eating it after they confirmed it and they are further strengthened in their pagan views?). Obviously, you are already feeling cleared in this situation. But the other person's conscience, the one who mentioned it, matters too. In other words, it's not all about clarifying our own personal views. It's about ministry and loving on others.
- **Why Should My Liberty be Determined by Someone Else's Conscience?** – Paul is also quick to make sure people aren't falling into legalism, which he is telling them to restrain their freedoms, AND he's possibly defending himself from attack by the Corinthians since he would eat with nonbelievers. One way he does this is to periodically insert these parenthetical statements to say, 'remember guys, you are free in Christ, I'm not saying otherwise.' Just because someone else has a weak conscience doesn't mean we all live to the lowest common denominator of their conscience level.
- **What's a Conscience** – a conscience is the inner voice or feeling that indicates what's right and wrong. Sometimes we confuse that with the Lord's voice. But a conscience is a **self-set alarm**. It can be rightly set or wrongly set. Some people are not yet secure or fully aware of their identity in Christ and some of that ignorance allows their conscience to go off unnecessarily. Paul calls those people weaker brothers and sisters. We cannot set our own behavior by someone else's self-set alarm. If we are thankful to the Lord for something, then it's a connective element with Him and it's made holy.
- **Big Picture**
 - **It's All About God, not Us**
 - **1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1** - *"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, 33 just as I try to please everyone in everything I do¹⁸, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. 1¹⁹ Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."*
 - **Whatever You Do** – This is one of the super-statements in the Bible. They encapsulate powerful, over-reaching truth, in one succinct statement. I love

¹⁸ "It is of some importance to note that "pleasing people" in the context of evangelism is otherwise anathema to Paul (1 Thess. 2:4; Gal. 1:10). In those passages he refers to the kind of conduct that often characterized the itinerant philosopher or religious charlatan, those who carried the favor of others in order to gain their approval. Paul's concern is not that he himself be pleasing to them, but that his conduct be such that he may not stand in the way of their being saved." NICNT, Gordon Fee

¹⁹ "This final imperative has suffered from one of the more unfortunate chapter divisions in the NT. The language and argument are such that it seems clearly to conclude the parenthesis of 10:23–33. It is not enough for Paul that he appeal to his own example. They are to follow ("imitate") that example, in the same way that he has "imitated" Christ. On this idea in Paul see on 4:16. The emphasis here is certainly on the example of Christ, which for Paul finds its primary focus in his sacrifice on the cross. Thus, as in chaps. 1–4, the antidote to their behavior predicated on wisdom and knowledge is Christ crucified. It is hard to imagine a more telling way to end this long argument." NICNT, Gordon Fee

them! Here it is: WHATEVER you do, do it for the **GLORY OF GOD**. It doesn't matter if it's a matter of what you can drink, or what you can eat, or what activity you engage with, or what your eyes see, or what your mind thinks about (and the list goes on), every bit of it should be done for the glory of God. Why? It's the prime reason we are on this planet. It's the purpose of our creation and life. He is the center. It's all about Him. WE are all about HIM. So, anything that is not glorifying Him is either missing the mark or downright dishonoring.

- **What's Glory?** – glory is that which makes someone look good. Because we are 'led by our loves' it is that which makes us attractive to someone else. To give God glory means to highlight and demonstrate that God is so valuable that He is WORTH it (worthy of our praise and adoration). It's publicly showing that God is great.
- **Why is it so Important?** – bringing or giving glory to God is important for at least 2 reasons: 1.) as the creation of His hands and servants to Him as Lord, it is incumbent on us to do so as our reciprocity of His love. 2.) All of creation desperately needs to connect with God. God is the source of all life and all that is Good. For anything with life to thrive it must be connected to the source and that's God. Therefore, when we personally raise up God in our hearts in adoration and glory, we are further bought in and are further connected. When we publicly lift Him up and demonstrate His value, others are drawn to Him and they get healthier as well. Again, Glory to God is our #1 reason for and purpose in existence.
- **Don't Offend (further) but Bless (closer)** – Paul cites 3 main groups: Jews, Greeks, Christians. Oddly to a casual observer, Romans aren't mentioned, nor are all the other people groups that would have lived in such an international zone. But Paul's shorthand way of dividing people is simple: Jews and non-Jews; Christians and non-Christians. He's encapsulating a broad amount of people here. His point is that we should go out of our way to consider how our actions and behaviors are going to affect them. Are they going to lead them closer to Christ (bless) or further from Christ (offend)?
- **Not Seeking My Own Advantage but Theirs Getting Saved** – Paul isn't interested in living his life so that everyone around him has everything they WANT. He is interested in making sure the pathway to salvation is as clear and paved as it can possibly be. As long as we are self-seeking, we are going to intentionally or unintentionally create obstacles for them. Why? Because **we can only build one house/kingdom at a time.** We can build ours, theirs, or God's. If we are focused on building God's first, theirs second and ours third, we will have the greatest chance of leading them effectively to the Lord.
- **Be Imitators of Me as I Am of Christ** – Paul saw life and Christianity primarily through the lens of **Apprenticeship**. Maybe that was because of his background as a tentmaker. Maybe it was because that's all he heard about when the original Apostles talked about Jesus' style. Regardless, much of his mandate in the New Testament is to FOLLOW another and duplicate their mindset and

lifestyle. It's about doing what they do, seeing how they see, living how they live. Here Paul says it plainly, 'imitate me'. That's a command to duplicate how Paul does things and lives. The only reason he's confident to say that is that he is sure that he is duplicating Christ in the most effective and honest way that he knows how. He knows that the Corinthians never had the personal and present Lord of all Creation come to them bodily or catch them up in visions of heaven. He knows that he has extra inside information about Christ. So, he also practically knows that he is their best shot at practically seeing what it would look like for Jesus to live in their midst today. Instead of them guessing and arguing about what Jesus was like, they should look at the best closest tangible example, and that's Paul.

Conclusion

- **Can You Offer Your Life as Example?** - Jesus and Paul asked their people to follow them as they lived a life of example. Are you able to do that? Or are you still cutting corners in life, or making compromise, or living for self too much to offer that to others?
- **What can we see differently?** – We need to reintegrate a question into our everyday decision making. **How does it make Jesus look?**