

Topic	Glorifying God
Reference	1-Cor 10:23-32
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Paul in this letter wrote about accommodating the concerns of fellow believers when it comes to issues such as eating food offered to idols. It is important to note that these verses shouldn't be read in isolation, it is part of a flow from earlier verses in chapter. In fact, it is an extension of Paul's teaching that began as far back as chapter 7, when Paul started to address various difficulties faced by the Corinthian church.

The main issue in our text from verses 23 to 32, is eating meat offered to idols. Paul had already started to address this from verse 19 before our text. In fact, much earlier in chapter 8, he devoted one whole chapter to talk about food offered to idols and so we will need to make a reference to these earlier passages. To help us navigate these 10 verses in our text, I have divided them into four parts

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|----|---------------------|---------------|
| 1. | Liberty with Limits | verses 23~24 |
| 2. | Overcoming Legalism | verses 25~27 |
| 3. | Virtuous Latitude | verses 28~29a |
| 4. | Exalting the Lord | verses 29b~32 |

Part 1 – Liberty with Limits

*²³ "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is **beneficial**. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is **constructive**.²⁴ No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.*

As mentioned just now, our text is part of a flow that started earlier. Interestingly, verse 23 here is the repeat of an earlier verse from 1 Corinthians 6

1 Corinthians 6:12

*"I have the right to do anything," you say – but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything" but I will not be **mastered by anything**.*

What happens is that in 1-Corinthians chapter 5 and 6 Paul was addressing a multitude of sins plaguing the Corinthian church. Anything here in this verse

refers to sin. As such, when we say everything is permissible there is a caveat. Everything here doesn't include sin. When we say I have the right to do anything, it doesn't give us the right to engage in sin and hence Christian freedom or liberty is a constrained entity and has its limits. The limits are defined by our conscience. Conscience is our inner sense of right and wrong, our internal moral compass so to speak. When our conscience tells us that something is wrong then we have reached the boundary of our liberty. When our conscience say, this is wrong then we've reached the boundary of our liberty.

However, I must point out that this is not what Paul is talking about here in our text. What I have just explained is in context of 1-Corinthian 6. In our text in chapter 10, the context is different. Here the limits of our liberty are not defined by our conscience but rather by other person's conscience. Meaning that when our action effects a fellow believer's conscience then we have also reached the limits of our liberty. Paul gave a hint of this in verse 24:

²⁴ No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.

So for example, even if I think it is okay to go to a nightclub, perhaps to celebrate a friend's birthday, but if a Christian brother thinks it is not okay, maybe he thinks that a nightclub is a place of sin and if might going to the nightclub affects him, then I will rather not go. I will rather forego my liberty of going, is for the good of that brother. Paul will later elaborate this from verse 28.

Now to wrap up part 1, Paul has this way of writing in a very complex fashion and the discussion can go back and forth like a ball in a Ping-Pong game. Because earlier in verse 19, Paul was saying there is nothing inherently evil about food offered to idols. Verse 19

1 Corinthians 10:19

Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything?

In other words, he was pointing out that idol food has no special qualities and an idol itself has no special powers and Paul already said this in 1-Corinthians 8:4, an idol is nothing at all meaning it is okay to eat food sacrificed to idols, but then immediately after this in verse 20, Paul also pointed out that while idols themselves are nothing, they are just inanimate objects, just lifeless pieces of stone or wood but those who brought the food to the idols will in essence bring sacrificing them to demons. So you might to think twice about eating that food. So in verse 21 before our text,

1 Corinthians 10:21

You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.

Meaning, you cannot partake the bread and the cup at the Lord's table while at the same time eating food from the table of demons. It is one or the other, but not both at the same time. In other words, Paul is saying in verse 21, it is not okay to eat food offered to idols. Just now it was okay, but now not okay. This is very confusing, but it is Paul's way of teasing your mind to get you to think deeper about the matter. What he was trying to say is this, eating food sacrificed to idols in itself is nothing wrong, because the food is nothing but stuff, the idol is nothing but stone or wood but then if you broaden your perspective, if you consider other factors, if you think of others, you might want to refrain from eating it and hence the first verse in our text is really a summary of Paul's arguments in the earlier verses. So it is good to read Bible verses or passages in context.

²³ "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is constructive.

The idea here is constrain, holding back for the greater good or for the good of others and hence Christian liberty does come with limits.

Part 2 – Overcoming Legalism

Here Paul is back to his way of writing and now he is suggesting that you can eat, eat all you want, don't worry too much about the questions of conscience.

²⁵ Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, ²⁶ for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." ²⁷ If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.

Paul was directing this part of the text to those in the church who were too legalistic. The Corinthian church was consisted of a mix congregation of Jews and gentiles and this is the plight at the end of our text where Paul mentioned both Jews and Greeks. The term Greek here in generic and it can refer to gentiles in general or non-Jews and of course there were many Greeks in the congregation because after all Corinth was located in Greece, but it is to the Jewish group in the congregation that Paul was addressing in this second part. They were the so called conservative wing and conservatives are those who

want to conserve or preserve. They want to conserve or preserve things from the past, especially traditions or the old way of doing things.

These Jews have now become Christians but they still held on tight to their past practices and the two main issues with them were firstly the laws pertaining to the sabbath even until today and secondly all the various food laws in the Old Testament which is also the case today. Here Paul was saying to them, instead of insisting don't do this or that, he told them to eat anything sold in the market. Why? Because you are no longer under the law but under the grace of God. no one is safe by observing the law but we have been saved solely by the grace of God. This is well explained by Paul separately in Galatians 5

Galatians 5:1

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Here Paul was teaching about freedom from slavery to the law. This is what I mean when I use the term Christian liberty. Now we started part 1 with Paul's statement that everything is permissible but not everything is beneficial. So part 2 of our text here can be seen as an expansion of the first half of this statement that everything is permissible. In other words, don't hesitate, go ahead and eat. Earlier we looked at verse 19 where Paul said eat because idols are nothing and then in verse 21 he said, don't eat because it is from the table of demons. Now in part 2 Paul is saying, eat. Now you can guess what he is going to say in part 3, you are right, he is going to say, don't eat.

Part 3 – Virtuous Latitude

*²⁸ But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then **do not eat it**, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience. ²⁹ I am referring to the other person's conscience, not yours.*

I have touched a bit on this earlier, is because we must give due consideration to other people's conscience. We must give latitude or concessions to others who might be weaker spiritually or who might be less knowledgeable Bible wise and we do this as an act of virtue and hence virtuous latitude. When our action affects the conscience of another person, we've reached the boundary of our liberty and at that point we have to give up that liberty. Paul already addressed this earlier.

1 Corinthians 8:9

Be careful ... that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

Part 4 – Exalting the Lord

Paul begins by asking two rhetorical questions

*For why is my freedom being judged by another's conscience?³⁰ If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?³¹ So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all **for the glory of God.**³² Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—*

Now the answer to these questions appear to be in the negative. In other words, 'I shouldn't care about what others think or say' and once again Paul seems to be swinging to the other end suggesting that it is okay to eat, but here he finally offered the punch line in verse 31. It sounds a bit abrupt because after shuttling between eat, don't eat and suddenly Paul wrote, okay everything that you do, do it for the sake of God's glory. The huge question is, what is God's glory got to do with the issue of eating food offered to idols. What is the connection between the two? To answer this, we must first understand what is really meant by glorifying God or in verse 31, for the glory of God. Another phrase that we often use is to God be the glory.

What does all this mean? To God be the glory, glorifying God for the glory of God. This is the key that will unlock our text for today. To unlock the text, we must first start with the word glory itself. We must ask the basic question, what does glory mean and this is a very deep subject and we can only scratch the surface with the time we have.

To begin with, glory is not a word that is commonly used outside the church, but it does come out occasionally in our conversations. In the New Testament glory carries a slightly different nuance, which we may be more familiar with but for our purpose we will just look at the Old Testament and what it says about the word 'glory'.

The most common Old Testament or the Hebrew word for glory in the Bible is the word 'kavod', which means weight, referring to something or someone heavy or weighty, not necessary in a physical sense. Now to illustrate this idea of kavod, suppose Jack Ma walks into this auditorium. All eyes will be on him. He will immediately draw everyone's attention. His mere presence will overwhelm the

place because he carries a lot of weight. He is a towering figure in the world of business. So in a manner of speaking, Jack Ma possess a lot of 'kavod'.

So when we talk about God's glory, we are pointing to his overwhelming awesome being. We are referring to the weight of his splendor and majesty to his holiness and perfection, to his power and strength and all his weighty attributes that will prompt a response of awe and the reverence from those who truly know him. So when we say, to God be the glory, we are ascribing to him utter greatness and importance and this is the meaning of glory or 'kavod' in the Bible. Hence God's glory is often associated with honour and praise and worship, but it goes much deeper. Honor and praise and worship are merely the responses from our hearts when we acknowledge and appreciate God's kavod. We got to acknowledge his kavod first before the praise and worship can come out. Because if you don't have a proper grasp of God's kavod then your praise and worship will be rather shallow. Someone wrote that

Glory of God refers first and foremost to the sheer weight of the reality of his presence

That is why God is often referred to as 'our rock'. It is a visual pun if you don't realize. Because the rock is heavy, God is heavy in a sense that he carries a lot of weight in our lives if we allow him, but the trouble with us is that we fill our lives with so many other kavods. We pursue so many more important things in life, so much so that God is pushed to the side. So instead of heavy weight, He becomes a lightweight in our lives. We glorify, meaning that we give a lot of weight to our careers and businesses. We glorify or we give a lot of weight to money and other material things. We even glorify our children. So if we are honest, we our children are often weightier to us than God is. We wait eagerly for our children to come back from their holidays abroad, but do we wait as eagerly for Christ's return. Do I look forward as much to spending time alone with God.

Whatever you do, do in such a way that you reflect God's weight in your life. Now there maybe many important people or things in your life. There maybe many glories in our lives but they shouldn't be ranked higher than God. One small point to address here, the phrase whatever you do, it doesn't cover the details of our lives. The phrase whatever you do means the way you live your life, Paul was referring to your being, your entire being, your whole existence, as you live don't take God lightly and to coin a new phrase, take God heavily, not lightly.

As mentioned verse 31 here is the anchor of the text. It is the punchline that will clarify the meaning behind the text and the punchline is this, in the end it is not so

much about whether we can eat food offered to idols or we should not. Now if you recall how Paul was going back and forth between eating and not eating, what Paul was trying to say is like this, if I tell you it is okay to eat I can give you reasons for that. If I tell you, it is not okay to eat, I can also give you reasons for that. No, that is not what it is all about. You can imagine Paul saying, don't you see, in the end it is more about wanting, it is about glorifying God. It is more about God's kavod. It is more a question of how much weight you give to him. It boils down to how important God is to you.

Now what do I mean by this? How is this more about glorifying God about his kavod. So let me elaborate as we come to the application part of the sermon.

What is God's glory got to do with the issue of eating food offered to idols? Now to begin with, I refer to this interesting passage in the gospel. Jesus said,

Matthew 5:17~19

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter...will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.... whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus appears to be saying that the law is here to stay, and not only that he seems to be commending those who keep the law. Now let's compare this with Galatians 5:2

Galatians 5:2

Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.

Now in this verse Paul was referring to the law of circumcision. In the passage where this verse sits, he was speaking against keeping the law as a means to salvation, but Jesus was commending those who keep the law. So how do we reconcile Matthew 5 and Galatians 5. What Paul wrote appears to contradict what Jesus said, actually there is no contradiction. What Jesus taught in Matthew 5 is part of his sermon on the mount which actually stretches until Matthew 7 and this is how Jesus further clarified.

Matthew 7:12

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

The entire law can be summarized in two lines. The whole point of the law is 'LOVE'. The very foundation of the law is love. Now this is collaborated by an encounter Jesus had in Matthew 22. An expert of the law asked Jesus which is the greatest commandment in the law and Jesus replied

Matthew 22:37~40

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

So again the basis of the law is love. The purpose of the law is love. Now to help you understand this, let me give you an example. The eighth commandment says, thou shall not steal. Why do we refrain from stealing? Well the law prohibits stealing you might say but that's just dwelling on the surface. If you go deeper, it is because you are supposed to love your neighbor. You don't want to steal because you don't want to profit at the other person's expense. In fact, if you love him, you want him to profit often at your expense.

What Paul wrote is that, we are no longer under the law, that we are free from the law. When he spoke against following the law of circumcision in Galatians 5, what he meant is that we are no longer justified or reconciled to God because of our adherence to the law, because no one is saved by observing the law, because sooner or later you will bound to break one of them, rather we are saved by grace through faith. What did Paul further says in Galatians

Galatians 5:6

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

So how do I know if a fellow believer has faith because we are saved by grace through faith. How do I know if a fellow believer has faith, it will be demonstrated through the way he loves God and how he loves his neighbor. So it is therefore no accident that three chapters from our text Paul explain what love is in the famous chapter on love in 1 Corinthians 13. Love is the fundamental theme that cuts across not only our text chapter 10, but also beyond.

Earlier, I mentioned that Paul first talked about food offered to idols in 1-Corinthians 8, two chapters before our text, this is what he wrote

1 Corinthians 8:1

*Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that "We all possess knowledge."
But knowledge puffs up while love builds up.*

So Paul connects eating food offered to idols to love. So is there a contradiction between what Jesus said in Matthew 5 and what Paul wrote in Galatians 5. No, none, whatsoever. Both Jesus and Paul were on the same page, which is to love your neighbor. That is what the love is all about and the last verse in 1-Corinthians 13 goes,

Now these three remain; faith, hope and love but the greatest of these is love.

It is not so much about whether we can or cannot eat food offered to idols, it is more about glorifying God. Also how is glorifying God connected to the issue of food offered to idols. You see, if you give God the glory, meaning that you acknowledge and embrace his weight, his kavod, you would naturally want to pay heed to who he is, his nature, what he says and what he commands you to do. If you take God heavily so to speak and not lightly then you would start to love your neighbor. This is what it is all about. So love is really the underlying motivation in all that we do with regards to others in relation to others. So it is the invisible glue that holds the verses together in our text.

If you think that 1-Corinthian is about the merits and demerits of eating food offered to idols, then you have completely missed the point. If you are looking for a yes or no answer to the question of food offered to idols, then you have misread the text. The lesson that Paul was trying to put across is that, when you are deciding whether to eat the meat offered to idols, you must be guided by love, your actions and your decisions are to be conditioned by love, by your concern for others and hence when it becomes necessary you will give up that liberty and grant concessions or accommodations to your fellow believers because you love them. Just like you are ever willing to sacrifice for your children because you love them. That's why Paul ended this chapter with an exaltation in verse 32,

³² Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—

Simply because if you love someone, you wouldn't want him or her to stumble or fall. Your actions and decisions are to be driven by love and so in conclusion love is the operating truth behind all that we do in relation to others and that's why I embedded the acronym LOVE when I titled the four parts of the text.

In closing, I would like to broaden the application a little bit. Now we have to realize that the situation in the Corinthian church is hugely different from what

we have in our church. Our culture today is very different compared to what the Corinthians had in those days. Archaeologists when they excavated the ruins of the city of Corinth in Greece, they dug up about 10 pagan temples and three markets. So you can imagine the amount of meat flowing from the temples to the markets in Corinth at that time and so the problem with eating food offered to idols was very real to the Corinthian Christians at that time, but today we don't have such a situation. The various types of meats that we consume, we buy from grocery stores which are 100% commercially produced in huge factories and hence we don't have really an issue of eating food offered to idols.

In that respect, when we read the text, let us go beyond the issue of eating or not eating food offered to idols, instead let us ask ourselves these questions:

1. Does my life reflect God's weight or kavod? Do I live for the glory of God?
2. Are my actions and decisions driven by love in relation to others, remembering that love is the foundation of God's laws.
3. Do I readily give concession or accommodation or latitude to my fellow believers in order not to stumble them or do I always insist I am right? Do I always insist, I have the right.