

The unfolding of your words gives light.

The Temple of God

An Exposition of 1 Corinthians

²³All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify^a. ²⁴Let no one seek his own *good*, but that of his neighbor^b. ²⁵Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience' sake; ²⁶FOR THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S, AND ALL IT CONTAINS^c. ²⁷If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything

^a 10:23 **All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.** Here we go back to a thought from chapter six:

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. 1 Corinthians 6:12

The difference in this later statement is the second clause: He said that not all things build up instead of saying that he would not be mastered by anything. I made the comment in chapter six that I believe Paul was quoting a false notion of the Corinthians rather than stating a fact. There are some things that are not lawful. It is never morally lawful to worship idols, to commit adultery or to murder. So Paul is pointing out that questions of rights and legality must be trumped by matters of neighbor loving. The troubles in Corinth sprang more from demanding rights than from not knowing their rights.

^b 10:24 **Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.** This is the second great commandment restated. The biggest question to answer is not about your rights but your neighbor's good. Inside the church, building others up is a primary goal. This is echoed in Paul's challenge to the Philippians:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Philippians 2:3-4

^c 10:25-26 **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. Eat anything.** That does mean that everything at the grocery store is good for you. It just means that there is nothing inherently sinful or spiritual about the foods and beverages you consume. Paul already said this in chapter eight:

But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. 1 Corinthians 8:8

Paul drew on the Psalms to support his training of the Corinthians' consciences. The food sold at the market was not the problem.

The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains,
The world, and those who dwell in it. Psalm 24:1

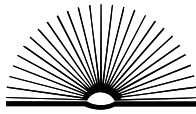
Hear, O My people, and I will speak;
O Israel, I will testify against you;
I am God, your God.
I do not reprove you for your sacrifices,
And your burnt offerings are continually before Me.
I shall take no young bull out of your house
Nor male goats out of your folds.
"For every beast of the forest is Mine,
The cattle on a thousand hills.

The Epistle of 1 Corinthians
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

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that is set before you without asking questions for conscience' sake^d. ²⁸But 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^e; ²⁹I mean not your own conscience, but the other *man's*; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? ³⁰If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks^f?

³¹Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God^g. ³²Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; ³³just 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^{h i}.

I know every bird of the mountains,
And everything that moves in the field is Mine.
If I were hungry I would not tell you,
For the world is Mine, and all it contains.
Shall I eat the flesh of bulls
Or drink the blood of male goats?
Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving
And pay your vows to the Most High;
Call upon Me in the day of trouble;
I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me. Psalm 50:7-15

Your view of the nature of God does influence the way you treat others and make life choices. The lordship of Christ over His creation means, among other things, that He designed many pleasures for you to enjoy.

^d 10:27 **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.** Here again is the phrase "for conscience' sake." This is an instance where a believer is challenged to consider an unbeliever's preferences as he decides what to do. This also communicates that it is not a bad thing for a Christian to have close contact with a non-Christian. "Biblical separation" is less a matter of the company you keep as it is the way you stick out around the company you keep.

^e 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.** This is the third use of "for conscience' sake" in this text. The very fact that someone points out the source of the food for the meal communicates something about his conscience.

^f 10:29-30 **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?** We tend to be very individualistic. We are tempted is to make choices based solely on how we feel about them—sometimes with spiritual sounding arguments. In other words the final arbiter for choices often gives no thought to what is best for others.

Paul's concern in this text is not your own conscience but your neighbor's. If you can thank God for something that does not mean others can.

^g 10:31 **Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.** The first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, "What is man's primary purpose?" and answers the question based on this verse and another from Isaiah:

Bring My sons from afar
And My daughters from the ends of the earth,
Everyone who is called by My name,
And whom I have created for My glory,
Whom I have formed, even whom I have made. Isaiah 43:6-7

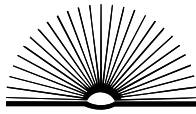
The answer to that catechism question is, "Man's primary purpose is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." This verse and others like it are the also basis for one of the mottos of the Reformers: *Soli Deo Gloria* (Glory to God alone).

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^h 10:32-33 **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.** To “give offense” is not the same as “do something that makes someone angry.” An “offense” in this context is something that causes someone to sin.

Your concern for both believers and unbelievers should be for their good and their salvation. Paul argued that the things we do can be a means of turning others away from or toward the gospel.

^l 10:23-33 In any culture in church history there has been controversy over matters of behavior the Bible does not directly address. Christians have rarely quarreled over murder and theft but they have quarreled over diet and dress.

What you should ask yourself before engaging in a questionable activity:

1. Did God design this for my good? The whole world is full of the glory of God to enjoy within the boundaries He set in texts like this.
2. Can I bring good to others by enjoying it? “I like it” should not be the final measure of the choices you make.
3. Can I bring glory to God by enjoying this? You may not answer this question the same in every context.
4. Might my joy in this cause my brother or sister to sin? This is the most important matter of conscience here.
5. Could this activity hinder the gospel? There are some things that even unbelievers consider wrong. Is it really a priority for you to convince them that their conscience is messed up?

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