

## “Glorifying God in the Little Things” 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

### Introduction

- I was working from home last week when I noticed a man outside my office window. If you’ve ever been to our house, he was standing on the sidewalk at the base of those hideous concrete steps leading up to our front door. I’ve never seen this man before and haven’t seen him since. He seemed like a nice man. He was obviously waiting for a ride and as he waited he pulled out a pack of cigarettes. He took one out. He lit up. He puffed away for a few minutes. And as his ride approached, he dropped the empty box of cigarettes right next to our front steps.
- I wasn’t upset by this man’s behavior. Okay, I admit I was a bit peeved at first. And I must have sat in front of my window for five minutes thinking about why that man dropped that empty box of cigarettes. And the more I thought the sadder I became. Why? Because when he chose to dispose of his box of Camels in our front yard instead of the inconvenience of holding his trash until he could find a trash can, in that instance he chose to live as an atheist. And that saddened me.
- Obviously he believed no one was watching him. He certainly had no idea the owner of the house was watching. And obviously he didn’t consider for a moment that God was watching him. And when he chose to live for self by freeing himself from the slight burden of carrying an empty box as opposed to the inconvenience of holding that box until the appropriate time came that man missed an opportunity to glorify God. He was living as an atheist. He missed the chance to acknowledge God and bring glory to Him. And that’s what made me sad.<sup>1</sup>
- Some of you are probably thinking. That’s it. Our pastor has finally lost his mind. Glorify God by what you do or don’t do with your trash? You bet. Let me say right up front that as Christians we are to...

### Proposition

- **Live in such a way that God is glorified in the little things of life**
- The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:31 that *whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God*. Just think about it for a moment. There are few things more mundane, more routine, more thoughtless than eating and drinking and yet Paul says whatever you do, eat, drink, whatever, you can and should glorify God when you do it. When this is broadened and expanded the picture of life I get is one where all of life, even the smallest most inane and mundane things, has either the potential to be a godless act or bring great glory to God. **And God wants us to live in such a way that he is glorified even in the little, seemingly unimportant things.**
- Two people are in the grocery store buying groceries—the exact same groceries. One’s a Christian and the other isn’t. Should there, is there any difference between their actions? Two doctors perform surgery, the exact same surgery using the exact same technique. One’s a Christian and the other isn’t. Is there any difference between what they do? Two six-year-

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<sup>1</sup> Idea for this illustration came from a sermon by John Piper on 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 entitled *I Will Not Be Enslaved by Anything*, September 1, 1985.

olds tie their shoes. One's a Christian, the other isn't. What's the difference between their two actions? Two high-school sophomores work on a book report. One's a Christian, the other isn't. What's the difference? Two mechanics replace a timing belt on a late model Honda. One's a Christian, the other isn't. What's the difference between the two?

- As far as 1 Corinthians 10:31 is concerned the difference can be as great as the difference between night and day. Why? Because the action of the Christian has the potential to bring glory to God, no matter how trivial or mundane, while the exact same action from the person without Christ, when done with no thought for God, is a godless expression of atheism.
- As it relates to this passage, the question I've asked myself as I've looked at my own life is that at the level of the mundane, the routine, the repetitive, the little things of life, has the cross changed me so that the way I act is different than the person who lives life without God? Or do I live as a practical atheist? God wants us to **live in such a way that He is glorified in all of life, especially the little things of life.**

### Transition

- This morning, from 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1, I want to draw out from the text...

### Organizational Sentence

- **One principle that will help us glorify God in everything we do—whether its brushing our teeth or building rockets**
- Again, we need to keep in mind the context of 1 Corinthians. For Paul it's all about the cross. The Corinthians, in their desire to be super-spiritual, neglected the importance and significance of the cross for defining and shaping what was truly spiritual. So Paul reminds them that the thing, the event which most shockingly displays God's glory is the self-sacrificial, self-giving of Jesus Christ crucified on the cross.<sup>2</sup> In other words the cross, which normally isn't a display of glory, dying the death of a criminal on a tree, becomes, by the wisdom of God, the supreme instance of glory. Spirituality is defined by living like Jesus lived; it's characterized by weakness, foolishness, shame, humility, selflessness and love.
- So when Paul says *everything is permissible—but not everything is beneficial* in [verse 23](#), look at verse 23, what he means in context is that, if an act is done with the wrong ethic, without the ethic of the cross it's not beneficial. And therein lies the wisdom for us as to how we can live all of life in such a way that even in the little things God is glorified. If the ethic of the cross—weakness, humility, selflessness, love—is at the front and center of all we do, even if it's flossing our teeth, we can glorify God.
- Suppose I pull the floss container out of the cabinet, pull some floss off and notice the floss is nearly gone. I pull the remaining floss off the spool and there are about four inches left. It's really hard to floss your teeth with just four inches of floss. At that moment, by my choice, I will either glorify God or be godless. If I choose to keep that nice long piece of floss for myself leaving the short one for Miriam, if I live for self, I live as if there is no God, as if Christ didn't die on the cross. And God gets no glory when I floss. However, in light of the cross, if I consciously choose the shorter piece for myself and leave the longer one for Miriam God is glorified in my flossing. Two choices with completely different end results. Sounds trivial. But because of the cross even the most trivial things can glorify God.

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<sup>2</sup> Thisleton, p. 793-4.

## Transition

Listen again to Paul's ethic of the cross applied to the little things of life. Verse 23. *"Everything is permissible"--but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"--but not everything is constructive.* 24 *Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.* 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 some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.* 28 *But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience'—29 the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be 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--* 33 *even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.* The **principle** that will help us glorify God in everything we do is the repeated phrase in verse 24 and then again in verse 33. **Seek the good of others.**

## Main Points

- In this particular instance, the little thing Paul has in mind is food—eating. If you'll remember from last week Paul prohibited the Corinthians from going to the temple to fellowship around a meal of meat that had been sacrificed to an idol. That's was a no no.
- In the section we're looking at this morning the issue is slightly different. The issue before the Corinthians had to do with idol food sold in the meat market. By the way, archaeologists have found and excavated the Corinthian meat market; probably the very one Paul writes about in these verses. Pretty cool, huh? Anyway, as we talked about last week going to the temples to eat idol food was strictly prohibited because doing so signified communion or fellowship with demons. But what about idol food sold in the local meat market? If the Corinthians didn't fellowship around a meal of idol meat could they at least buy the meat and eat it in their own home?
- Paul says yeah, you bet. No problem. **Verse 25.** *Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience.* C'mon Corinthians, you know your Old Testament, right? Psalm 24. God owns it all. He made it all, including that leg of lamb in the butcher shop.<sup>3</sup> It's clean. Remember Peter, right? The rooftop. The sheet. All kinds of animals. All those unclean things? They're actually clean. What a man puts into his body doesn't make him unclean. Take and eat Peter. Don't bat an eye. Don't let it bother your conscience. An idol is nothing. That's what Paul just finished telling them in 10:19. Is it anything significant? No. So even if that meat had been sacrificed to an idol. The moment it left the temple and made its way to the meat market, what's the difference between it and the good free range organic stuff? Nothing. Eat.
- With one notable exception. **Verse 23.** *"Everything is permissible"--but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"--but not everything is constructive.* Some, especially unbelievers, might get the wrong idea about Christians eating this idol food. They might

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<sup>3</sup> Peterson's *The Message*.

think they're hypocrites; they might not understand what it means to be free in Christ. [Verse 27](#). *If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. 28 But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake-- 29 the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience?* In other words, it's not wrong to eat but its best not to eat.

- Several chapters earlier when Paul began this discussion of idol food what was the ethic he laid out for the Corinthians? Flip back to 1 Corinthians 8:1. *Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. What's the ethic? Love. What edifies, what's constructive, what builds up the body of Christ? The ethic of love. From Paul's perspective the only thing worth doing is that which builds up the church.*<sup>4</sup> Don't trip up anyone by your behavior. Don't cause others to stumble. [Verse 32](#). *Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks, or the church of God.* The ethic hasn't changed 2 chapters later. What applied then applies now. It's more important to seek the good of others than it is to assert your rights or freedom. [Verse 24](#). *Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.*
- So when Paul broadens the discussion with this proclamation in [verse 31](#) *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God* he has in mind this cross centered ethic of putting others first, seeking the good of others.
- And this one of the most amazing things about the Christian life. Somehow, because of what Jesus has done on the cross even the most insignificant, trivial, routine, mundane things of life can take on a whole new meaning and significance. The differences between the Christian and the non-Christian are not simply limited to where they go after they die. The differences are infinitely greater than that. The person without Christ does not and cannot glorify God because the things they do are done with no thought of God—they're done for self. For the non-Christian eating is just eating. That is sad. For the non-Christian driving to work is just driving to work. That is sad. For the non-Christian there is nothing significant about grading papers. That is sad. Nothing meaningful about taking out the trash or sweeping the floors. That is sad. But for the Christian every single one of those things is an opportunity to glorify God. *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*
- The obvious question facing all of us this morning is this; does the Christian life look like this at the microscopic level of our day to day lives? Do you know what it means to see the glory of God in what you suppose to be your drudgery? In God's economy it doesn't matter what you do. All that matters is who you do it for. Let's face it. Most of us are just average Joes. There's nothing special or unique about us—except for the fact that through Christ we've been given the above average calling of glorifying God in just about anything and everything we do. But still the question is there. Has the cross and all that the cross means—selflessness, sacrificial love filtered down into our lives to the level of the mundane and trivial?

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<sup>4</sup> Garland, p. 488.

## Conclusion

- Recently I've been reading some classic short stories. A couple of weeks ago I finished Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener*. In this story a Wall Street lawyer who does a comfortable business handling mortgages and title deeds and other legal documents hires a new scrivener or copyist for his office. Joining Nippers and Turkey is the new hire, the forlorn, melancholy Bartleby—maybe one of the most tragic characters in all of literature.
- One day, the lawyer asks Bartleby to help proofread one of the documents that Bartleby himself copied; protocol for a copyist at that time. To the dismay of his employer and the rest of the office Bartleby responds, "I would prefer not to." Week after week, task after task, question after question is asked of Bartleby. And every single time, to the amazement of all, he responds "I would prefer not to." He is asked to get lunch for the office. "I would prefer not to." He is asked to look out the window and check the weather. "I would prefer not to." He is soon fired for preferring to do nothing and when asked to leave the premises after his dismissal his response is "I would prefer not to." The story ends with Bartleby in prison, found dead in the prison yard because when asked to eat, his response, you guessed it, "I would prefer not to."
- It is an absolute tragedy when a person rejects Christ. But there is an equally great tragedy; the Christian who, when given the opportunity to glorify God in the routine, the mundane, the trivial, prefers not to. *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.* And like gloomy Bartleby we live a tragic shriveled up existence. In Melville's closing words, "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!"