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TEACHING THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

1 Corinthians (2013) - Lesson 10B

Chapter 10:14-33

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- We're ready to wrap up our examination of Paul's teaching on the issue of Christian liberty
 - Today Paul circles back around to the first point, that is to the question of whether a Christian has liberty to eat meat sacrificed to idols
 - Paul began his answer in Chapter 8 with a straightforward answer: yes
 - Christians have freedom to eat anything
 - And we know that idols don't actually exist (except in the minds of the pagan worshippers)
 - So we are not sinning to eat a steak regardless of what may have been done with that meat prior to the moment it appeared on our plate
 - But of course, that's the not the end of story, because the situation is more complicated
 - Paul used the next two chapters to explain the questions we must consider when making decisions about liberty
 - These questions are much broader than simply whether a specific action is sinful or not
 - We must consider what impact our actions will have on others, on our witness and on our effectiveness as an ambassador for Christ
 - In the end, we will find self-restraint will be the wiser choice more often than not
 - Because the choice to restrain personal liberty carries the possibility of far greater reward than an unfettered exercising of our freedoms
 - We will grow spiritually and please the Lord

Like the pastor who was looking for a inexpensive lawn mower for the church grounds and responded to ad for a used lawn mower. "How much do you want for the mower?" he asked the young boy selling the mower?

"I just want enough money to go out and buy me a bicycle", said the little boy. After a moment of consideration, the preacher decided to generously offer more than it was worth as a testimony of God's goodness.

The boy was overjoyed at the prospect of finally getting the bike he always wanted. Meanwhile, the pastor realized he had never bothered to check to see if the mower ran. So the preacher bent down began to pull the starter line. He pulled on the cord a few times but with no response from the mower. The preacher called the little boy over and said, "I can't get this mower to start." The little boy said, "That's because you have to cuss at it to get it started."

The preacher said, "I am a minister, and I cannot cuss. It has been so long since I have given up cussing that I do not even remember how to cuss." The little boy looked at him happily and said, "Just keep pulling on that cord. It'll come back to ya!"

- Eating meat sacrificed to idols wasn't a sin, Paul said, yet the church was to consider the impact of this choice on themselves and others

- So where does that leave the church in Corinth on this issue?
 - Should they or should they not eat this meat?
 - Were they permitted to visit the temple meals?
 - And what about shopping in the agora where the temple meat was sold alongside regular meat?
- So to conclude this conversation, Paul demonstrates how to apply all the principles he taught to the specific situation in Corinth

1Cor. 10:14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

1Cor. 10:15 I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say.

1Cor. 10:16 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?

1Cor. 10:17 Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.

1Cor. 10:18 Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar?

1Cor. 10:19 What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?

1Cor. 10:20 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.

1Cor. 10:21 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.

1Cor. 10:22 Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?

- As we ended last week, Paul summarizes his chief concern over eating this meat: the church is flirting with idolatry
 - Their desire to enjoy that top quality meat is so strong, they're willing to risk slipping into idolatry
 - They are following in the footsteps of the Israelites in the desert
 - They are so immature they think they can resist the temptations common to all men, as Paul said
 - So Paul tells the church to flee idolatry
 - Steer a wide path around these things
 - Discipline the flesh's desires
 - And then to this immature group that thinks themselves wise and strong, Paul says he is prepared to speak to wise men
 - If they are truly wise and discerning, then they will recognize the sense of Paul's advice and heed it
 - And then Paul begins to apply all that he has taught in coming to a specific recommendation for action in Corinth

- In v.16 Paul looks past the question of eating or not eating to consider how does eating impact a Christian's testimony and influence in the city?
 - Insightfully, Paul draws a comparison to another meal in the Christian context – the communion meal
 - Paul asks, don't we share a common cup of wine and a common loaf of bread when we share the communion meal?
 - More importantly, what do the sharing of these things mean symbolically?
 - As every Christian knows (or should know), these elements represent the blood and body of the Lord
 - They remind us of His death in our place
 - And so they become symbols of our joining with Him through faith in the New Covenant
 - Are the elements of this meal the actual body and blood of Christ?
 - No, they are merely symbols
 - And do we become Christians through the taking of these elements?
 - Again, no
- But by taking part in that meal, we testify that we consider ourselves joined to Christ
 - Notice in v.17 Paul says that when the Body of Christ shares in this meal, we communicate we are one with one another and with Christ
 - A small piece of the bread enters each of our bodies, so for that brief moment everyone's body is connected by that bread occupying everyone's body
 - In that symbolic manner, we testify that we are made one Body by the indwelling of Christ's Spirit in each of us by faith
 - And the Israelites who bring their lambs to sacrifice at the Jewish temple during Passover all shared in the meat of those sacrifices
 - Their common participation in that sacrifice communicated they were one people under one God
 - And their unity was further emphasized by eating the Passover together in a ritual manner according to a common covenant
- So though a meal may be symbolic, nevertheless choosing to participate becomes a statement of who we are and what we believe
 - The meat sacrificed in Corinth meant nothing to a Christian, spiritually speaking
 - Neither did the so-called idols, since their gods don't truly exist as Paul says again in v.19
 - But that wasn't the point...the point was what message were they sending by their participation?
 - If they participated in these ceremonies – even just to gain access to the meat – they were declaring their solidarity with the pagans and their gods
 - Even more importantly, the pagans may have been sacrificing to nonexistent idols, but that didn't mean there wasn't spiritual power present
 - In fact, the demonic world orchestrates these ceremonies and guides the

worship

- The enemy and his army of demons have blinded the unbelieving world, leading them into false worship of one kind or another

2Cor. 4:3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 2Cor. 4:4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

- The enemy has placed false gods before the eyes of the unbelieving world to distract them from the true Light of Christ
- Therefore the Corinthian Christians – of all people – must be sensitive to the message they send by participating in a pagan meal with religious connotations
 - As they choose to return to the temple services and eat the meat sacrificed there, they become sharers with these people in the symbolism of this meal
 - Even though they may not agree with their beliefs, still their actions speak louder than their words
 - They are declaring an allegiance they don't actually have
 - They are proclaiming the existence of a god they don't actually believe in
 - They are inadvertently extending honor to demons, who are the declared enemies of God and Truth
 - The problem wasn't the meat...the problem was the message
 - And if they proclaim a message of pagan belief, they diminish the Christian testimony
 - At the very least, they confuse the Greek culture concerning what a Christian believes
 - Even more serious, they risk provoking the Lord to jealousy
 - The Lord certainly knows that His children are not truly worshipping pagan gods much less demons
 - But that doesn't mean He approves of going through the motions
 - Would a husband kissing another woman provoke his wife to jealousy? Would that change if he said it didn't mean anything?
 - Would a child be jealous if a father spent all his free time with buddies instead of with them? Would that change if the father told the child he loved them more?
 - The point is that all relationships come with expectations of certain guidelines and commitments
 - If we violate those guidelines, we provoke the other party
 - And it makes no difference what we think of that relationship...it only matters what the injured party feels
 - And when we join in celebrations designed by demons to replace a relationship with God, then we provoke the God Who died to save us from

such lies

- It makes no difference what we truly believe
- Because eventually, our unrestrained flesh will pull us deeper and deeper into idolatry
- Our world presents many situations where this same principle must apply
 - Situations where an activity itself is not sinful and Christians have liberty to participate
 - And yet in the way the activity is commonly practiced, we have good reason to reconsider our involvement
 - Our involvement presents concerns because of the message we send or the company we keep
 - For example, our culture is enamored with Eastern mysticism and pseudo-religious practices
 - Yoga, meditation, chanting, Eastern medicine, and the like
 - Once again, are these things wrong for Christians?
 - No, but in each case we should consider their source, their messages and the associations we establish through our participation
 - The enemy is just as active today as he was in Paul's day
 - And he is still the father of lies, working behind the scenes to create alternatives to the Lord for the unbelieving world
 - Many of his inventions are dressed as lambs, appearing innocent and helpful
 - We cannot live without concern for what we approve

Phil. 1:9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment,

Phil. 1:10 so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ;

- In the end, the question isn't what's lawful, for virtually everything is lawful apart from obvious immorality
 - The question is what's the best way to serve Christ and His people?

1Cor. 10:23 All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.

1Cor. 10:24 Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.

- Among all the myriad of choices I have, which ones are most profitable for the sake of the Gospel and my eternal reward?
- And which path results in building up my brothers and sisters in the Lord rather than merely building up my flesh or ego?
- As we live out the liberty granted us through faith in Christ, we must seek the good of

others rather than the good of ourselves

- This is the true fulfillment of the commandment to love others as we love ourselves
- When the question of eating the temple meat came to their minds, the believers in Corinth should have asked, how would my choice impact other believers in the city?
- What will the unbelievers in the temple or market think when they see a Christian appearing to support a pagan god?
- Will my choice make it easier or harder to persuade others of the Gospel?
- These are the questions a mature Christian asks before running blindly ahead under the banner of liberty
- Since the church wasn't accustomed to thinking about these things in a mature manner, Paul finishes his answer with simple instructions on when and how to eat the temple meat in keeping with all he's said

1Cor. 10:25 Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience' sake;

1Cor. 10:26 FOR THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S, AND ALL IT CONTAINS.

1Cor. 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.

1Cor. 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;

1Cor. 10:29 I mean not your own conscience, but the other man's; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience?

1Cor. 10:30 If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks?

- The church was free to eat this meat, just as Paul has said from the beginning
 - But he asks them to observe certain guidelines to ensure they act in love towards God and others
 - If they are shopping in the market, don't ask questions about the source of the meat
 - Just shop in blissful ignorance
 - Or if you are served meat in someone's home, ask no questions about its origins
 - Because as Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 10:14, everything God created is made for our enjoyment
 - So as long as we had no reason to fear the temple meat
 - But Paul makes clear that his point isn't to keep us ignorant, for our ignorance isn't making us holy in these situations
 - Paul says in v.25 that we aren't to ask the origins of the meat "for conscience' sake"

- But then Paul clarifies in v.29 that he isn't worried about the believer's conscience
 - The believer already knows the meat is just meat and that there is nothing to be concerned about
 - The point of not asking is to avoid initiating a conversation that then obligates us to protect another person's conscience
- When a Christian shopper asks a pagan shop owner if his meat came from a temple service, he immediately opens a conversation of spiritual dimensions
 - Where before, the shop owner knew nothing about this shopper, now he knows he is a Christian
 - The shop owner realizes this is a person who has rejected pagan idols and declared his faith in the one true God
 - He has been put on notice that this shopper sees his meat purchase as an issue of spiritual concern
 - Secondly, the shop owner has communicated to the Christian about the meat's source
 - So now the shop owner has interest in how the Christian responds to that news
 - He may expect the Christian to disapprove of the meat's source and distance himself from pagan practices and beliefs
 - Or maybe he doesn't know what to expect
 - Regardless, whatever the Christian does next will impact the shop owner's conscience
 - The impression this Christian leaves on this pagan's conscience hangs in the balance
- Paul says that for the sake of the shop owner's conscience, the Christian is now obligated not to buy the meat
 - Where before the Christian might have eaten it without worry, now he can't because to do so would mean damaging his witness of Christ
 - This is a powerful example of living with concern for the needs of others above our own
 - Though we are free to eat the meat, we can only do so when it doesn't damage another
 - We must be sensitive to others and to our own testimony
 - Interestingly, Paul says our freedom doesn't depend on another man's approval in v.29
 - He's speaking of how others might disapprove of our liberties
 - No one can or should rob me of my liberties simply because they are not personally approving of them
 - However, I am called to restrain my liberties whenever necessary to avoid harming the conscience of others
 - I can illustrate Paul's point with a simple example from our own experience today

- Christians have liberty to drink alcoholic beverages, according to scripture
- Nevertheless, there are pockets of Christians who disapprove of drinking alcohol and will cast judgment upon a Christian who drinks
- We need not doubt our liberty to drink merely because another person is disapproving of the practice
- However, when I am around that person, I refrain from drinking to avoid injuring their conscience
 - So I have not given up drinking, since I know I have liberty to do so and I am thankful to God for the joy it offers
 - But nevertheless, I gladly abstain from drinking in the company of those who object out of respect for their conscience
- Paul concludes with a succinct summary of everything he’s taught on the question of Christian liberty

1Cor. 10:31 Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

1Cor. 10:32 Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God;

1Cor. 10:33 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.

- The golden rule of sorts for the godly use of our liberty is to do whatever you do for the glory of God
 - God’s glory is magnified when we act in love toward God and toward our neighbor
 - God is glorified when we preach the Gospel by our actions as well as our words
 - God is glorified when we discipline our flesh for the needs of the Gospel
 - God is glorified when we flee immorality out of respect for our body, which is the temple of God
 - We are to live without giving offense to any man or woman, whether believer or unbeliever
 - Because as we live this way, we are seeking the maximum spiritual profit in our day
 - We are maximizing our potential spiritual and eternal rewards as we please the Lord
 - And we are maximizing the potential to be a positive influence upon others for the sake of the Gospel
 - These are the very reasons we’ve been saved and left here on the Earth
 - When Jesus prayed his remarkable prayer to the Father in John 17, He prayed for us, that we might live by these standards and thereby fulfill our mission on earth
 - Consider Jesus’ words again...

John 17:15 “I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep

them from the evil one.

John 17:16 “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

John 17:17 “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

John 17:18 “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

John 17:19 “For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

John 17:20 “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;

John 17:21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

John 17:22 “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;

John 17:23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.