

Sermon 1 Cor. 10:22-11:1 “Glorify God”

Introduction

One of the most important things you can give a hiker, at least for navigation purposes, is a compass. Why? It's one thing to be on a peak and be able to see the horizon, or see a landmark, and say, that's where I want to go. But another thing when you come down the mountain into the woods. You can find yourself going in circles, retracing your own steps. You lose vision of what you are supposed to do. But a compass says go North and you can keep your path straight.

We have a similar difficulty in the christian life as we try to navigate the millions of decisions that placed before us. We need a tool to know how to navigate effectively.

And the same was true from the Corinthians. They were facing all kinds of decisions. And Paul gives them the ultimate tool today in our text, and it's going to be our compass as well.

10:31, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

If you've been around church, or around christian sports for any amount of time, you've surely seen this verse. its a familiar and favorite verse of many, however the context is usually not as familiar.

It comes on the tail end of Paul responding to this big question the Corinthians had about whether or not it was okay for them to eat meat sacrificed to idols, and specifically, Is it okay for us to eat the meat in the temple? how about once the meat is being sold in the market? Or what about when the meat is served in someones house?

After he addresses each of these in turn, which we will do today, he then lands this verse. It's like he's saying, this is the compass he uses to navigate through all the complex decisions in life. Whatever you do, aim at this, glorying God.

““Glorifying God as John Piper says, means feeling and thinking and acting in ways that reflect his greatness, that make much of God, that give evidence of the supreme greatness of all his attributes and the all-satisfying beauty of his manifold perfections.”

And because this is driving Paul's decision-making tool, I want to make this the theme of our morning. Three primary ways to glorify God that we will see in this text. Glorify God by fleeing sin. Glorify God by feasting on Christ. Glorify God by submitting your freedoms to His mission.

1. Glorify God by fleeing sin

Paul leaves off with his example from 9:27 urging them to run the race, giving his own possibility that after preaching he himself could be disqualified. Then he turns to them and basically says, and if I could be disqualified, then you could too. Paul wants to shake them out of their self-confidence and spiritual presumption.

And so he begins...

10:1-14, “For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Paul brings up the history of the Jews, when God brought Israel out of slavery from Egypt and led them through the wilderness.

First notice the “all” language here. It’s emphatic. All passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased and they were overthrown.

What is Paul doing? What’s his point? What’s he getting at? What’s very interesting is that Paul is actually making a reference here to the christian ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Table. They were baptized into Moses as they went through the water, a type of the christian baptism to come. Then all ate the spiritual food, a reference to the manna from heaven, along with the drink from the rock, which is Christ.

With this it comes into focus what kind of warning Paul is giving them. See the Corinthians had a messed up view of the Lord’s Table. In one way they overestimated it’s power, from a religious external standpoint. They thought that because they were partaking of the Lord’s Table, they were protected from the enemy and were free to dabble in sin.

So Paul gives them this forceful reminder that that’s not the way it works. He continues...

Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

Paul is now interpreting these events in the OT saying they took place as examples for us, being written down for our instruction. He lists out their sin, do not be idolaters as some of them were, this is from Exodus 32 after God has brought them out of Egypt, He’s just saved them and promised to give them a Land of their own, takes Moses up on the mountain to give him the Ten Commandments, and it says, while he’s up there, they all started to lose trust in God’s chosen man and instead melt their gold into the shape of a calf and say, behold, your god who brought you out of Egypt. This causes God’s wrath to burn.

Sexual immorality. Putting Christ to the test. Grumbling, and these folks were put to death.

What did they do? They presumed upon the kindness of God. They thought because God had delivered them that God would always deliver them. Or they were flippant about God, they just didn’t care. They weren’t going to worship Him. And God poured out His wrath on them.

How’s this relate to the Corinthian situation? Well again, the Corinthians were thinking that since they were taking the Table they were then free to act however they wanted.

And the particular sin that Paul is hammering on is connected to their question, “can we eat meat sacrificed to idols inside the temple?” He says, by no means, that’s idolatry, my beloved, flee it, stay as far away from the temple meals as possible.

This might sound confusing though, since Paul just argued in chapter 8 that an idol was nothing. So he needs to do some explaining...

I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. 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. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

So Paul is still tracking with the same thought. Meat is just meat. Idols are nothing. But what is behind the idols is something supernatural and dangerous, demons. Satan's angels. There's this whole world that does not meet the eye, no pun intended. These foods are being offered not to God but to demons.

And what does this offering, sacrificing entail? He draws a parallel of their idol festivals to the Lord's Table.

And the focus is in this word participation, partnership, or other versions render it share, which probably better gets at the nuance. The cup that we bless, is it not a sharing in Christ? Isn't the bread a sharing in the body?

Does it mean that we drink the physical blood of Christ and eat the physical body of Christ? No, this becomes clear as Paul points us back to how it worked for Israel. Are not those who eat the sacrifices participants, sharers in the altar? These people would not be eating the actual altar. What they are doing is sharing in the "benefits" of what takes place at the altar. At the altar God was removing guilt, forgiving sin, and establishing fellowship with His people.

In the same way the Corinthians are sharing in what demons are doing in those sacrifices.

As John Piper puts it, to share with demons "means that we get entangled in their power. We submit to them. We become vulnerable to them. We enter into some kind of fellowship. We affirm them in some way and give them leeway in our lives."

So Paul's word to the Corinthians on this issue is an absolute, flee idolatry.

And the same can be said to us today. We might not be walking into the Hindu Temple down the street, but we are all at risk of idolatry in a broader sense. You might ask, what do you mean?

Tim Keller has been very helpful here. He says,

"(An idol) is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give. . . Idolatry is not just a failure to obey God, it is a setting of the whole heart on something besides God...

...family, children, career, achievement, romantic relationship, physical beauty, money, a political or social cause, your moral record, your ministry success, religiosity, popularity... You know something has become an idol when you lose it you want to throw yourself over a bridge, you demand it at all costs. That's how you know it's an idol in your life.

"When an idol gets a grip on your heart, it spins out a whole set of false definitions of success and failure and happiness and sadness. It redefines reality in terms of itself."

*Personal Idols—[Money]—Artemis was the "business idol" or financial prosperity. Child sacrifices would actually take place. Do we practice child sacrifice today when we make our careers our gods? We sacrifice our children on the altar of money. [Romance]—If you look to another person for worth or value (I'm nobody unless this person loves me), they are your idol. There will be no boundaries on your relationship...you are under the authority of your slavemaster. [Children]—If my children are (fill in the blank), then I know that I'm worth

something...living our lives our through our children, they are idols. Beware of bitterness toward God and to your children.

*Religious Idols–[Truth]–Is it possible to say that I’m saved because of the rightness of my belief instead of by the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus? Do you seek justification by ministry? We can make an idol out of good preaching. [Morality]–I do “x,y,z” and therefore I’m right with God or super spiritual...

*Cultural Idols–Science, Technology, Education will solve everything. There have been devastating results... poverty, racism are still around.

APP: What idols are in your heart? What are you sacrificing to? Sacrificing for? trusting in for justification?

“Idols cannot simply be removed. They must be replaced. If you only try to uproot them, they grow back; but they can be supplanted. By what? By God himself, of course. But by God we do not mean a general belief in his existence. Most people have that, yet their souls are riddled with idols. What we need is a living encounter with God.”

We turn there next...

2. Pursue God’s glory by feasting on Jesus

I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. 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. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

This is the flip side of fleeing sin, and really the antidote to sin, and the way that idols are crushed, and that is by feasting on Jesus. It’s impossible to flee sin without fleeing to Jesus. If you flee sin and you don’t run to Jesus you have just run to another idol right? It doesn’t matter if you clean up your act, you’ve swapped out an overt idol for a more subtle form.

True Repentance is turning from sin to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

The living encounter with God that Keller was talking about is a living encounter with Jesus, one that inspires faith, trust and worship of Jesus.

Here is the other way that the Corinthians were wrongly practicing the Lord’s Table. See it wasn’t just that they overestimated it’s power from an external religious sense, they underestimated it’s power in a inward, spiritual sense.

The Table for the Israelites was a sharing in the benefits of the altar, and so for the christian, the Table is a sharing in the benefits of the NT altar, the cross of Jesus Christ. What’s really interesting, is why Paul felt like he had to bring up an OT ceremony. Likely this is because the Lord’s Table meal does not have a one to one with the pagan meal because there is no sacrifice at the NT meal, the sacrifice has already taken place, once and for all. It was the Jewish feasts and the pagan feasts that constantly sacrifice.

You see idols demand more and more at your expense. Christ instead gives at His own expense.

Just as there is a real encounter with demons in idol festivals, so at the Lord's Table, when there is faith, and that's what makes this inward and spiritual, there is a true opportunity to encounter the Risen Lord, sharing again in all the benefits of Jesus sacrifice for us.

Idols demand more and more of us at our expense to destroy us. Jesus gives more and more at His expense to give us life everlasting.

In the Table we are becoming vulnerable to the things of the Spirit, tasting again the forgiveness of sin and cleansing of guilt, and enjoying fellowship with God.

Paul goes on to say, "you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons." These are mutually exclusive. This is what true feasting on Jesus does for us. It builds us up. We get fortified and satisfied in Him through faith, in such a way that idols lose their attractiveness, they are seen for what they are, empty and powerless.

Psalm 34:8 says, "taste and see that the Lord is good."

As soon as I had cookies and cream icecream, i don't think i have ever ordered vanilla again, it just doesn't satisfy.

But it's not like Christ is only available during the Lord's Table. No, this is characterize our lives, always one of pursuing Christ and being satisfied in Him. This is the life of a Christian. Feasting on Jesus.

His power. His kindness. His faithfulness. His righteousness. His mercy. His grace. His wisdom. His strength. His holiness. His gentleness. His tenderness. His patience. His authority. His knowledge. All given to us in the cross.

"God is faithful, he will provide a way out of temptation." (That way out is not running into a Temple)

That way out of temptation is faith in Christ.

The Corinthians were asking, how far can I go without sinning? That's the wrong question. The question is, how can I love Jesus more?

God is not glorified by our sin. He's not glorified when we participate with demons. He's glorified when His Son is glorified, and Jesus is glorified when you feast on Him, when you revel in His benefits given to you at the cross, when you trust and lean and depend and worship Him while forsaking all other gods, that makes God look awesome.

And there is a last way we glorify God...

3. Glorify God by submitting your freedoms for His mission

Paul shifts here to now talk about non-essentials. He has just argued since chapter 8 to get to the final absolute prohibition about eating food in temples. Now he shifts to talk about non-absolutes.

He begins...

"All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up.

He quotes the Corinthians own words here, then adds his commentary, the second time not making a new point, but reinforcing the first.

The corinthians were into their freedom, to them freedom was about standing on their rights whenever they saw fit. Paul here, as one scholar remarks, “brings the idea of freedom to its knees.”

Freedom is not ultimately free, it is limited, it is governed.

Rather your freedom, Paul says, is bound up in the benefit or the building up of others. Your freedom, is to become a slave and servant of others for the sake of the gospel.

This he clearly lays out...

Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.

So then now Paul, ready to address these non-absolutes, is going to apply freedom to two scenarios for food... meat purchased and brought back to your own home, and eating meat in someone else’s home.

Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. For “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.”

This was an issue because Jews were forbidden to eat such meat. It was meat that was likely from a sacrificial meal, but Paul’s already been over that, the idol is nothing, and if you aren’t in the ceremony itself, the meat is just meat, take and eat without worrying about it. If the meat was good before the ceremony, then it’s good after the ceremony.

So if you come in here Monday morning and find some bread crumbs around here, you aren’t participating in Communion. It’s a sacred meal, and the sacredness is in the fellowship, not in the food itself.

If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience.

This is no different than buying meat in the market. It’s just meat.

But if someone says to you, “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— I do not mean your conscience, but his.

Whether or not this person is a believer or unbeliever is debated. If it was a believer, Paul is telling the strong christian who knows he can eat this meat to not eat it because of the weak christian who thinks there is something wrong with it.

If it’s an unbeliever, Paul is telling the christian to abstain because of the nonbeliever, because by partaking of the meat, you’d be leading the nonbeliever on to imagine that the idol really is something, that it has power, and you’d be confusing what would be the moral expectations of that time of christian behavior.

Though I might lean that this is to an unbeliever, the point is the same. You are to give up your rights for the sake of the gospel, in order that others might be saved.

Paul gives a further defense of his freedom...

For why should my liberty be determined by someone else’s conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?

And then gives his concluding summary of the entire section...

**So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.
Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.**

In everything you do, whether you choose to eat or drink or not, or in every facet of life, make your decisions based upon glorifying God, making Him look awesome, doing all we can to get the gospel out.

Though we will sin, Christ was sinless. Though we will not glorify the Father perfectly, Christ did. Even to the point of death. Not my will be done but yours. Though we will fail to feast on Christ, Christ has died for us, He is our advocate.

Let us in worship crush our idols and spread the gospel.