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1 Corinthians

But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for *the food* over which I give thanks? 1 Corinthians 10:30

Paul has been referring to eating or not eating meat based on conscience, not personal conscience, but the conscience of another. If they are going to be negatively affected in their understanding of the work of Christ, then refraining from eating is the proper course to take. And yet, in the last verse he closed with, "For why is my liberty judged by another *man's* conscience?" The answer is that it should not be so judged. We have liberties and we are free to exercise them, knowing that the Lord has accepted us.

And so we have two sides to the coin presented. The first is that of not harming another's conscience and the second is that we should be firm and fixed in our beliefs. In regards to that second premise, he says, "But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for *the food* over which I give thanks?" He indicates that the food is acceptable, he has given thanks to the Lord for it, and nobody should charge him with wrongdoing when he has done nothing wrong. The food should be eaten without further anxiety. The Pulpit Commentary does a good job of explaining this -

"He desiderated more considerateness and self denial on the one side; and on the other, a more robust and instructed faith, he would always tolerate the scruples of the weak, but would not suffer either weakness or strength to develop itself into a vexatious tyranny."

In other words, Paul was one to acknowledge that there are weak believers or uninformed non-believers that needed to be accommodated, but there are also contrarians that will perpetually nitpick another person to the point where they subjugate them to their every whim. They will do this just for the sake of being bossy or demonstrating a "holier than thou" attitude. One must be discerning and not let such people ruin the joy we have in the Lord or rob us of our freedoms.

In everything, we are to consider our standing in Christ and work as best as we can within that position. It is a precept that he laid out in Romans 14 and which he is reiterating to the Corinthians in his letter to them. Here are his words to those in Rome -

"Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; ¹⁷ for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ For he who serves Christ in these things *is* acceptable to God and approved by men." Romans 14:16-18

Life application: It is our duty to be considerate to those around us who are truly weaker in the faith and who lack in the knowledge of the Lord. However, it is also our responsibility to not let people who willingly act in a contrary manner toward our freedoms in Christ rob us of our joy. If someone is shown the truth of a matter, such as that all foods are acceptable, and they still charge you with wrongdoing, then ignore them. Enjoy your lobster and let them eat peas.

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31

This verse is commonly known as the Christian's great "first principle." Paul has been speaking about foods sacrificed to idols, our Christian liberties in regards to that, and our need to consider others' conscience in the process. He has shown that by following this pattern which gives glory to God, we will be neither overly offensive towards others, nor complacent in our duties and responsibilities towards Him.

This then is the reason for the word "therefore." It looks over the entire discourse he has thus far penned on the Christian's responsibilities and sums them up in an all-inclusive statement. "Whether you eat or drink" covers everything he has written about concerning the issue of idols and our liberties and responsibilities in regards to them. "Or whatever you do" adds in every aspect of our life; nothing is excepted. With each step we take, with each breath we breathe, with each day we go off to work, or with every penny we spend for the things we need or desire, nothing is exempt and everything is included. In all things we do, "do all to the glory of God."

Being filled with the Spirit is not an active process. Rather it is passive. We are sealed with the Spirit the moment we receive Christ as Lord. We have all the Spirit we will ever receive at that moment. But the Spirit can get more of us as we cede our life to Him. When we do, He fills the voids that exist in our humanity. As the Spirit is fully God, then He will only do in us that which glorifies Himself, and therefore God will be glorified. It is a synergistic relationship of us ceding to the will of God and allowing God to be glorified in the process through the Spirit's work.

Unfortunately, in what seems almost unappealing to most Christians, we cannot be in God's will if we don't know what His will is. Thus we must read, study, and practice what is given in His word. There is no "short cut" and no external injection of right knowledge which leads to right practice. Either we study and then put into practice His word or we are not glorifying God as we should. This is an inescapable truth.

As a great summary of this verse, we can look to the eloquent words of Ellicott -

"The quality of each act depends on the spirit which guides it, and the motive from which it springs. The commonest thing may be done in a high Christian spirit. The greatest deed may spring from a low and selfish motive. A religious act done in a secular spirit is secular. A secular thing done in a religious spirit is religious. This is 'the great first principle' of Christian life."

Life application: Doing all things to the glory of God means that we must know what will bring glory to God. Knowing what will bring glory to God is knowing what God has shown will bring glory to Him. Knowing what God has shown will bring glory to Him is knowing His word which is given for this purpose. Know your word; put your knowledge into practice; and give glory to God.

Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God,
1 Corinthians 10:32

The words of this verse are clear and explicit. In giving no offense, we are seeking the glory of God and thus honoring Him. The reason for this is obvious. If it is God's will that none "should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9), then our avoiding offense in others is in line with God's will. Instead of chasing people away from Christ, we should be leading them to Christ. And to ensure that we don't misunderstand or misapply the precept to one category of people and not to another, he gives the all-encompassing thought that we are to act in like manner to either "the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God."

The Bible's two main categories of people are Jews and Gentiles (represented here by the term "Greeks"). We are to have the same standard for both categories, not holding ill-will towards the unconverted Jews as so many do. They have the same need for Christ as do the Gentiles. And then, as an additional category, Paul speaks also of the "church of God." In this, he has made a distinction between the unconverted (Jews and Greeks) and the converted (the church of God.)

Those in the church deserve the same care because there are differing levels of maturity. If offense is given to the weaker in the faith, it could cause them to stray from their faith. What a price to pay over something as trivial as eating a meal! It is our obligation to edify others, not tear them down.

Having noted that the words are clear and explicit, there is yet an obvious qualification which needs to be addressed. It is true that we are to "give no

offense," but this is true in indifferent matters. We are never to forsake proper doctrine at the expense of "offense." Tolerance quickly becomes the death knell for the sound Christian church. As soon as "tolerance" becomes of primary importance, doctrine can no longer be adhered to in a proper way. Thus, the church very rapidly becomes no church at all. The truths contained in the Bible are firm, fixed, and unchanging. Be ready to stand on biblical truth, even at the expense of offending others who are belligerent against it.

Life application: If your church won't stand on the truth of the Bible, it will quickly be no true church at all. An example of this is John 14:6 - "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Either that is true or it isn't. It is highly offensive to state to an unbeliever who rejects Jesus that they will never enter heaven's gates, but instead are destined for hell. However, Jesus has spoken and the Bible has recorded His words. If a church will not proclaim this simple truth, it is not a true church at all. Stand on the Bible, be firm and fixed in your resolve to proclaim Christ, and be willing to take whatever abuse and insults will come your way because of it.

Fixed and unchanging is the word of God

It proclaims a message which must be adhered to

Let us stand on its truths while in this life we tread

Are you also willing this to do?

What is more important than obedience to the Lord?

What profit is gaining the world and yet losing your soul?

And so be willing to accept the truth of God's word

Fear not in obedience, for He is in control

He will exalt you for your faithful adherence to His book

And will reward you for your willingness to proclaim it

*When you look back on the noble path that you took
You will be honored that to His word you did submit*

...just as I also please all *men* in all *things*, not seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of many, that they may be saved. 1 Corinthians 10:33

In this paragraph, Paul has noted that everything we do should be to the glory of God and that we are to give no offence in the process. As shown though, that is concerning issues of conscience, not issues of doctrine. We are never asked to do something which will be at the expense of upholding right doctrine. But in those areas where conscience is an over-arching concern - be it "to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God" we should be willing to look to the example set before us; that of Christ who "did not please Himself" (Romans 15:3).

With Christ as our ultimate example, Paul notes that he had attempted to be like-minded and that we could use his example. And so he notes "just as I also please all *men* in all *things*." Why would Paul note himself as an example, rather than stating it as he did in Romans 15:3? The answer is that Christ is an overall example to those who would follow Him. He is the Head of the church and the fulfillment of Scripture. But though He is the first example to the church, Paul is an example *within* the church. In other words, Paul's ministry included outreach to those outside the church for evangelism and those inside the church for doctrine and edification.

Therefore, there is nothing wrong when he uses himself as an example. He is showing how to act under the Headship of Christ and he is doing it to please "all *men* in all *things*." In fact, he says "not seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of many." Rather than accepting the liberties that he had been granted in Christ, he was willing to forego the exercise of them and not tread on the conscience of another. He could have enjoyed certain meats, but he would abstain if it were to harm another's conscience. To him, finding joy in the Lord was more pleasing than finding joy in a banquet.

In all things, his hope was to bring about a great knowledge of Christ in others so "that they may be saved." This was his highest hope for all whom he met. If he could lead them to Christ, even if it meant doing so at the expense of his personal liberties, then to him it would have been worth it. Matthew Poole sums up this thought for the well-grounded believer. Yes, Christians have great liberty in Christ, but "... notwithstanding that liberty, yet they ought to have respect to the spiritual good and salvation of others, and to do that part which their judgments inform them will be, as least to the spiritual damage and detriment, so most to the spiritual good and profit, of the souls of others with whom they converse."

Life application: What is the value of another person's salvation? What is the value of another person's proper doctrine? Are we willing destroy the chance of people coming to Christ simply because we "can" do something? Or would it be more prudent to stop and consider if our actions, though allowable, might be detrimental towards another person. We have been left here not to indulge ourselves in our freedoms in Christ, but to be examples to lead others to Christ.

Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ. 1 Corinthians 11:1

Although this first verse of chapter 11 sums up the thoughts of chapter 10 in a succinct way, it is appropriate that it begins chapter 11. It is a good transition to the points that are ahead as much as it is a summary of the points which have already been made. As noted in the previous evaluation, there is nothing wrong with Paul asking others to imitate him. This is especially so because he follows up the thought immediately with "just as I also *imitate* Christ."

Paul's example is Christ. As this is so, then those who have learned from Paul can rightly use his example as one to emulate. He is an example within the church of Christ who is over the church. He isn't asking for eyes to be on him, but rather he is noting that his actions are in line with the expectations of Christ. And throughout his writings, it is Christ whom Paul both explains and exalts. In Philippians 2, he writes these words about Christ to the church -

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. ⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Philippians 2:5-11

He is the Head of the church and the fulfillment of Scripture. And though He is the first example to the church, Paul is an example *within* the church. In other words, Paul's ministry included outreach to those outside the church for evangelism and those inside the church for doctrine and edification.

Life application: Until the epistles were written, there was only verbal instruction and emulation of the conduct of the apostles and other disciples for believers to follow. Now, with the Bible complete, we have what we need to understand both in the example of Christ and how to be obedient to it. Further, we have the conduct of the apostles recorded - when they were in line with the truth, when they failed and were rebuked for it, etc. If we study the Bible, we will be able to develop a proper understanding of how to conduct our own affairs in the presence of our glorious Lord.

Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered *them* to you. 1 Corinthians 11:2

This verse begins a section which will continue through 1 Corinthians 11:16. It will take thoughtful care to properly evaluate and it is an area which is greatly misunderstood and has been often misinterpreted, leading to some divergent traditions within the church. He begins with "Now I praise you, brethren." Paul is very good about giving praise where praise is due and also calling out wrong doctrine or attitudes when necessary as well. By beginning this with a note of

praise, he is ensuring that they will perceive his words with the proper mental attitude which should only solidify their continued right performance.

It should be remembered that Paul has been addressing items which were submitted to him in writing. This is one of the reasons for his letter to them in the first place. In 1 Corinthians 7:1, he said, "Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me..." He has been going through this list and answering their questions. This section will be no different. There must have been an issue concerning something he said to them of which they are asking further clarification. Understanding this, he continues with "that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you."

This is his compliment and this is what sets the tone for the further instruction which will now be presented. In his statement, the word translated as "traditions" indicates something which had been delivered to them by the instruction of the apostles, not a tradition of the past which was of a cultural nature. These are issues which stem from the church itself and not something which he or another apostle brought along from their own pre-existing traditions.

Lastly, in 1 Corinthians 11:17, we will read Paul's words which say, "Now in giving these instructions I do not praise *you*, since you come together not for the better but for the worse." This rebuke will in no way contradict his words of verse 2. Though the Corinthians had kept the traditions as they had received them, they will need correction concerning the issues of liberty and brotherhood. After he completes the thought he is now addressing, Paul will deal with those issues to ensure the church functions well within those parameters.

Life application: As with all things, we need to have a clear understanding of the context of a teaching in order to understand if it applies to us or not. In the case of the church, our teachings are those which come from the epistles, particularly the letters of Paul. His words have been given to us in order for us to have sound, healthy churches. All of Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for our understanding of God's redemptive plans for man, but not all of Scripture is applicable at the same time in the same way.

But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. 1 Corinthians 11:3

What will be said for the next few chapters of instruction is given for order, propriety, and edification of the church. It is intended to keep things functioning properly and it is set doctrine which, if not adhered to, will lead to dysfunction, disorder, and eventually to chaos within the church. Some of the words which are coming are directed to proper male/female hierarchal conduct. The instructions are in no way intended to diminish the role of women in the church, nor to subjugate them in a merely "cultural" way. Rather, the words are intended to instruct on what is right and proper at all times during the church age.

In the preceding verse, it was noted that the Corinthians were to be praised for having kept "the traditions just as" Paul had delivered them. However, there were questions that had obviously arisen and he is now answering those questions for the proper functioning of the church. But instead of simply saying "women are to pray with their head covered" he starts with a much larger and broader aspect of the issue to which he will address. Thus, by showing the overall nature of hierarchy, his words will demonstrate why things work as they do and why certain things are proper and others are not. Therefore, we can draw accurate conclusions from the points which he provides.

And so he begins with, "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ." The first obvious question which should arise is, "Is this referring to male-believers or all people?" At first, it would seem that this must be referring to all men because the next thought is "the head of woman is man." This seems to be referring to all women. However, elsewhere in 1 Corinthians it says -

"As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man." 1 Corinthians 15:48, 49

This sets a clear delineation between believers and non-believers and indicates that those born only of the dust have Adam as their head. Therefore, Paul's words are referring to those within the church. His next thought is, "and the head of Christ *is* God." This leads to another obvious question which must be asked, "Is this saying that Jesus is not God?" The answer is, "No." The Bible elsewhere indicates very clearly that Jesus is God. However, Jesus also subordinates Himself to the Father such as in John 14:28 -

"You have heard Me say to you, 'I am going away and coming back to you.' If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, 'I am going to the Father,' for My Father is greater than I."

Further, just because man is the head of the woman, it doesn't mean that the woman isn't a human. Therefore, we can see that there is a hierarchy within the Godhead itself and that there is a hierarchy within humanity as well. Again, the idea of a hierarchy within the Godhead is also confirmed in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28

"Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For 'He has put all things under His feet.' But when He says 'all things are put under Him,' it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all."

Paul has shown that there is a great and eternal hierarchy within the Godhead. Though Christ Jesus is fully God, and though the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are co-equal within the Godhead, there is an order and a propriety in dealings between the three. In understanding this, we can then understand why there is also an order and a propriety in how men and women conduct their affairs within the church.

In Galatians 3:28, Paul says that, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Yes, this is true. It is also true that within the Godhead all are One. And yet each has its individual role and responsibility. And the same is true within the church. We are all one spiritually, but we are individuals who are accountable to staying within the parameters set down by God in His word.

Life application: When we violate the tenets of Scripture, for whatever reason, we usurp what God has intended. When we do so willingly, it is a direct slap in His face because we ignore what He has stated. And this is true regardless of how we feel about an issue.