

SDG

God's grace and peace be laid on your hearts, for you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.
Amen.

This is now our last text to consider from our series in First Corinthians. We have seen thus far how the issue of idol worship and sacrifices offered to idols was a prominent issue for the saints at Corinth. We have seen how these recent converts to Christianity were struggling with questions as to what their relationship should be with the idol's temple. We have seen the integral influence of idol worship on Corinth's everyday economy and social life. How was a Christian to know when he was at liberty to associate with the sacrifices in the temple and when it was sinful? How do we know when we are exercising fellowship with the sacrifices to false gods and when we are exercising liberty in things not commanded nor forbidden by God. We read our text which comes from . . .

1 Corinthians 10:19–31 (NKJV)

19 What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? 20 Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. 22 Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He? 23 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. 24 Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. 25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; 26 for "the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness." 27 If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. 28 But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness." 29 "Conscience," I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience? 30 But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for the food over which I give thanks? 31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

All Things to the Glory of God

In Jesus Name who is the glory of God in flesh revealed, dear fellow redeemed, All Glory to God. What we mean by this is "All Credit to God!" What we mean is attribute to God the due honor of His word and work of salvation – both in issues of fellowship where we consider how it is that "share" our faith with God and our fellow man, and in issues of adiaphora where we deal with issues for which God's word has not spoken to the positive or negative.

1. To the glory of God in issues of fellowship

The word fellowship means “sharing.” In Scripture it relates to those spiritual relationships that we express and “share” with others. We find such “sharing” referred to in our text with the words “fellowship” in v.20 and “partake” in v.21.

The idols is nothing, Paul agrees, but the sacrifice itself on the other hand is something very real. (v.20) When the unbelievers, or Gentiles as Paul calls them, conduct these sacrifices, they really saying #1 - that what they are doing is o.k., and #2 - that this god they worship really does exist. Therefore that “idol” which they serve is not just a statue. It is a very real demon.

In fact, any idol we set up in our lives that replaces the true God is a sacrifice to demons. (v.21,22)

In all things we seek to give glory to God. Most basically this means that in every action, every decision, we highlight the revealed credit God deserves for the redemption He has won. As Paul says in v.31 . . .

The Lord has no fellowship, no “sharing” with demons. **Exodus 20:4–5 (NKJV) — 4 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image . . . 5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me.**

To think that we can at the same time both serve sin and God is provoking God’s righteous jealousy. And so when humans condone behavior that God defines as sinful and contrary to our created purpose, they offer a sacrifice to demons.

Recently both the courts of California and Washington have overruled bans on same sex marriages. The ELCA through synod resolutions have made the basis for what is right and wrong a matter of personal choice and consent between humans. They have declared that God really doesn’t say that sexual relations are reserved only for a married man and woman.

This is fellowship with demons. It is trying to share a relationship with the Lord with a relationship with something sinful. Now we say such things not because we think ourselves above such sins, it is because we commit such sins. We do not avoid worshiping with those who promote such teachings because we are without our own equally sinful behavior and impulses. We do so because we do have equally sinful behavior and impulses. Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts – from murders to adultery to false witness – we are all equally guilty of sharing ourselves with demons.

But what we must understand is that just because sin exists in our hearts and in our lives never means it is acceptable. What we should be emphasizing when we refuse fellowship with such behavior is to point that we too are equally guilty before God and we too must run to the cross to find that right fellowship with God. But what need would there be for the cross if we weren’t guilty. And so Paul emphasizes that you

cannot come to the Lord's Supper receiving the forgiveness of sins and at the same time intend to turn around, walk out of church, and promote sinful behavior; this, we read, is provoking God's anger.

This is what destroys faith. However, we should not think that the opposite is true. Our faith is not sustained by our right behavior and right teaching. Fellowship with God and with each other is established only through the cross.

1 Corinthians 6:11 (NKJV) — But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

Yes you have only been brought into this fellowship with God because God has "shared" His only begotten Son with you. This is the whole reason why we flee fellowship with anything or anyone that is promoting something contrary to what God says is right.

And so this applies in various aspects of our life. It applies in our not walking into an ELCA church and sitting down and worshipping as if there were nothing wrong with what that church is promoting. It applies when we refrain from sharing in the Lord's Supper when we know the other church, for example, teaches that Christ's body and blood are not really present in this meal. And it applies when we decide with whom we will "share" in the joint work of the kingdom, whether money, food, or physical labor. We give all glory to God as we follow His gospel in issues of fellowship.

2. To the glory of God in issues of adiaphora

And so the question naturally arises in the Corinthian's head, well, if I must abstain from joining in these sacrifices to false gods, shouldn't I also abstain from buying meat in the meat market without finding out first if it has come from an idol's temple?

There must come a point where we can draw a line between issues of spiritual fellowship and issues of basic everyday choices. These we call adiaphora – something neither commanded nor forbidden by God.

Paul addresses the situation where the Christian would find himself in the meat market or invited to a dinner party and is faced with the choice to accept this meat which has very likely come directly from the temple of a false god. After all a high percentage of the cattle and sheep market was flowing through these massive temple complexes. It was a basic source of long term business for cattle and sheep herders.

(v.25,26) Could you imagine if we were to trace the history of every product we would buy to find out who that person was who produced the product? And then we have to find out if we are in agreement with them spiritually? There is a difference then between participating in the sacrifice to a false god and participating in a business transaction in the meat market. One serves a spiritual purpose, the other serves a purely economical purpose. There in lies the difference between issues of fellowship and issues of adiaphora. Is the vendor or church or business or neighbor promoting a spiritual cause when they offer a product or when they invite you to a ceremony?

“Ask no questions” Paul says is these matters of indifference. Still, there is more to factor in than just your own well being – there is the welfare of others (**v.28a**).

During the Protestant reformation in the 1500s, a confessional document which we today still use as the basis for our confession was compiled known as the Formula of Concord. They were struggling with deciding which portions of the Roman traditions and ceremonies were worth retaining, and which should be omitted from their worship services. It is in this connection that we read (cf. Art. X, #9ff) –

We believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every place and at every time has the right, authority and power to change, to reduce, or to increase ceremonies according to its circumstances, as long as it does so without frivolity and offense but in an orderly and appropriate way, as at any time may seem to be most . . . beneficial . . . for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the edification of the church.

Yet they go on –

We believe, teach and confess that at a time of confession, as when enemies of the Word of God desire to suppress the pure doctrine of the holy Gospel . . . we should not yield to adversaries in matters of indifference, nor should we tolerate the imposition of such ceremonies on us by adversaries in order to undermine the genuine worship of God and to introduce and confirm their idolatry by force . . . For here we are no longer dealing with the external adiaphora . . . Here we are dealing with the chief article of Christian faith, so that, as the apostle testifies, the truth of the Gospel might be preserved.

And so we find that, again, the issue is decided “all glory to God.” In these matters of “ceremonies” as they referred to them, what sort of things must we have in our worship according to God commands and what things are we at liberty to change and adapt. Furthermore if we are at liberty, how do we know whether a given change will serve to “build up” the church? After all, **v.23**. . .

Our life as Christians is not a set of rules. It is living to give glory to God. If it was just about a set of rules where the pastor defines for you what to do in every situation without searching God’s word on your own, it would become all glory to me. This is what the Pharisees and religious leaders of Jesus’ day were doing – setting up a list of rules for the people to keep if they wanted to be considered “in good standing.” Rather it is about giving glory to God and building up our fellow Christians.

(v.24) See your brother’s weaknesses, listen to your sister’s troubles. Understand each other. Let each one seek the other’s well being. This is what Christ has done for us and it is what spills over into our lives and actions. It was Christ who did not come to be served, but to serve. It was Jesus who gave all glory to God in everything He did. At times this meant eating with sinners – something that was forbidden by the Scribes and Pharisees. At other times Jesus said, pay the Temple tax lest you give offense. And ultimately, it was Jesus who gave up all rights and privileges to take your place before God. Because we have failed to give God the glory and we serve ourselves more than

we serve others, Christ chose to sacrifice His life and suffer your death, so you might be saved. It is this sacrifice that should be the driving influence as we live our lives to give God the glory. **(v.31)**. Amen.