

MULTIPLYING LOCAL CHURCHES THROUGH IMITATING JESUS 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

INTRODUCTION

This will be the fourth time in the 13.5 years our church has existed that I will have preached on this passage in 1 Corinthians 10. I preached on this text during the summer of 1998 as our church of 40 or so people prepared to have our first public worship service in September of that year. I then preached on this text in January of 2000 and January of 2009 in view of our commitment to be a church that God uses to save people from his wrath and for eternal life. Whenever I think about a local church being used of God to save sinners and then being used of God to preserve those sinners unto eternal life, I think of this passage. Thus, as the reason for us to begin new local churches is the salvation and preservation of sinners, this passage speaks directly to the kind of people and church we must be if God is going to use us to multiply local churches in Rock County.

It is not difficult to see why I turn to this passage. Look at vv.31-11:1. After commanding churches and Christians to do everything for the glory of God and to not cause offense to any person Paul gives the reason for these commands: "...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." We are to live as he commands in this passage for the same reason he lives the way he does, so that other people will be saved as a result of how we live. Then, he tells us that this motivation and this way of life which he models and which we are to adopt is exactly the way that Jesus lived. The implication here is that since Jesus is our life, since he is the one we are depending upon to deliver us from our sins and God's wrath, then our highest ambition is to live like him. Paul's assumption is that if you are a Christian then your highest aspiration, your greatest dream is to be like Jesus. So the question for each of us individually and for us as a church is pretty simple: Do you and I want to be like Jesus? Does your heart ache because of your longing to be like him? Is Jesus your hero, the one person you most desire to emulate, to imitate?

The promise in this passage is that if we will live like Jesus as described in this passage, then many will be saved and preserved through us. Thus this morning we are going to discuss what this passage tells us about living like Jesus. Before we launch into that examination we need to recognize that this passage and especially vv. 31-11:1 form the conclusion to a long argument that Paul began back in chapter 8:1. In chapters 8-10 Paul is dealing with the insistence of some in Corinth that because Christ had died for all their sins and thus they were now citizens of heaven and because they had received the HS and were thus born again into a new and spiritual life, then they were free to go into the pagan temples in Corinth and participate in the ceremonies and meals and cult prostitution that constituted the worship of false gods. Their motto was "All things are lawful" which you can see that Paul quotes in v. 23. In their argument they used Paul's own buying meat which had been sacrificed to idols in the marketplace and his eating of "idol meat" with non-Christians in their homes to support their insistence that they had the right to participate in the pagan worship services.

So Paul has aimed at two things throughout chapters 8-10; first, he aims to show them why they cannot join in the meals served in the pagan temples as part of the worship of the false gods and second to defend his practice of eating whatever was in the market or whatever was set in front of him. Throughout his argument he is using their particular errors to teach the church through the ages of how we are to live as Christians in this world. Here at the end of the argument he asserts that the reason he has done what he has done is because he is imitating Jesus and thus they, and we, should do what he has commanded so they, and we, can imitate Jesus as well. He asserts that when you imitate Jesus many will be saved but when you do not imitate Jesus none will be saved, including your own self (1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 9:24-27 & 10:1-13). This morning we are going to consider how we are to imitate Jesus so that through us many will be saved and preserved into eternal life.

MAIN POINT

The churches and Christians that God uses to save others live like Jesus by...

I. Doing everything for the glory of God (v. 31)

To begin with we need to define what Paul means by doing something “for the glory of God”. This phrase means two things. First it means that we are motivated to do what we do because of the glory of God. His greatness, his majesty, his beauty motivates us to do what we do. Second, it means that we do what we do in order that his glory might be seen. These two things always go together. No one will promote the glory of God who does not see and delight in the glory of God and no one who rejoices in the glory of God will fail to work to make that glory manifest.

I think we all would agree that the Grand Canyon is glorious, magnificent, awe-inspiring. We all know this to be true based upon pictures we’ve seen, stories we’ve heard from others who have visited it, or reading about it in National Geographic. However, it is only when we are at the Grand Canyon and personally observe it that we are affected with its grandeur. We stand on the edge of the canyon overwhelmed by its beauty. We perceive and thus appreciate and delight in its splendor. Then what do we do? We exclaim over its beauty, even if we are alone. If others are present with us we talk with one another about its magnificence. We point out various details of the glory we see. We will sit and gaze at its loveliness for hours. We will pay money to fly over it in a helicopter to enjoy more of its glory. We will rebuke our children who want to sit in the car and play their Nintendo DS video games and demand that they come look. We will not spend our time on the internet looking at pornography or shopping for new clothes or following our fantasy football team or playing video games when we are camped on the rim of the Grand Canyon. We will camp on the rim so we can gaze upon and enjoy its beauty until it is dark and get up the next morning to gaze some more on its beauty. We will hike to the bottom in order to enjoy it fully. All sorts of behaviors that we do and do not do will be for the purpose of enjoying its glory and for displaying its glory.

This is how Jesus lived his life. He did everything he did for the glory of God, including going to the cross. Listen to a few of the places where he says this about himself. John 12:27-28, “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” John 17:1, 4, “When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you,... I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.’” Jesus delighted in his Father, he was impressed with his glory, he loved God and thus all that he did, every moment of every day that he lived on this earth, he did to manifest or display and make clear the majesty of his Father. Especially his suffering and death were motivated by God’s supremacy and designed to magnify his beauty.

The first thing we must evaluate as we consider imitating Jesus is this: do we see the greatness and the glory of the Triune God? Are we impressed with him, his mercy, his power, his grace, his love, his justice, his holiness, his wisdom? Does the Creator and Sustainer of all creation astonish you? Does the just and holy God who made a way to preserve his justice and yet love you by killing his own son on the cross impress you? This is what Christ came into the world to do. Turn back in your bibles to the first chapter of 1 Corinthians. Look at v. 18. Paul says the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing but to we who are being saved it is the power of God. The word of the cross is that message we have been told that God placed all of our sins upon his Son and poured out all of his just anger against us upon Jesus as he hung upon that cross so that for all who trust in Christ, our sins are forgiven, all of God’s anger is satisfied and now he loves us because of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. I want you to look down to vv. 30-31, “And because of him (God the Father) you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, **so that**, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’” What is the final result of being saved by God through Christ? What happens to all who receive the word of the cross? What is the ultimate purpose of his saving work? It is so that we will boast in the Lord. What does that mean? What are the things in which you boast? We boast about the things we love, the things that give us security, the things that make us feel good about ourselves, the things and people we take pride in, etc. Thus, Christ died and God placed you in Christ so that you will be impressed with God and boast about him, in short, so that you will glorify him. Thus all who are in Christ by God’s gracious work, imitate Christ by boasting in God, by doing everything for his glory.

A second thing to observe about this amazing command that whatever we do we are to do for the glory of God is this: there is not a set of activities or behaviors that automatically bring glory to God. Paul doesn't make a list of religious or moral activities that automatically glorify God. Coming to church, reading your Bible, praying, shoveling out your neighbor's driveway, preaching a sermon may or may not bring glory to God, may or may not be done because you are impressed with God. There is no activity, no job, no relationship that always, without exception shows off the greatness of God. There is nothing more sacred or holy or God-honoring about being a pastor or about reading the Bible to your children than about washing dishes or being a teacher or being a retail clerk or mowing your lawn or watching TV. If whatever you do has the potential to be for the glory of God then all you do, including all your religious and moral behaviors can also be for the dishonor of God.

Therefore, there are no inconsequential activities or behaviors. Everything you do all the way down to the most mundane and earthly things, like eating and drinking can be done in such a way that the greatness, the majesty, the grandeur of the God who made everything and who rules everything is made manifest. You can do everything you do because you are impressed with God or because you are impressed with something else. So what determines whether something I do, including the mundane parts of my life is done "for the glory of God?" Thankfully, we are not left our own devices to figure this out. The immediate context of this verse gives us some very important direction.

First, we do things for the glory of God when we act in accord with God's word, when what we do is regulated by his word. This means two things. First of all it means there are activities and behaviors that can never be done for the glory of God because God says they always dishonor him. If you look back to 10:6-10 you will see a list of activities that always dishonor God. Idolatry, sexual immorality, drunkenness, testing God and grumbling about God's provision always dishonor God because he says so. You cannot gossip to the glory of God, you cannot curse your children to the glory of God, you cannot steal from work to the glory of God, you cannot look at pornography to the glory of God, you cannot get drunk to the glory of God, you cannot set your heart on making a million dollars by the time you're thirty to the glory of God, you cannot disobey your parents to the glory of God. So living for the glory of God requires that I call sinful those things that God calls sinful. I live for the glory of God when I resist sin and when I fail to resist I confess my sins to God and call upon his power to help me to change. You will not imitate Christ and thus will not glorify God and thus you will not be used by God to bring salvation to anyone if you do not do this.

The second way God's word must regulate our behavior if we are going to glorify God in all that we do is we must not treat as sinful things that God does not call sinful. In the immediately preceding verses to this one Paul is defending the appropriateness of buying and eating whatever is sold in the marketplace of Corinth without giving any thought as to whether or not the meat comes from animals that were first offered in sacrifice to pagan gods. There are people in the Corinthian church who are teaching that God cares about what you eat and that he cares about with whom you eat. Look at vv. 25-27 and 29b and 30. Paul says that you should buy and eat whatever is being sold in the marketplace without asking any questions about where the meat came from. The reason he is so liberal in his thinking is because of what God says in Psalm 24:1, the whole earth and all the creation pleasures that fill it come from and belong to the Lord. Therefore, whether or not a piece of meat has been offered to a false god has no impact on its value as food. If an unbelieving friend invites you to dinner and you want to go, do not hesitate to do so and when you get there do not hesitate to eat what is set in front of you. Ask no questions; just enjoy this gift of friendship and food from God. It dishonors God and hinders the salvation of others when we treat as sinful and prohibited those things which God does not call sinful. We are going to talk more about this in a few weeks as we spend time in Romans 14.

Finally, another thing this immediate context tells us about doing what we do for the glory of God is seen in v. 30. We give thanks to God for all the pleasures he gives us in this world. We are doing what we do for the glory of God when we are grateful, content people. When we give thanks we demonstrate that God's goodness is motivating us and we manifest his glory by acknowledging that this pleasure, this provision is directly a gift

from him. Thus we acknowledge and draw attention to God's sovereign power over his whole creation and his infinite goodness to his creation. We live in an environment that says "I deserve it, because I earned it or because I am worth it." We live in an environment that screams at us that we need more if we are going to be happy. The biblical view is opposite. All is gift. God gives according to his own wisdom and pleasure. You and I deserve nothing. Therefore we are grateful and content with what God has given us. We do not compare what we have to what others have because we trust our heavenly Father to give us what we need according to his own pleasure and will. We are grateful for all that we have because we realize we deserve nothing and that everything is a gift. This content gratitude brings glory to God and is how Jesus lived and will be used by God to save others.

II. Doing everything for the good of others (vv. 23-24 & 32-33)

Paul would without doubt say that one of the most necessary things that determines whether or not an action is for the glory of God is by determining if it is for the good of others. If what I do is only motivated out of a concern for my own good, my own advantage, without consideration for others, then what I'm doing is not to the glory of God. Thus when you eat, drink or do any other action with a view to benefiting another human being, you are doing it to the glory of God. Look at vv. 23-24. Some of the Corinthians claim that because we are saved by grace, then we can do whatever we want because we are not saved by what we do. "All things are lawful" is their cry. However, Paul says no, my behavior must be regulated by love for others. I must ask the question, how will this activity benefit or build up another person? I must work for the good of my neighbor. Two questions need to be answered: who is my neighbor? What is the good for which I am to seek?

Look at v. 32. Paul says that my neighbors are all those people I interact with who are either non-Christian Jews, non-Christian Gentiles or Christians who are members of God's church. There is no human being you have ever known or spoken to who does not fall into one of those three categories. In v. 33 Paul defines the benefit he is seeking to gain for other people. He lives as he does so that many people from these three categories are saved. As Paul thinks about what he is going to do and what he is not going to do he is always thinking about how his behavior is going to influence others in regards to the gospel because it is this gospel alone that is God's power for the salvation of everyone who believes. Because he includes the church among those who he seeks to please so they can be saved we know that he does not think of salvation as simply getting a person to pray a prayer to ask Jesus into your heart. Salvation is a life-long process that begins at conversion when a person is born again by God's Spirit, thus turning away from sin and trusting in Christ alone as Savior and Lord and treasure and life and continues to the end of life as a person perseveres in trusting in Christ alone as the only thing necessary for being happy.

You will notice that Paul states the command in both positive and negative terms. In vv. 23-24 we are to work for the benefit, for the building up and good of others. In v. 33 he always sought to please others. However, in v. 32 he commands us not to give offense to others or in other translations, not to put a stumbling block in the way of others. How could Paul or how can you and I be a stumbling block to Jewish and Gentile non-Christians? How can we be a stumbling block to other Christians? What is it we are to avoid? First of all, there's a paradox here. In I Cor. 1: 22-23 Paul says the gospel is offensive, it is a stumbling block. Non-Christian Jews and Greeks do stumble over Christ. Jewish people can't handle a crucified Messiah and Greek people say it's crazy to think a dead guy can make you right for heaven. Thus Paul expects us to offend others when we proclaim the gospel. Some people are going to be offended when we tell them of Christ and that is as it should be. Another way the NT expects that we will offend non-Christians is by refusing to join them in their sin. I Peter 2: 3-4 says, "For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation and they heap abuse on you." So if your non-Christian friends want you to get drunk with them or watch pornography or steal from your employer or make fun of another person don't go along even if it makes them mad. Also, he's not saying not to offend legalists in the church. Look at v. 30. Paul was eating meat that had been sacrificed in pagan temples and some of the Corinthian Christians were saying you can't be a Christian and do that. Paul says, I will eat this meat when it furthers the work of Christ and I will abstain when it doesn't. Eating or not eating has no effect on my

relationship with God and if it makes you mad that I eat meat sacrificed to idols or I hang out with non-Christians, I don't care, that is your problem, not mine.

Then what does he mean that we are to avoid? There are several ways that we can wrongly cause both non-Christians and Christians to stumble. First, to cause someone to stumble is to cause them to believe that to be a Christian requires an attitude or a belief or an action that being a Christian does not require. Second, you also cause a person to stumble when you communicate by word or action that a certain behavior or belief is not necessary to be a Christian when it is necessary. Finally, you cause a person to stumble when you, by your action, lead them to engage in a behavior that he or she believes to be sinful, even though God does not call it sin. That is, when you lead a person to sin against his or her own conscience. Here are some examples of ways we can wrongly cause others to stumble: 1) To communicate by word or action that to be a Christian you have to dress like me or have the same hairstyle I do. 2) To communicate by word or action that to be a Christian you can't be a Democrat or you can't be a Republican. 3) To communicate by word or action to any non-Christian person that he or she will have to change his or her dietary habits in order to be a Christian. 4) To communicate by word or action that to be a Christian you can't use birth control or you have to homeschool your children. 5) To say to a person sexually involved with a person to whom he is not married that he can be a Christian while continuing in that relationship. 6) To tell a practicing homosexual that she can be a Christian without forsaking homosexual behavior and resisting homosexual desire. 7) To communicate by word or action that you can be a Christian and keep holding grudges against a family member. 8) To communicate by word or action that you can be a Christian and believe that Jesus is not the only way to know God. 9) To put pressure by word or action on a professing Christian who believes it is a sin for him to drink wine to have a glass of wine. 10) To put pressure on a professing Christian who believes it is a sin for her to watch an R-rated movie to watch an R-rated movie.

The positive side of the command in v. 33 is we must live to please everybody in every way. Again, note the paradox. In I Thess. 2: 3-4 Paul says, "We are not trying to please men". But here he says, "I'm trying to please everybody in every way". How can he say both things? First, Paul never hesitates to preach the gospel and do all that God commands him to do. It doesn't matter if people don't like it, he still does it. People command him to not preach the gospel and he still preaches the gospel, even though he ends up in jail for doing so. He doesn't stop obeying God because he's afraid of what people will do to him, that is, he is not trying to please men. However, he also accommodates himself to the customs and preferences of those to whom he is seeking to share the gospel. When he is with Jewish people he acts like a Jewish person. When he is with non-Jewish people he acts like a Gentile without joining in their sin. You can see why Paul was forever being accused of being a hypocrite and a false teacher. Paul worked to be like the people he was sharing the gospel with without giving into the pressure to be liked by them. It was accommodation without compromise.

This passage confronts us with a very difficult challenge. How often does thinking about other people's salvation affect what you do and what you do not do? Do we ever not do something that we are free to do because we are concerned with how it will impact another person's salvation, either a non-Christian or a Christian? Think through the previous 24 hours of your life and ask yourself: how did my actions, my words, my use of money and time help or hinder non-Christians coming to Christ, Christians loving Christ more? The only way that you and I can do what Paul is telling us to do here is if we have found Jesus to be our life, our refuge, our stronghold, our everything. We will only think about the salvation of others and adjust our behavior to promote the salvation of others when we are full of joy in Christ our Savior. If it is indeed true that Jesus is your life, then you are going to care about the salvation of others and you are going to adjust your behavior to promote the salvation of others. Caring about the salvation of others is not limited to pastors, elders, small group leaders and missionaries. Every Christian and every church is to be involved in promoting the salvation of others by not putting stumbling blocks in the way of others and by seeking to please others and not themselves because they want above all things to be like Jesus.

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