

My One Ambition: The Glory of God

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

Introduction: Who am I? Why am I here? These questions fall into the category of what we call “life’s ultimate questions.” And they are good questions. We all ask them. Still better, however, would be to put them in a biblical context. The questions then become, 1) “Why did God create me?” And 2) “Why did God save me through the Lord Jesus?” Interestingly, the answer to both questions is the same. God created me and He saved me that I might glorify Him every day and, in every way of my life (1 Cor. 10:31; cf. Rom. 11:36). This text brings to a conclusion a conversation that began in chapter 8 addressing the issue of food sacrificed to idols. Paul, in the process of dealing with this situation, will put before us 7 principles to help us navigate difficult issues that the Bible does not directly address. There is some repetition with what we have seen previously in chapters 6:12-10:22. But, repetition is a very good teacher. Sometimes (most of the time?!) we need to hear the same truths over and over before they sink in.

Glorifying God may be a lofty theological concept. But, as we will see, it is also extremely practical, impacting every conceivable area of our lives. Both in motive and action, the glory of God is to be preeminent in our lives. It is essential to the mission of the church. It should be our one ambition.

I. I will always pursue what is helpful and builds up 10:23

The Corinthians said, “Everything (*ESV*, “All things”) is permissible.” (cf. 6:12). This slogan reveals a misunderstanding of grace and the Christian life. We now live “under the law of Christ” (9:21), a law that focuses on loving others. We are not free to do anything we want. We must live in a way that advances the gospel among the nations. The proper perspective is to recognize “not everything is beneficial” (*ESV*, “helpful”), “not everything builds up” (*NIV*, “is constructive”). Again, this verse recalls 6:12. There the context is sexual immorality. Here it is spiritual idolatry. Sexual immorality and spiritual idolatry are often together in the Bible. In both cases two of the questions (there are others) to ask are, “Will my actions be helpful to others? Will my actions build others up?” Vaughn is right, “liberty should be limited by consideration for the well-being of others” (*1 Cor.*, BSC, 106). The edification of fellow-believers must always be a major guideline in both word and action. C.S. Lewis says, “The stamp of the saint is that he can waive his own rights and obey the Lord Jesus.”

II. I will always pursue what is good for others 10:24

Verse 24 “sharpens the point of verse 23” (Schreiner, *1 Cor.*, TNTC, 214). Paul writes “No one is to seek his own good, but the good of the other person” (*ESV*, “his neighbor”). This principle is found several times in the NT. In Rom. 15:2-3, Paul writes, “Each one of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to build

him up. For even Christ did not please himself.” In 1 Cor 13:5 we read that love “is not self-seeking” (cf Phil 2:3-4). Christians are never to act in ways that harm and hurt others. Rather, we help them grow in Christlikeness and build them up in their faith. Glorifying God, in relation to others, means I seek to do the right thing, the right way, at the right time, and for the right reason. An evangelistic, Great Commission focus informs everything that I do.

III. I will always pursue what is in the best interest of another’s conscience

10:25-29

Paul will address one final time the vexing issue of food sacrificed to idols. He lays down a basic principle, grounding it in the Word of God. “Eat everything that is sold in the meat market, without raising questions for the sake of conscience” (v.25). You go to the grocery store to buy steaks, buy what you want without making an issue about where the meat came from. Do this as a matter of conscience for yourself and for others. Afterall, quoting Ps. 24:1, “the earth is the Lord’s, and all that is in it.” (v. 26). Beale and Carson note, “Paul is thoroughly Jewish and biblical in his understanding that creation is good and that the food we receive has been provided for us by God and should be received with thanksgiving” (*Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 730). The meat you eat is a part of God’s good creation and God’s provision for your nourishment. Eat it! Enjoy it! No need to ask any questions about it. However, different circumstances may require a different

response. “If any of the unbelievers invites you over for a cookout (*ESV*, “to dinner”) and you want to go, eat everything that is set before you, without raising questions for the sake of conscience” (v.27). An unbeliever invites you to their home for a meal. You pray about it, give the invitation consideration, and decide you will accept the invite. Here is an opportunity to share the gospel and be a witness for Jesus. The meal is served, have at it! Again, no need to ask questions. However, and this is a big however, “if someone says to you, “This is food from a sacrifice” (*ESV*, “offered in sacrifice”), do not eat it, out of consideration (*ESV*, “for the sake”) of the one who told you, and for the sake of conscience. I do not mean your conscience, but the other person’s” (vv. 28-29a). I believe these particular verses are something of a parenthesis to address a very specific situation that potentially can arise when we go to the home of an unbeliever for the purpose of missions and evangelism. Godly wisdom is essential. We do not want to offend them unnecessarily. But we cannot send mixed signals and foster confusion for unbelievers and believers alike.

Blomberg is concise and to the point, “In this situation, one might decide to refrain so as to not risk leading the other person into sin or confusing his or her conscience” (*1 Cor.*, NIVAC, 203). Morris helpfully adds, “The strong Christian knows that offering meat to an idol cannot really alter its character, for the idol is nothing; his conscience is clear. But a pagan observer thinks the

idol is a god, and thus sees the Christian who eats the meat as sanctioning his idolatry. A weak Christian observer will be in danger of being harmed in the way noted earlier (8:10ff.) Whatever the status of the informer, then, the wise and kindly course for the strong Christian is to abstain from eating.” (*1 Cor.*, TNTC, 147). For the sake of evangelizing the lost and edifying a fellow-believer, no uncertain sound should be trumpeted. The gospel is at stake, your witness is on the line. The spiritual well-being of others once again takes precedent. On this occasion, a vegetarian meal will be just fine!

IV. I will always pursue a thankful heart

10:29-30

Paul picks back up with his main argument in v.26. “The earth is the Lord’s, and all that is in it.” Therefore, “why is my freedom judged by another person’s conscience?” (v. 29a). Paul’s point is this. I should not be paranoid and overly concerned about what others might think. “I will partake with thanksgiving” (v.30), not asking unnecessary questions or making a big deal about something I don’t need to raise. I am thankful for God’s gracious provisions of drink and nourishment. It all belongs to Him and comes from Him, and I know that. Why make an issue of something when there is no issue and draw criticism for “something for which I give thanks?” (v. 30). That would be foolish, silly and unprofitable for everyone. I will choose to pursue a thankful heart and place no

unnecessary stumbling-blocks before anyone. Sometimes the wise and godly thing to do is remain silent. This is one of those occasions.

V. I will always pursue the glory of God in all things 10:31

First Corinthians 10:31 is one of those verse every Christian should memorize. It has been one of my life verses as long as I can remember. Paul, I believe, intended it to be a foundational pillar in our lives that acts as a compass 24/7. It clearly is comprehensive and all-encompassing in nature. “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything (*ESV*, “all”) for the glory of God.” Isaiah 43:7 teaches that God created us for His glory. Paul would add He saved us for His glory too. God is to be at the center of all things not man. Nothing is outside of the command to glorify God in all things. Now, the question we must answer is what does it mean to bring God glory? In its simplest expression, I believe it means to make much of God in all things, to magnify and show his unsurpassing worthiness in all that we do. John Piper has famously said “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.” He goes to say glorifying God means we love him, trust him, are thankful to him, obey him, enjoy him and take pleasure in him. In other words, “when he created us for his glory, he also created us for our joy, [and] the way he seeks to be glorified in us is by making us satisfied in him” (“*The Joyful Duty of Man*,” 1-22-89). In the

context of this passage, something we should always consider, Paul shows us a number of specific ways we glorify God:

- 1) We do what is beneficial or helpful to others (v. 23).
- 2) We do what builds others up (v. 23).
- 3) We seek what is good for others (v. 24).
- 4) We acknowledge all of creation is God's good gift to us (v. 26).
- 5) We care well for the conscience of others (v. 29).
- 6) We put no unnecessary stumbling-blocks in the path of Jews, Greeks or the Lord's church when it comes to the gospel and the salvation of others (vv. 32-33).
- 7) We always put the well-being of others ahead of our own (v. 33).
- 8) We find and follow worthy and godly role models (11:1).
- 9) We seek to be like Jesus (11:1).

Wow! There are lots of ways to glorify God in these verses alone! Maybe that is why C. S. Lewis wrote, "A man can no more diminish God's glory by refusing to worship Him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling the word 'darkness' on the walls of his cell" (*The Problem of Pain*). The glory of God should be our one ambition in all we do. "Will this glorify God" should always be the question in our minds and the words on our lips.

These are what I call soul-winner verses (cf. 9:19-22). My friend James Merritt and co-author of this book says our #1 desire for everyone on this planet are the last five words of v. 33, “that they may be saved.” Because the winning of souls to the Savior is a priority in our lives, “We will give no offense (*NIV*, “cause anyone to stumble”) to Jews or Greeks or the Church of God (v. 32). Paul says I do not want to be a stumbling block to an unbeliever coming to Jesus or a stumbling block to a believer living for Jesus. Rather, as verse 33 affirms, “I try to please everyone in everything, not seeking my own benefit (*ESV*, “advantage,” *NIV*, “own good”), but the benefit of many, so that they may be saved.” Others may be offended when we share the gospel, but they should never be offended by how we live out the gospel. Their soul and eternal destiny matters more than any right or privilege or desire I may have. The phrase “I try to please everyone” could be wrongly understood and misapplied if we rip it out of its context. Warren Wiersbe is helpful when he says that Paul, “was not suggesting that he was a compromiser or man-pleaser (Gal. 1:10). He was affirming the fact that his life and ministry was centered on helping others than on promoting himself and his own desires” (*Be Wise*, 106). We must consistently prize the spiritual well-fair of others above any personal preferences we might have. The eternal destiny of human souls hangs in the balance.

VII. I will always pursue the principles of WWPD and WWJD 11:1

The acronyms WWPD and WWJD stand for 1) “What would Paul do?” and 2) “What would Jesus do?” If 1 Corinthians 10:31 is one of those verses every Christian should memorize, 11:1 is its close and intimate companion. The verse fits better with the end of chapter 10 than the beginning of chapter 11. It is an unfortunate chapter division (remember verse and chapter divisions were not a part of the original texts). At first blush it makes Paul sound puffed up and arrogant, but only if we fail to read all of the verse! Once more we are reminded of the importance of reading a text in its context. Paul begins with a clear and simple command that literally reads, “Imitators of me become.” The word imitate is the Greek word *mimetai* from which we get our word “mimick.” Paul calls us to become like him, to follow his example in the same exact way he has imitated and followed Christ (cf. 4:16). Gordon Fee is right when he writes, “The emphasis here is certainly on the example of Christ, which for Paul finds its primary focus in his sacrifice on the cross” (*1 Cor.* NICNT, 540). In other words, sacrificial service for the benefit and blessings of others is at the heart of what it means to imitate our Lord. We all need role models, examples, we can follow and imitate. For the Christian the ultimate example is Christ. To glorify God by being like Jesus should be our consuming passion and one ambition. But we need flesh and blood role models too. Paul knew he could provide that

for the Corinthians. Who is providing that for you? Who are you providing it for?! When you go through the ebb and flow of everyday life, do you consider the questions: 1) WWPT, “What would Paul do?” 2) WWJD, “What would Jesus do?”

Several years ago, I was listening to an address by the brilliant and famous British scholar N.T. Wright. As he addressed the issue of Christian ethics, he noted that a number of his British friends had poked fun and dismissed the silly, shallow American phenomena of the WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) bracelet. However, he then pointed out that several of his children were in their teenage years. Suddenly, he said, he did not find the WWJD idea to be a silly and shallow consideration at all! In fact, he said, he rather hoped his children might adopt such an ethic in this post-modern, anything and everything goes culture of the West. I agree with N.T. Wright 100%. I would only add, it is essential to know what Jesus said and did if asking WWJD is going to have any benefit. In other words, the gospel-centered, Christ-centered mind requires an immersion in scripture and the heart of a servant, even a slave. To live like Jesus, you must know Jesus. To live like Jesus, you must love Jesus. So, let me ask a question we all must answer, beginning with myself. If other follow my example and imitate me, will they in some real and genuine sense be imitating Jesus? To put

it another way, can your children follow in your footsteps and in the process be walking in the footsteps of Jesus?

Conclusion: It is one of the most famous statements in Church History. It is often taught to young children to help them understand our relationship to God. It is located in the “Westminster Shorter Catechism” written in 1646-47. This question raised is:

Q: “What is the chief end of man?”

A: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy him forever.” This is the theme of 1 Cor. 10:23-11:1. This is the theme for the Christian life. This is the theme of the Bible. May it be the theme that captures your life and my life as our one holy ambition. Nothing could be greater.