

## IMITATE CHRIST

*10* <sup>23</sup>Everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible, but not everything is constructive. <sup>24</sup>No one should demand his own rights, but should seek the good of others. <sup>25</sup>Eat whatever is sold in the marketplace, without questioning it because of your conscience; <sup>26</sup>for “the earth and all that it contains belongs to the Lord.” <sup>27</sup>If any of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you want to go, eat whatever is set before you without questioning it because of your conscience. <sup>28</sup>But if some [Christian brother] says to you, “This meat has been offered as a sacrifice,” do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience. <sup>29</sup>Now when I speak of conscience I am not referring to your conscience, but the other’s [conscience]; for why should my liberty be judged by someone else’s conscience? <sup>30</sup>If I partake [of a meal] with thanksgiving, why should I be denounced because of something for which I give thanks? <sup>31</sup>So then, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. <sup>32</sup>Cause no offense to the Jews or the Greeks or to the church of God—<sup>33</sup>just as I try to please everyone in every way; not seeking my own benefit, but the benefit of the many, so that they may be saved. **11**<sup>1</sup>Follow my example, just as I [follow the example] of Christ. (1 Cor. 10:23-11:1)

### **Introduction**

Jane was a little girl whose father and mother were missionaries in Japan. Being a little girl, Jane wanted a doll; so her aunt in America sent her one.

Jane loved that doll. She rocked it to sleep, gave it a bath, and had much fun playing with it. But when some of the Japanese Christians saw Jane’s doll, they mistook it for an idol. (In Japan, the people have little doll-like idols that sit on the shelves in their homes.)

Jane’s parents told her what some of the Japanese Christians thought of her doll; and, regretfully, Jane would have to give up her doll so that she would not cause confusion and a stumbling block to the Japanese Christians. So Jane gave up her doll. She felt very sad. But she did not want to hurt any of the Japanese Christians. (*Mrs. Knight’s Book of Illustration*, by Alice Marie Knight.)

Little Jane was doing exactly what the Apostle Paul instructs the Corinthians and us to do: little Jane was imitating Christ. Like Jane, we, too, must take the example of Christ our Savior as our model to instruct us how we are to conduct ourselves in a way that is pleasing to God and beneficial to others. In our relationship with others and in our public conduct, let us be sure to imitate Christ, rather than only thinking of how we may satisfy ourselves.

### **I. Imitate Christ, by Seeking Your Neighbor’s Well-being (10:23-29a)**

In verse 23 Paul once again states the great axiom or principle for New Testament Christian living: *“Everything is permissible.”* This was a principle the Corinthian

Christians appreciated, but one they misinterpreted and misapplied. They took it to mean, “anything goes,” there are no binding standards for the Christian’s conduct—but contrast this erroneous view with the Apostle Paul’s teaching regarding the purpose of our salvation,

*God ... by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering ... condemned sin in sinful man, <sup>4</sup>in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.* (Rom. 8:3-4)

The true meaning of this principle is that the New Testament Christian is liberated from the constraints of the Old Testament regulations and ceremonial laws. Those particular ordinances were intended to point to the work of Christ and were done away with by His coming and the completion of His work at Calvary.

Because of the Corinthians’ confusion with regard to this principle, Paul adds two qualifications to it. *“Not everything is beneficial.”* That is to say, not every activity is spiritually profitable; some activities, although not expressly sinful, may be detrimental, (by way of example: the viewing of movies with heavy emphasis on violence or sexuality or profanity.) *“Not everything is constructive.”* Not every activity is conducive to our own spiritual growth, or the spiritual well-being of our Christian brothers and sisters. Consequently, as a mature New Testament Christian, we need to apply the principle (*“Everything is permissible”*) with discretion, bearing in mind the two qualifications submitted by the Apostle Paul.

In verse 24 Paul presents another great axiom or principle that must govern New Testament Christian living: *“No one should demand his own rights, but should seek the good of others.”* The Christian life is not to be dominated by a self-seeking, self-pleasing attitude; rather, we must take into consideration the welfare of our Christian brothers and make their welfare a chief concern. Our Lord Jesus instructs us that the second great commandment is, *“Love your neighbor as yourself”* (Matt. 22:39.) Thus, this second principle (presented in verse 24) must become a guideline for how we are to apply the first principle (presented in verse 23,) and it prevents us from selfishly abusing or misusing that first principle.

In verses 25-29 the Apostle Paul goes on to apply these two principles to an actual situation of everyday life that the Corinthian Christians faced. *“Eat whatever is sold in the marketplace, without questioning it because of [your] conscience.”* The Christian is free to eat whatever meat he desires, without concern over the fact that the meat in question had previously been offered to a pagan “deity;” *“for 'the earth and all that it contains belongs to the LORD.’”* The apostle here is quoting Psalm 24:1. The Christian must realize and remember that all things have been created by the LORD God and He has graciously offered all to us for our satisfaction and enjoyment. Following the Great Flood, the LORD gave

this instruction to Noah, "*Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything*" (Gen. 9:3.)

Note: It is foolish and dangerous to violate the conscience when its voice is in harmony with the Word of God. By way of example, when our conscience, in harmony with the Word of God, convicts us of the sinfulness of stealing, we do well to heed our conscience and refrain from any act of stealing. But there are times when the conscience itself needs to be brought into harmony with the Word of God and be liberated from the bondage of a scrupulousness that goes beyond the Word of God. Consider Colossians 2:20-23, a passage in which Paul explains that an overly strict conscience not only makes demands that are beyond the requirements of the Word of God, but is of no true value in combating the sinful tendencies that still remain with us:

*Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules, [such as,] <sup>21</sup>"Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? <sup>22</sup>These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. <sup>23</sup>Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. (Col. 2:20-23)*

In verse 27 Paul goes on to write, "*If any of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you want to go, eat whatever is set before you without questioning it because of [your] conscience.*" In this verse the apostle appears to be counseling the Corinthians as follows: If your conscience is sensitive to the fact that the meat set before you has been offered to a pagan "deity," let your conscience be emboldened and set to rest with the truth of Scripture, (as presented in such passages as Psalm 24:1 and Genesis 9:3, mentioned above.) But, according to verses 28-29, if a fellow Christian informs you that the meat has been offered to a pagan "deity," then do not eat it, for the sake of his conscience. Out of love, we are to abstain from the full and public use of our Christian rights and privileges rather than offend, confuse, test, or despise a weaker Christian brother. Our own conscience should conform to the liberty and requirements of the Word of God, but in our use of Christian liberty we must be sensitive to the consciences of our Christian brothers, note Romans 15:1-3a,

*We who are strong ought to bear with the weaknesses of the weak and not to please ourselves. <sup>2</sup>Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up; <sup>3</sup>for even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written, The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me. (Rom. 15:1-3)*

Let us imitate Christ, by seeking our neighbor's well-being. As the Apostle Paul will inform the Corinthians, "*Love ... is not self-seeking*" (1 Cor. 13:5.) As His disciples, we are called to be like Christ our Savior, of whom it is written, "*Christ loved us, and gave himself up for us*" (Eph. 5:2.)

## II. Imitate Christ, by Doing Everything to the Glory of God (10:29b-31)

In verse 31 the apostle presents the third and greatest principle for Christian living: *“Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”*

This is the principle that must regulate our use of Christian rights and liberties, that is what Paul has in mind when he writes, *“whether you eat or drink,”* all is to be done unto the glory of God. In very practical terms, one glorifies God when he causes his conscience to be regulated by both the liberties and the regulations prescribed in the Word of God—thereby submitting to the LORD’s sovereign and gracious lordship rather than to any other. Again, in very practical terms, we glorify God when we receive with thankfulness His good gifts and their enjoyment.

This is the principle that must regulate all of our everyday living: *“whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”* Old Testament Israel was taught this truth by means of the table of the bread of the Presence set in the tabernacle:

*Make a table of acacia wood—two cubits long, a cubit wide and a cubit and a half high. <sup>24</sup>Overlay it with pure gold and make a gold molding around it ... <sup>30</sup>Put the bread of the Presence on this table to be before me at all times. (Ex. 25:23-24,30)*

The bread, symbolizing Israel’s daily labor and the fruit of their labor, was set in the immediate presence of the LORD, thereby symbolically teaching that all of life is lived in the presence of God and should be lived for the glory of God.

A New Testament application of this great principle is presented in Colossians 3:23-24, *“Whatever you do, work with all your heart, as doing it for the LORD and not for men; <sup>24</sup>knowing that from the LORD you will receive the compensation that is the inheritance. You are serving Christ the Master.”*

This great principle governed the life of Christ our Savior. Our Lord glorified God His Father by surrendering His will to His Father’s will. Referring to the cross of Calvary, which loomed before Him, our Lord Jesus Christ declared, *“Now my soul is troubled; and what shall I say? [Shall I say,] “Father, save me from this hour”? But it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. <sup>28</sup>“Father, glorify your name” (Jn. 12:27-28.) Our Lord Jesus Christ glorified God His Father by finishing the work His Father had given Him to do. In His prayer He testifies, *“I glorified you on the earth by accomplishing the work you gave me to do” (Jn. 17:4.)**

Let us imitate Christ, by doing everything to the glory of God. This must pertain not only to our church activities, but also to our everyday job, to our choice of recreation, to our personal relationships, to all aspects of our lives in this present world.

### III. Imitate Christ, by Giving No Occasion for Someone to Stumble (10:32-11:1)

In verse 32 Paul exhorts us as Christians to live lives that are inoffensive: *“Cause no offense to the Jews or the Greeks or to the church of God.”* What is envisioned here is a life that does not cause harm or injury; a life that does not provoke others to anger or wrongdoing; a life that is not objectionable because it is glaringly inconsistent with the life of Christ. An inoffensive life is one of the themes for Christian living that is presented throughout the New Testament epistles:

*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* (Rom. 12:18)

*Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.* (Rom. 14:19)

In giving this exhortation to live an inoffensive life, the New Testament makes clear that there are certain exceptions. We are never to compromise the truth or to be silenced from proclaiming the gospel:

*Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. <sup>28</sup>We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, he said. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood. <sup>29</sup>Peter and the other apostles replied, We must obey God rather than men!* (Acts 5:27-29)

We are not to remain silent in the face of social injustice. The Book of Proverbs exhorts us, *“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. <sup>9</sup>Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy”* (Prov. 31:8-9.) Consider the Apostle Paul’s response to the injustice he and Silas suffered in the city of Philippi at the hands of the city officials:

*The jailer told Paul, The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace. <sup>37</sup>But Paul said to the officers, They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.* (Acts 16:36-37)

The way to heed this exhortation to lead an inoffensive life is presented to us in verse 33, *“I try to please everyone in every way; not seeking my own benefit, but the benefit of the many, so that they may be saved.”* By his own example, the Apostle Paul points out that the key to living such an inoffensive life is living a life that is oriented towards others rather than self-oriented and self-absorbed—it is living a truly Christ-like life. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul calls upon us to follow his example just as he himself is following Christ’s example.

Let us imitate Christ, by giving no occasion for someone to stumble.

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but with a humble mind let each one consider others as occupying a higher position than himself. <sup>4</sup>Let each one be concerned not only about his own interests, but also about the interests of others. <sup>5</sup>Have this mind in you that was also in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 2:3-5)*

## **Conclusion**

We must take the example of Christ our Savior as our model to instruct us in our everyday conduct. Like the Apostle Paul, and like the little girl named Jane, let us be sure to imitate Christ, rather than only thinking of how we may please and satisfy ourselves.