

Title: Aquarium Living pt.1

Text: 1 Corinthians 10.23- 11.1

Theme: Making choices about subjective matters

Series: 1 Corinthians #41

Prop Stmt. Glorify God by sensitive living towards others

When you are driving a car and you come to an intersection. Are you allowed to go through the intersection, or do you have to stop? The answer depends on the situation. Is there a stop sign and if so, on which street? Is there a traffic light and if so, what is the color? You cannot drive on the basis of what I feel like at the moment. You have to drive based on the ethics or the laws of driving, and those laws govern how you respond in certain situations.

Life in the church family is like an intersection. In some cases, people want a very simple rule. Can I go or do I have to stop? Often times the answer is: it depends on the situation. Church life is supposed to have a high level of diversity in it. Not theological diversity, but ethnic, social, economic and personality diversity. The reason is, our fundamental unity in the midst of surface diversity is a critical means for us to show off God. Though God is three distinct persons Father, Son and Spirit, He is a perfect unity. We have coined a word that expresses this. Tri-unity. How, can we as a multi-unity body, reflect the person of God? One of those ways is seen in how we relate to people who are different than us. I am called to show Christ to other believers in the church. As we show Christ to each other, then as a church we show Christ to our world. The church is the intersection of lives. There are times when you have to stop, and times when you have to go. There are times when you have to yield and times when you have to let someone in. It all depends on what is going to: 1) Honor God 2) Benefit others and 3) Build the church.

As followers of Christ, we function according to a series of underlying ethics, and you have to figure out how they apply. We can try to short-cut the process and create a list of rules for every thing. But then, you do not learn how to think, the atmosphere turns pharisaical and the rules have to constantly be updated.

This text is really a summary of this entire section of 1 Corinthians (8.1-11.1) followed by a strong challenge. And this section (8.1-11.1) is built on the points that Paul has been making from the beginning. The big idea of our text today is simply this. If you are a follower of Christ, your life is a fishbowl. Like it or not, that is the way that it is. Your life is on display for other believers. You are called to show them the heart of Christ. Your life and our life together is also on display for non-believers and you are called and we are called to show them the heart of Christ as well. Therefore, Christ is the lens through which I must view and live in my world. Throughout this section, Paul has used a contemporary problem in Corinth as the issue to illustrate and then apply these truths. The issue that Paul uses is that of food. Food is not the most important issue in the Christian's life. The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking (Romans 14.17a) but it is a matter of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by others. In other

words, if your life is characterized by righteousness, peace and joy in the Spirit, not only will this type of living please God, but it will also have a great benefit in the lives of others.

Now, here at Cornerstone and certainly in Corinth the people in the church did not all have the exact same opinion about every little thing in life. There were those who had a much higher level of personal freedom about things. In some cases they were comfortable with doing things that they should not be comfortable with. We have been looking at that in the past few weeks. On the other hand there were others in the church who had an over-active conscience. They were sensitive about things that they should not be sensitive about. Both sides could easily be very judgmental about the other. And both sides really needed to get this figured out. Earlier in this book we learned again how the cross is the foundation and focus of our lives. What I mean by that is that Christ and His gospel affects everything about us. A cross-centered life is not a me-first life. If we do not get that figured out, we will die. We will splinter, we will fracture, we will decay and we will die. It affects the way we worship and do church (11-14). So, here is the summary, here is the ethic, here is what you have to think about as your life intersects with the lives of others. How does my life affect the lives of others?

1. **The Summary** – 23-26

A. **You are to live for the benefit of others.** (23)

“Everything is permissible” is either a motto that some in the church were taking as their personal slogan authorizing their exercise of freedom, or, more than likely it was a Corinthian statement from the culture at large. In either case, Paul is saying, you do not make decisions simply based on whether or not you can justify this to yourself. Think a little deeper than just saying – “What’s wrong with it? – huh?” As a follower of Christ, I am now concerned about the things that Christ is concerned about. Christ is concerned about His children. Therefore, I have to make decisions in a manner that is consistent with this axiom. How does this benefit others? You need to make decisions that will consistently benefit others because, that is consistent with Christ. The strong need to remember this. I can say something that is true, but I can say it at the wrong time or in the wrong way.

Now my emphasis this morning is on explaining this text and next week I want to take an extended amount of time applying this for our benefit. But, I want to point out a very practical use of this truth in the little church – the family. Kids, what if you asked yourself this question before you talked or acted this week? I am convinced that so many of our rules come because we fail to act in love. For example: does your family have a front seat problem? I am talking about the front seat in car. You would think that the front seat was God. It is so revered, so wanted, so desired, that some would almost kill to get the seat, and those who don’t think that life is ruined, life is over. Does this sound familiar at all?

“I call the front seat!” “I was there first!” “But my stuff is on it!” “You got it last time!” But that was only for a 3.2 mile trip, and you got it for a 4.5 mile trip, therefore I am under-front-seated by 1.3 miles! Well, if you get the front seat, then I get the radio, cause your music stinks! If you don’t like my music you can stick your fingers in your ears or you can bring your CD player, but you can’t have my batteries ‘cause you took 2 double A batteries from me 2 years, 3 months and 4 days ago (but who’s counting) and you never gave them back. And we are sitting there listening to our in-house Philadelphia lawyers dissect every aspect of this issue, until we weigh in with our brilliant logic. All right – no one sits in the front seat for the next 24 years and there will be no music, because when I was your age we rode a school bus and we did not have I-pods, or CD players, we had 8-tracks. What if, you asked yourself – “How are my words and actions benefiting my family?”

Church is an intersection where different people are trying to sit in the same place and trying listen to different music. The question is simple, but the heart of it is profound. How is this beneficial?

B. You are to help build up the church. (24)

The next question is certainly related. How does this help build the church? (23b) How are my actions contributing to the health of the church? “Nobody should seek his own good but the good of others.” This truth will revolutionize your relationships. We like to do good to those whom we deem worthy of us doing good for. We like to do good when the other person has done good to us, or when we can get a little benefit or attention from it. You have freedoms, but you there are times when you want to limit the exercise of your freedoms because it would not benefit others nor would it be helpful in contributing to the health of the church. Paul then reminds his readers of a third point in this summary.

C. You are to enjoy the gifts that God has given you. (25-26)

The first two seem to be directed more toward those who considered themselves to be spiritually strong. This one seems to be directed to those who had a hyper-sensitive conscience. “You are to enjoy the gifts that God has given you” because that is consistent with Christ. The immediate issue of conflict in Corinth had to do with food. But, if you make a rule that no one can eat any meat because of the possibility that it had been offered to an idol, you are eliminating something that God actually created for us to enjoy.

Is there any potential problem with these three points? Of course there is. In the intersection of church life these truths need to be worked out. In the next several verses Paul seeks to do that.

2. The Application – 27-30

Here is the scene. You are invited to a meal, hosted by a person who is not a follower of Christ. The food is set before you. You live in Corinth where almost all of the food is bought and sold in the city food market, and is often offered up in a ceremony of thanksgiving to the gods by the farmers who mistakenly think that the idols were responsible for the food. Obviously, the issue of idol worship is very important. The issue of food is not, but when food and idol worship get mixed up together, then it becomes a little more complicated. Scenario #1

A. What if you don't know? – 27

What if you don't know if the food that was set before you was first offered in a ceremony to an idol? I think that the people with a hyper-sensitive conscience are in view here? Eat and don't ask questions. You need to develop a biblical conscience and for some that means stop calling unclean or unspiritual something that really does not matter. After all, the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. If you call something unclean that God has called clean, what are you doing? You are setting your word above God's. If you want to have a special diet – ok, but do not make it a standard of spirituality.

B. What if you do know? – 28-30

There are two ways that we can interpret these verses. Option 1 – The host tells you where the food came from. You can understand this as part of normal dinner conversation. “Hey, this roast beef is great – where did you get it?” “Oh, I got it from ...” I do not think that is what Paul is saying here, which is why I think option 2 is the best way to take these verses.

Option 2 – At the dinner, another believer who is with you is wiggling out about the food and he tells you “this was offered to idols.” I can't eat this. What do you do? Do you have the freedom to eat? Sure, because the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. But in this case, don't, because it would in this situation be beneficial to your brother who at this point in his life as a hyper-sensitive conscience about this.

Paul then asks two questions: v.29b and v.30. These verses seem at first to be a bit confusing? In fact, some have said, Paul never wrote these, they were added by an editor later on. That is clearly not the case. But what is Paul saying here? Stop for a second. Think about the scene that Paul has just described. You are at a meal, the food that is set before you is delicious and you are hungry. But the conscience of another believer is at stake, what do you do? Paul is saying, “it's not worth it.” I think that what Paul does here is, he anticipates the reaction of some of his readers. Paul is addressing the natural objections of the strong who would protest this and say, “why should I subject my freedom to the conscience of someone else?” “Should I be denounced by a weaker brother when I have given thanks to God for this food?” If I can eat this food with a clear conscience before God and give thanks to God for the food, then why am I being denounced by this spiritual weakling for something I thank God for? The answer is part of his final challenge. Whether or you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the

glory of God. There are some situations in which you can eat that meat to the glory of God. There are other situations, same meat, that you cannot. What have you done? You have given glory to God for this food. You are seeking to live for God. The goal is not the enjoyment of the food, but the honor of God. If your ministry with this person is going to be messed up because of the food, then set the food aside for the sake of your ministry with the other person. This is what leads into his five-part challenge that concludes this section.

3. **The Challenge** – 10.31-11.1

A. **Live with a 24-7 awareness of the glory of God.**

I am to live in order to advance the honor of God. I am to live in order to make Him famous. I am not here on this earth primarily for the purpose of enjoying all of my freedoms I am here to reflect His person to my world.

B. **Seek to please others.** (32-33)

Try to please all people to the extent that you can instead of claiming your rights. This does not mean that you should stake your happiness on making others happy. The fear of what others think can be bondage. But, as you live in order to make God known, you will want to seek their pleasure.

Give up the front seat this week. Leave a generous tip at the restaurant. Smile at people. Stop being so concerned about my rights.

C. **Seek the good of others so they can be saved.** (33b)

Those who live for their own happiness, never get it. Those who live for the good of others are the happiest people on earth. But we don't live for the good of others so that people will say nice things about us. We want to seek their good so they can come to faith in Christ. How do you live for the glory of God? By living in a manner that is consistent with God. Is God happy? He is infinitely happy and he is a good and giving God. Julie Ellis has red hair. Julie served in China for several years for the sake of the gospel. Do you think that her red hair in China drew any attention to her? She dyed it black. Did she have to dye it black? No. She considered her ability to blend in with the people and not draw unnecessary attention to herself to be more important than the color of her hair. There are some things more important than your hair color, or what you eat. One of the ways in which we make God famous is by showing unity and sensitivity in the midst of the intersections of the church.

D. **Be a leader as you follow.** (11.1)

“You should not follow me, you should follow Christ.” Nice try, but it just doesn't work that way. We live in an aquarium, and people are watching our lives. The reputation of Christ and the apparent validity of the gospel is at stake.