

Jason Upchurch - 1 Cor. 10:23-11:1 - Ignorance is Bliss for Christian Liberty

So you may have thought we were done talking about eating meat or not eating meat. But we've got one more week on this issue of food.

When I was in high school I remember working at a place and we had a pizza party for our customers. And a Jewish lady and her 10 year old son came in. He asked his mom if he could have a slice of pepperoni pizza and she said no because it would make them sick.

What we eat, how we eat, what people tell us about food in relation to worship is a huge deal. We joke about the NC giving us the ability to eat all kinds of foods, but it really is pretty radical that God's people now can eat basically whatever we want. And we can eat basically whatever we want in worshipful thankfulness to the God who made all things.

And this section, even more than the previous sections, really helps us understand our role in the world and what we do in the world.

When God saved us through faith in Jesus, he saved us into his Kingdom where we live every aspect of our lives to his glory. That includes what we decide to eat and drink. Jesus cares about what you eat. And how you eat it. And where you eat it. And he cares about where you shop. Because what we do and how we do it can have real, spiritual implications.

“Jason, Jesus really cares about what I eat?” **Read 31**

As John MacArthur has said, eating and drinking are the most mundane things in life. They are very ordinary, very blah and average. But everything we do - down to eat and drinking - can either bring glory to God or take glory from God.

Do I eat bagels and cream cheese? Maybe I eat too much bagels and cream cheese. Maybe I'm not thankful to God for my bagels and cream cheese.

Where do I buy the bagels and cream cheese? Do I buy it from Yokes or do I buy it from the guy at the farmers market? What if he turns out to be a pagan? What if he's using the money I'm giving him to tithe to his church of Satan? Maybe I need to find that out.

What if I go to the grocery store and they're employing someone in the snack isle who goes to the same church of Satan as the guy at the farmers market? If I buy bagels at that grocery store am I endorsing a company who's okay with Satan worship?

Should I boycott the farmers market for allowing this guy to sell his pagan bagels? Should I boycott the grocery store for employing pagan snack isle guy?

Should I boycott Disneyland, like the southern baptists did 25 years ago, for their stance on homosexuality? Do I need to burn all of my Disney DVDs? Can I watch Frozen or Star Wars or Captain America? Those are owned by Disney.

Should I boycott Home Depot for promoting gay Olympic athletes? I mean, I just need a few 2x4s but I don't want to be supporting confused men sprinting past ladies and using the wrong bathroom. What do we do?

The principles we're about to look at here affect our day to day lives more than we realize. Jesus cares about our day to day lives. He cares about even the smallest decisions we make.

Jesus doesn't want us to live our lives like we're walking through a mine field. Mine fields are dangerous because you know if you make one small step you could trigger a land mine and blow the whole place up. Is that how we go about living our lives?

No. Jesus just simply wants us to be aware that everything we do can either either bring glory to him or not.

So there are 2 big takeaways this morning: 1) Ignorance can be bliss for Christian liberty. 2) If you know something is wrong, you have to act accordingly.

So let's get to it. Paul, so you probably noticed, has switched to a different issue now. He was talking about going down to the pagan temple and eating. We can't do that because that's idolatry - it's communing with demons.

Now he switches to buying meat in the meat market and bringing it home to eat. And we notice the switch in subject because he repeats the phrase that the Corinthians were using. **Read 23-24**

Remember they used this phrase back in chapter 6 to say it was okay in our Christian liberty to go visit prostitutes. Is it okay? Of course not. This slogan they had was true, but not absolutely true.

When someone becomes a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are set free. We're set free from our sin, we're set free from the law. We have a tremendous amount of freedom. The freedom we have doesn't allow us to sin.

And even though we have freedom concerning food, that doesn't mean we can always eat absolutely whatever we want.

Paul says there are some other things we need to keep in mind. "All things are lawful" but are they helpful to my brother in the Lord. Is it helpful to invite my Jewish friend to eat baby back ribs 2 weeks after his conversion? That might not be helpful. He might know it's okay to eat pork in theory, but it might actually still be hard for him to do it because he was raised that pork was unclean. So it wouldn't be helpful to eat ribs or bacon or eagle with our Jewish friends unless we knew for sure they were okay with that.

"All things are lawful" but is what I'm doing building up my neighbor? Am I even concerned with what my brother in the Lord would think? I can drink a beer and enjoy it, but did my sister in the Lord come out of a family where alcohol was being abused? If so, maybe we don't drink beer around her.

See, our natural inclination is to always assert our rights. I can do this, I can do that. "I'm a free person I can do whatever I want!" If it doesn't hurt me then it should be okay. But if we're in Christ our outlook completely changes. It becomes focused on how we can love and bless our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

See, along comes Jesus who gave up every single right and privilege and comfort he had as God and was born in a cave and slept in a feeding trough. He wandered around homeless and died the death of the lowest criminals. Why did he do that? Why did he give up every right he had? So that we could share with him the riches of his glory. He gives up everything to bless us.

He's not asking us to do anything he didn't do. So now, our first impulse should be: how do I enjoy my liberties while at the same time loving my brother? That's the principle of **Vs 24. Read**

God just assumes we're going to always be on the lookout for number 1. That's why Jesus says the greatest commandment is, "Love the Lord with all your heart and soul and strength and the second is love your neighbor how?" Like yourself. You already love yourself - everyone does. That's not radical. What's radical is loving your neighbor like you love you.

So how do you do that in regards to living in a fallen world?

First of all, let's talk about our liberties. Remember I said the first big takeaway is that ignorance can be bliss for Christian liberty. **Read 25-26**

So this is how we know that Paul has shifted from talking about eating food in a pagan temple - which we are forbidden from doing - and buying meat in the meat market. There were food markets in ancient times just like there are food markets now. You'd go down to the local market and there'd be tables and people were selling their stuff.

And just like most farmer's markets, you really don't know anything about the seller. You don't know who they are or where they're from or how they raised the food or where they slaughtered the food.

They could be a believer in the Jesus from the other side of town and be your brother or sister in Christ and you just don't know it. They could be a slave working for a guy 30 miles away. They could be dedicated worshippers of Artemis and just slaughtered that cow at the temple down the road earlier that morning. That beef you're about to eat might have been laying on an altar to idol just hours ago.

How do you know? What do you do?

Paul has an amazing answer to that: don't ask any questions. **Read 25**

This is a revolutionary principle for the people of God. You can eat absolutely anything in the market. Jesus declared all foods clean in the gospel of Mark. Everything in the meat market is up for grabs.

The reason this was revolutionary is because the Jews were notorious for investigating what we would call the supply chain for any hint of sin or idolatry. Did the cow eat grass on a Gentile's farm? No good.

Was the cow raised by pagans? No good. Was the person who butchered the cow employed in the service of the Temple? No good. Were they connected to the pagan Roman government? No good.

The Jewish people were scrupulous with their food. There could be absolutely no connection anywhere to idolatry. So they took it upon themselves to go search it out.

I mean, let me ask you: you go to Costco and grab one of those 3lb tubes of hamburger. Where exactly did that come from? What cow? Where? We have no idea. South America? China? Nebraska? Washington? Who raised it? Where was it slaughtered. I mean, do you really know if the cow was sacrificed on a pagan altar? No. Do you know where the truck driver who drove the cows to the slaughter house goes to church?

All we know is we pick up a tube of meat and barbecue it.

I mean, religious objections aside, I think if we'd probably stop eating a lot of our food if we knew where it came from. Don't go look it up. But we know nothing about the religious views of those who've been around the meat and butchered it. And we probably don't want to find out.

Paul is saying the same thing. Don't go looking up where it all comes from. You have all kinds of liberty to eat whatever you want. Just don't ask questions. If you're concerned that the beef you're buying was offered to an idol, don't ask about it. Just throw down your denarii and walk away.

There is a sense in which ignorance is bliss. We don't need to know every part of the supply chain or the religious failings or commitments of the people in the supply chain.

Because here's the reality: if you look hard enough at the supply chain, you'll find sin and idolatry. You will. We live in a fallen world. There is sin everywhere.

I mean, we've all got cell phones in our pocket. The likelihood that slaves or children were involved in manufacturing the phone or mining the material for the implements of the phone are pretty high.

If you dig into the supply chains of Wal*Mart or Costco or any brand name or any grocer...you're going to find very objectionable things.

Several years ago I saw an app that allowed you to scan the bar code of any product and it would tell you the manufacturer. It would also tell you all the objectionable relationships the manufacturer had. Who the company was owned by or what other companies that company owned. How much money they gave to various special interest groups. I remember drinking a Diet Dr. Pepper and someone scanned the bar code and started telling me all the things they supported and I'm just thinking: all I want is a cold, no-calorie beverage on a hot day.

Interestingly, that was essentially what the Jews would do. They felt compelled to find out every single aspect of where all their food came from. Paul says don't do that. Ignorance is okay.

Here's why he says that's okay. **Read 26**

Here's why it's okay to be ignorant: because at the end of the day all things are God's. He made it all, he owns it all. Whatever else we know about that cut of meat sitting in the marketplace, we know that the one true, and living God made the cow owns the cow and has given the cow as meat to be thanked.

Unless the thing we're purchasing is intrinsically evil, it's probably okay to purchase. Here was the dilemma for the Corinthians: everything in Corinth had some kind of connection to a Temple or some connection to worship at the Temple.

We have the same problem: if you look hard enough at any organization or store or company you'll find a connection somewhere and want to boycott everything.

Now, listen, I'm not against boycotting some things. We will see in a minute we need to abstain from some things. But the problem with boycotts is that usually they're done to make some sort of political statement rather than a gospel statement. And if the company doesn't know why you're boycotting it doesn't matter.

The second problem is that whatever company you go to to replace that first company probably has just as many problems. So many times boycotts just don't work because there's not enough connections made and they're often hypocritical.

The main principle here is that it's okay to live in ignorance sometimes. **Read 27**

So your neighbor invites you over for dinner. They're cooking Tri tip - you don't know where it came from, you don't know anything except that it's a beautiful cut of steak and you're ready to dive in. Go for it. No worries. Don't ask - eat the steak.

2) But, what if you learn something? This brings us to the second point: Once you know something is wrong you have to act accordingly. **Read 28-30**

It has been said that you can't unknow something. Once you know something, you know it and you can't play ignorant. You have to act according to knowledge.

That's the deal here: new information has come to light. The reality was always the same. The meat had always been sacrificed to an idol. But now the Christian knows. So we must act accordingly.

Now, we don't know the whole situation here. We don't know who told the believer the meat was sacrificed to idols. It could have been the unbelieving host. "Oh, I forgot you're a Christian and I sacrificed this this morning...can you eat this?" That's probably not the case. The pagan person has no issue with their conscience. He might be concerned about the Christian's conscience, but not likely.

More likely the scenario is this: You and a new believer go over to a pagan friend's house for dinner. The pagan friend serves up a big juicy steak and says, yeah, I just cut this up at the Temple this morning. And your new believer friend leans over and whispers to you, "We can't eat this!" And so you tell your pagan friend, "Sorry the steak looks great but we can't eat it."

And you say, how are there 3 people in this scenario? Well, it seems like there's 3 in **Vs. 28**: You, the person who invited you and the conscience of the 3rd guy. **Read 28-29a**

You see that?

So here's what we can know.

1 - Once we learn the pagan nature of a product, we don't consume it. Knowledge prevents us from acting. I mean if you knew for 100% sure that the shoes you're wearing were made in a sweat shop in India that was filled with malnourished little kids, you couldn't support that anymore. Two minutes ago, they were just comfortable shoes, now you know purchasing them is supporting sweat shops.

When we learn something it increases our complicity in our actions. The more we know, the more we will be judged with that knowledge.

2 - we need to remember that the world is watching us. One of the reasons Paul says not to eat is for the sake of the man who told us. This pagan man probably didn't mean to offend you, he invited you to a nice dinner after all. But now you know. And he knows you know. And you know he knows. So if you eat, you're basically saying "Yeah I'm a Christian and it's okay to eat idolatrous meat." Nope. Can't do that. When no one knew anything it was fine. But to eat of this meat would be to say idolatry is okay.

3 - we need to remember that other believers are watching us. We would abstain for the pagan's sake and for the new believer's sake. **Read 28-29a**

So we also would not eat because of this man's conscience. We don't want the pagan to think eating idolatrous meat is okay. And we don't want other believers thinking that this would be okay.

Now, remember we have a lot of liberty in Christ, but our liberty is not the end goal. The end goal is to love God and love our neighbor. To build him up and love him and show him grace.

4 - Christian liberty should be without fear. **Read 29-30**

Now this is a weird turn because it sounds like we wouldn't eat the meat because of the other believer but at the same time we we don't let other people determine what we do. So which is it?

Well, we want to be sensitive to other people - we don't want them to stumble. But generally speaking we don't let the restrictions of others hinder us.

So let's take a different issue: alcohol since it's another hot button issue. The Bible says we can drink as long as we don't get drunk. So there's basically 3 categories of Christian with alcohol. The person drinks and give thanks. The person who doesn't drink but doesn't care if others do. And the one who's conscience is very weak and can't be around anyone who might drink.

What Paul is saying is that no matter how other people might view alcohol, generally speaking we don't let that determine our lives. Maybe you've got a friend who can't stand to be around alcohol. That's fine, but that doesn't mean you can't ever have it.

We could change this to pork, if we were in a Jewish community. We could change it to smoking a pipe or a cigar. We could change it to a bunch of things. But the points is that the concerns of other believers don't absolutely control our lives. If they're around, we take them into consideration; if they're not our freedom wins.

Look at Rom 14:13-23. Here Paul addresses many of the same issues but more generically. I think this is helpful for us to see because it wasn't just in Corinth people struggled with this. **Read 13-18**

Same thing we saw earlier: we don't want to trip up our brother by what we eat. Everything is clean, but he might not quite be ready for that yet. **Read 19-23**

So all things are clean, and if you want to eat or drink, you're welcome to. But whatever your freedom is, make sure you're not tripping up your brother. Again, Jesus calls us to be very aware of our brothers around us. We don't want to trip them up in the faith.

Back in 1 Cor. 10:30 we see the liberty again. **Read**

If you can give thanks for it, and it's not intrinsically sinful, go for it. And sometimes it's ignorance that allows us to enjoy God's good creation.

So with all those considerations in mind:

3) All that we do should be to the glory of God. **Read 31-11:1**

Every aspect of our lives should be to make God famous. To show how amazing and awesome he is. And he is awesome and we see this especially in food.

I mean, you realize God could have just given us plain oatmeal to eat everyday of our lives right? We could be like cows who basically just chew grass.

But he didn't he gave us meat and dairy and spices and oil and all kinds of stuff. You can go into Yokes right now and for like \$.75 you can buy maple bar. A maple bar. Or a bear claw. Or whatever else you like because God made it so that we would praise him.

The only time we need to consider not eating those things is if someone might be truly offended by our eating. Other than that God in his grace has given us so much that we can praise him for.

This is what Paul does and what he calls us to. So go...eat and drink and give glory to God for giving you what he graciously made.

Pray