

4.4 It's in My Blood

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[0 : 01] But this evening we're going to be back in 1 Corinthians, Paul's first letter to the Corinthians that Josh has been preaching on these last few Sundays. We're going to read this evening in the second half of chapter 10.

We looked at the first part of chapter 10 last week and so I'm going to read now from 1 Corinthians chapter 10 beginning at verse 23, short section to the end of the chapter.

So Paul is in this long discourse about how to behave and how to live so as to glorify God and not ourselves, how to glorify him and not turn aside to what is false, to what is idolatry and indeed behind that is actually demonic.

And he's dealing with all sorts of complicated issues but comes back now to this business of what you eat and where you eat. It seems strange to us that these things are important but actually as we'll discover they are indeed sometimes very important.

So Paul says all things are lawful but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful but not all things build up. No one seek his own good but the good of his neighbor.

[1 : 18] Eat whatever is sold in the market without raising the question on the ground of conscience for the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you're disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience.

But if someone says to you, this has been offered in sacrifice, well then don't eat it.

For the sake of the one who informed you and for the sake of conscience. I don't mean your conscience but his. Why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience?

If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced? Because of that for which I give thanks.

So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

[2 : 23] And give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God. Just as I try to please everyone in everything I do.

Not seeking my own advantage but that of many. That many may be saved. So be imitators of me as I am of Christ.

Amen. May God bless to us his word. Well, good evening. Do you grab your Bibles again and open up to 1 Corinthians chapter 10 as we finish off this section of food offer titles.

What do you bleed? There's an oft used expression that communicates that what is most intrinsic to who we are, what really governs how we live, what we really live for and love, will bleed out of us.

So it may be said of a ranger's fan that he bleeds blue. Or it was said of John Bunyan, author of the famous book Pilgrim's Progress, that if you were to cut him, he would bleed scripture.

- [3 : 39] Well, we've come to the end of the food offered to idols section of 1 Corinthians. And it's now that Paul really gives the answer in various forms to the original question.
- And Paul is really showing that if you were to cut him open, he would bleed the pattern of the cross. The pattern set before us most perfectly in the Lord Jesus.
- Listen to how Paul explains this pattern elsewhere. He says, Christ, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. He wasn't driven by worldly glory like the Corinthians.
- But he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, giving up all kinds of glory for the saving of mankind.
- And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. If you cut Paul open, that's what he'll bleed.
- [4 : 46] And so this is what has been so important in answering the Corinthians' question. It seems likely that in asking the question in the first place about whether to eat food offered to idols, that really they're setting Paul up, they're setting him up for a gotcha moment.
- The Corinthians were out to expose Paul, seeing his flexibility with his freedoms as being utterly unprincipled. Much like how we'd see sleazy politicians who will say, whatever it takes to get people on their side.
- When my power and position are at stake, who cares about principles? But Paul wants the Corinthians to imitate him as he imitates Jesus. And in order to do that, they need to understand the deep-rooted principles upon which Paul's ministry is founded.
- He doesn't do these things on a whim. His choices are driven by a settled outlook. Think of it like an iceberg. Only a fraction of it appears above the water.
- However, that's all that we can see. And whilst we may only be able to see about 10% of an iceberg, that's still enough for us to know that that's what it is. Paul refusing to eat meat is the 10% that floats above the surface.
- [6 : 02] If all they see is that Paul is flexible and bends back and forth, depending on who he's with, then they won't appreciate what underpins his actions. And so all that we've covered so far in chapters 8 to 10 is the 90% that's below the water.
- Now, there's a sense in which something as everyday as what we can eat can actually involve some serious theological reflection. After all, Paul spends three chapters dealing with that 90%.
- But as we get to the answers, he also simplifies it for us into a maxim. And that's what we see in our first point. We see in verses 23 to 24, the DNA of the cross.
- The DNA of the cross. A church or a Christian who is truly spiritual defaults to thinking about the needs of others before their own.
- You see, good theology can always be misapplied. Paul has a corrective to that. The chief end of theology isn't simply to be right.
- [7 : 09] The best theology is the theology that builds the church up into Christ. So, verse 23, the Corinthian theology.
- All things are lawful. This is another one of their statements. Remember, we saw them before in chapter 8. All things are lawful. That gives us a mind in...
- That gives us a picture of the mind of the Corinthians in this issue. And it's pretty clear what they think. Idols are false. God is the creator. Therefore, all food is God's food. Therefore, in the involvement of idols, it is irrelevant.
- It's lawful to eat. And we'll see that Paul doesn't actually fully disagree with this. There's a large dollop of truth to it. But Paul's correction is that such a statement is not nearly nuanced enough.

The Christian life is not all about what is black and white. There are all kinds of shades of grey. Now, this isn't the first time Paul quotes the Corinthian phrase, all things are lawful.

[8 : 12] If you turn back with me to chapter 6 briefly. Chapter 6, verse 12. He writes there, All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful.

Same correction. But then he says, All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything. Now, if we have to defend things that we're doing with phrases like, But it is okay for me to do X.

Or, please show me somewhere in the Bible a verse that says, It's wrong for me to do Y. Well, with those kinds of things, there's a danger that something has become a little bit too important to us.

All things are lawful. I'm able to do it. But perhaps it's becoming a bit too important for you. And in a sense, that's what Paul was dealing with last week at the start of chapter 10.

That's one danger of the all things are lawful approach to the Christian life. But the other is the impact it has on your church family. Looking back to the very start of this section, chapter 8.

[9 : 21] Chapter 8, verse 1. Paul says, Knowledge puffs up. That's what the Corinthians think they have. But love builds up.

And then now in 10.23, All things are lawful, but not all things build up. The Corinthians cling to license to liberty.

Their intended outcome is enjoying all that's theirs. We're permitted to do this. We're free to act like this. We're licensed to eat the food, so we're jolly well going to eat it. They cling to liberty.

Paul clings to love. His intended outcome is verse 24. The good of his neighbor. What will build up my brothers in Christ?

As much as I'd love the fillet steak, medium rare of course, Today I'm ordering for my brother's benefit. And that means I'll even order keel.

[10 : 23] Paul's maxim, his gospel DNA, the shape of a cross, is verse 24. Let no one seek his own good, But the good of his neighbor. Cut Paul open.

That's what he bleeds. When in doubt about what to do, Think first, not about myself, but about others. His guiding compass in everyday decisions, The good of my neighbor.

And that applies to so much of life, doesn't it? All of our daily decisions about how we spend our time, our money, All kinds of things. It's limitless. Let's take just one example.

A young married couple, They're free to spend plenty of time together. But a point will come that insisting upon doing that, Can begin to hamper building up our brothers and sisters in the church family.

It can quickly turn into seeking one's own good, Over the good of our neighbors. It's a great freedom. But we need to think of others.

[11 : 31] That's Paul's maxim. And well, as Paul comes to answering the specific questions now on the food, He's envisaging two scenarios that will require different responses. We've moved out of the temple.

That was last week, actually, being in the idol temple. And he's now thinking about the meat market, Which the idol food would have made its way to. And also eating at someone else's house, Where they might have had this idol meat.

And the first thing that Paul says, Is that we have a planet to savor. That's his first answer. Verses 25 to 27. We have a planet to savor.

God has given us so much to enjoy in his creation, And it's right and worshipful to take delight in it. Paul knows that every good gift is from above.

So when it comes to verse 25, Whatever is sold in the meat market, We can eat it. We don't have to go asking questions about its origin. We don't need to know how it's been handled, And all the details of any possible evil That it's witnessed on its way to our plates.

[12 : 39] Why? Because verse 26, The earth is the Lord's. And all that fills it. Paul's quoting here from Psalm 24.

And it's interesting that the first verse of this psalm Talks about all that fills the earth, And those who dwell within it. All that is part of the created earth, And all the people who dwell in it, Belong to the Lord.

Even at this stage we can see that People are precious. People matter to God. And that profoundly shapes Paul's maxim. But it's also interesting That the first verse of that psalm says that, Because Paul's second example About everyday life and idle food Involves other people.

It's not just about the food, It's sharing it with a neighbor. Verse 27, If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner, And you're disposed to go, Eat whatever is set before you.

Paul's point is that in these verses, There are great gifts from God. We have great freedom to enjoy all these things. God has filled the earth with food.

[13 : 49] Good food. We don't just have packets of nutritional powder To sustain our bodies. As we grind ourselves into some miserable existence. No. It's right to enjoy good food.

And it's right to enjoy it with other people. We're free to sit down and fellowship With all kinds of people. It doesn't matter if they've been to the temple. You can still share a meal with them.

What's off limits is the temple And what happens in there. You can't go into it. The worship that's present in the temple Of fellowship with demons Is to be fled from.

Any notion that the idle worshippers Should be avoided is quite different. Paul says enjoy good food And enjoy it with the people God has filled the earth with. But notice what Paul repeats In these verses.

He says verse 25 Eat without raising any questions Regarding conscience. And the same again verse 27 Eat without raising any question.

[14 : 52] It's sometimes the case That Christians can feel They want to know exactly Every possible moral or ethical implication For every decision In order to be comfortable doing it.

But that can be a crippling thing. Particularly when We live in a fallen world Which is so profoundly marked by sin In all kinds of ways. And if that's what we want to do It can mean we'll never make any decision.

But Paul's saying There's a freedom to knowing That the earth is the Lord The earth is the Lord And all that's within it. Paul is mindful of us Not limiting our freedoms unnecessarily. There's a time to do that As we'll see.

But when the souls Of those around us Aren't at stake He says don't raise questions. If it requires a PhD In a field To understand all the possible Permutations and sinful acts That may have been involved In putting a meal on our plate Or clothes on our back Or medicine on our bodies.

And Paul says We don't need to ask. Instead thank the Lord For his wonderful provision. The earth is the Lord's And all that's within it. Of course that's very different From not asking questions We don't want the answers to.

[16 : 07] But that's another issue. Paul's maxim Isn't that we give up All of our rights All of the time. No he's clear That we do have a planet To savor. But for Paul There's something That's more important Than that.

There are always People to save. But we're going to pause And reflect On the words On the screen As the musicians play. And we're going to be Seeing the words To tell all the world Of Jesus.

Let's say For this We're to say For this Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Well, that leads nicely into our third point.

[19 : 04] As well as having a planet to save her, there are people to save. Verses 28 and 29. People to save. Paul knows that whilst every good gift is from above, every soul needs our love.

Paul has said we're free to eat food that we buy at the marketplace, whether it came through the idol temple or not. And he said we're free to eat food in people's homes. That is, unless something happens.

You can picture it. Lips being licked. Mouths salivating at the sight of perfectly cooked, wonderfully seasoned succulent steak sitting on the center of the table.

Slow-cooked brandy peppercorn sauce to accompany it. Oh, it's going to be a good evening. Glad I came. And then the most dreaded of all things happens. The host says, I got a great deal on this meat.

They had a glut left over from cousin Susie's wedding. You know, the big one that was on at the temple last night. It's the best of stuff. They spare no expense. You are okay to eat meat from the temple, aren't you?

[20 : 15] You're a Christian. Is that okay? Paul says, pass the parsnips. That's what verse 28 is all about. Whilst we don't need to raise questions, if someone else does, then something overtakes our liberty.

Love. Then it isn't about my supper. It's about their soul. We don't stop eating for our own conscience. We know that food doesn't commend us to God.

Paul stops for the sake of other people's consciences. And for clarity on what the gospel means. It's important that the watching world don't see Christians as taking Jesus seriously.

When it suits. And when it's inconvenient, we sort of ignore him. When our diet, or worse still, our health might be affected, then we can ignore him.

Then he's not that big a deal. The issue here isn't whether that's true. The issue is that what is perceived to be true by the pagan world around, that's important.

[21 : 23] If they think, oh, Paul, he's a Christian, until you set a juicy joint of beef down in front of him. Then he's just like the rest of us. Well, that would utterly undermine his message, wouldn't it?

Jesus is Lord. He's the King of glory. To quote Psalm 24. Who can ascend the hill of the Lord? And who can stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false.

For an unbelieving Corinthian, seeing Paul eat the food, knowing it had been offered to an idol, that might look like he was lifting up his soul to what was false.

And what does that do to the spread of the gospel? It either says that the gospel isn't so great after all, the apostle will say, well, he takes it and leaves it as it suits him.

Or it will produce believers who are compromised from the off because they believe in Christ, but still engulf themselves in the temple world because they see what they think is Paul doing the same thing.

[22 : 29] Either way, the casualties are counted in souls. Well, what are some examples of this sort of thing in 21st century Glasgow?

Can we eat halal food? Well, the earth is the Lord's and all that is within it. A cow doesn't stop being God's cow because it's prayed over by a halal slaughterman.

I think this is in the realm of we don't need to ask questions about that. But we might conclude that there are circumstances where we would want to refrain from it.

If those who are present with us raise questions, if they think that indulging in halal meat is in some way showing reverence for Islam or Allah, then having a planet to save her gives way to people being saved.

What about yoga? Well, exercise is to be enjoyed. We're free to stretch and put ourselves in all kinds of contorted poses and positions like downward dog.

[23 : 37] Every good gift is from above, if that's what you think a good gift is. But what if you're doing a class and some of the people in the class are very much there to benefit from the meditative spiritual aspects of it?

Or the teacher bills themselves more as guru than gym instructor? Well, every good gift may be from above, but every soul needs our love.

What do they understand by your participation in it? So there may be circumstances where you're careful in how you talk about doing something like yoga. Whereas if it's billed as solely exercise, something like a class at your gym or doing it at home on your fire stick with Netflix or whoever's on there, well, the earth is the Lord's and all that's within it.

Or what about some ethical questions that are often posed in the production of medicine? There are cell lines that are used in the production of all kinds of treatments and vaccines that find their origin in one or two aborted fetuses.

John Wyatt has a very helpful article on this issue and he says there's a couple of things that are worth pointing out. One is that, of course, we ought to thank God for medicine that relieves all kinds of sufferings and prolongs many lives and is more readily available now than ever before.

[25 : 04] It is a good gift of common grace. But he says, secondly, what about the question of using something that may well be for the common good now, but is morally tainted?

He observes that in living in a complex, interconnected and fallen world, some kind of cooperation with evil is tragically unavoidable. So how a Christian involved in the actual production of some of these things deals with it will likely be very different than someone who's very far removed and has no influence on such things.

And he says that then a parent may well think that not using it, not using some of these treatments or vaccines to bring help for their children is worse. It's a worse evil. But that where there is a choice of treatments, they could well choose a less tainted one.

It's a difficult field to navigate through. But in something like this, I think there is a sense in which the earth is the Lord and all that's in it. We can enjoy these things.

But what if suddenly it's in the public eye that a certain treatment has ethical question marks linked to these aborted fetuses? So much so that a colleague at work asks you, what are you going to do?

[26 : 21] I may have in mind that conversation that you had with them a few months ago when you were talking about the terrible inconsistency of a lockdown that's to protect lives. But at the same time, there's a policy that was making sure that there could be lockdown abortions done at home.

Well, in that sort of context, when you've raised the question, we can think every good gift is from above, but every soul needs our love. And what does it do for the clarity of the gospel that people think, well, we're all in for Jesus, but that changes when it comes to our health?

I'm not wanting to put question marks around everything so that we must worry about doing something gravely wrong any time we go to the doctors or the pharmacy. Remember what Paul says about eating and not raising questions.

But he does say that when someone else raises the question, we must be prepared to bend. All that isn't the heart of the gospel, all that isn't absolutely true, anything that isn't clearly something we're commanded that we must do or must avoid, all of that is stuff that Paul is happy to be flexible on.

He'll give it up in the blink of an eye because people's souls outweigh our preferences. They outweigh even our own self. Paul has one final thing to say here.

[27 : 50] What bleeds out of him is concern for others over himself because his chief concern is, lastly, praise for our Savior. Verses 30 to 11, one.

Praise for our Savior. Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. For Paul, that is just another way of framing his maxim.

His concern is never primarily for himself. Verse 33, his not seeking his own advantage but trying to see of many is ultimately a concern for God above all else.

Remember the classic question that's asked among young Christians in the dating world? How far is too far for me to go with my boyfriend or girlfriend?

Well, even asking a question like that is a very Corinthian question. Look at Paul's concern. It isn't asking, what's fair game? What can I get away with? What am I allowed to do? His question is asking, what's for God's glory?

[28 : 59] Not what's fair game. What's for God's glory? When we are able to enjoy all that God has created, thank him. Praise him. Enjoy it.

Remembering that the giver is always far better than the gift. That glorifies him when we enjoy his creation. And when we need to be flexible, when we have to give things up, when the cross's shape on our life means sacrificing things for the sake of others, doing that gladly glorifies God.

Turning down the steak and pepper sauce wouldn't have entered Paul's mind once he'd tucked into his parsnips. He'd have forgotten about it. The real cost for Paul was that for doing the right thing, for exemplifying the cross, he would, verse 30, he'd be denounced.

He always faced questions for his appearing unprincipled. And that's so often the case with the areas of the Christian life that are not black and white. On one side, when you enjoy your freedom, someone will think you shouldn't have.

And on the other side, when you surrender it for the purposes of the gospel, others will think you weak. For Paul, he sacrificed left and right for the gospel and at great cost to himself.

[30 : 21] And with it, he had churches who looked down on him all the time, never flavor of the month, often out on his own. Well, why did he put up with such a costly pattern?

Because chief in his mind was that the God who rescued him would get the glory that he's due. Not Paul getting the glory, not Corinth getting the glory they so loved.

God being glorified. Because the God who confounded all human wisdom and turned it all upside down did so in order that his people would be cleansed and renewed.

And he did so through the ultimate sacrifice. Through that which looks so weak, that looks like defeat. That's so disappointing looking. He did it through the cross.

If you have five minutes spare in the week, why don't read 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and you can see Paul speak in detail about all those things. But for now, let's remember Paul's great delight back in chapter 9.

[31 : 30] His great delight, he said in chapter 9, was to present the gospel free of charge. To make it seem as free as it really is. Or, 11.1, it's to imitate Christ.

Christ, to be like him. To bleed with him. To accept the sacrifice and the cost so that others might be rescued. So whether Paul eats or drinks or whatever he does, he does so for the glory of God.

That's the steer for us. In any situation, in everyday life, how can we, by enjoying, sorry, in any situation, how can we magnify in our lives just how precious our heavenly father is to us?

Sometimes that will be by enjoying all kinds of things that he's given us to enjoy. Sometimes that will be by refusing them. So that no one outside the church, verse 32, whether Jew or Greek, or no one inside the church of God, will be hindered in being saved.

The event in history that most magnifies the glory of God's grace is the cross of Christ. That is what set in motion the existence of the church, the church which is the showroom of God's grace, the cross.

[32 : 56] As we finish, C.S. Lewis wrote, die before you die. There's no chance after. So is there anything more glorifying for us to do than to carry our cross in even the smallest ways, to die to ourselves even in everyday decisions?

Knowing that even when our sacrifice is denounced by other Christians, when we're out on our own, we are following in the footsteps of Jesus, imitating him, imitating the one who gave up the glory of heaven to die on a tree.

How do you win at everyday Christianity? Whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, do it for the glory of God.

That's how we win. What makes a spiritual church? It's that when you cut them open, they bleed the pattern of the cross.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we ask for your help so that we would long for that which lasts into eternity.

[34 : 20] expose to us the true reality of the passing glories and wisdom of this world so that it would be our delight to die each day that we might be like our wonderful Savior, the Lord Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.