Divisions Over Lifestyle And Living In The World – Follow Up

Key Passage: 1 Corinthians 8-10

What's happening?
In ancient Corinth, much of everyday social life revolved around voluntary associations such as trade guilds, social clubs, cultural groups, and religious societies. Their regular shared meals strengthened relationships, built business and social connections, and reinforced belonging, but were often connected to idol worship and pagan sacrifices. These gatherings were a central way people participated in society. The church, however, brought people from different backgrounds and social classes together around a shared meal as a new family in Christ.

Some believers (most likely the more upper-class and educated) had the knowledge and confidence to distinguish between honoring an idol and just having a business dinner or meal with friends. While others (probably of lower status) couldn't see the difference and could not even eat meat bought in the market without feeling they were engaging in idol worship. So what's happening is that people in the church are divided over different stances on this social issue: Is it ok for a Christian to share meals and eat meat that is offered to idols?

Christians today often ask similar questions and divide over social issues related to how they interact with the culture around them. The Corinthians probably want Paul to give them an official position on the social issue of eating meat offered to idols and tell them yes or no, but that's not what Paul does. What does he do? He points them back to the gospel and the basic principles of Christ.

What has Christ done, and who are we now that we believe?
Up front, Paul shifts the focus from what we know about God to loving God and being known by him: "If anyone loves God, he is known by God" (8:3).

We don't belong to God because of our own knowledge, but because he first loved us and rescued us by grace. Focusing on our knowledge leads to pride and competition, but focusing on how God has rescued us by his grace through Jesus' sacrifice leads to humility and love for God and others. (ch. 13).

Paul also reminds them that through Jesus' sacrifice, they have been redeemed and brought together as one body—his holy family, united in Christ (10:16–17). Their shared meals when they gather reinforce this new identity and remind them that they belong to Jesus and, like Israel long ago, are called to reflect God's goodness to the world.

What principles have we been given to help us line up with the good news and live out who we are in Jesus?

- We belong to the one true God; Idols have no claim on us. (8:4,8)
- Loving your brother/sister in Christ matters more than exercising your rights and freedoms. (8:9-12, ch9)
- Our Loyalty to Jesus must never be compromised. (10:14-21)
- Live to glorify God and cultivate opportunities for the gospel. (10:31-11:1)
- We must not divide from or look down on fellow believers who don't share our personal convictions. (10:29-30, see also Romans 14).

What does lining up with Christ and his principles look like in this situation?

Is it ok to eat meat offered to Idols? Paul says,

> ***YES***, you are free to participate in the world around you; no God is more powerful than Jesus Christ.
>
> ***YES***, if it helps avoid unnecessary offense and cultivates opportunities for the gospel.
>
> **NO,** if your participation damages the faith of others in the church family.
>
> **NO**, if it compromises your conscience before God and engages you in idol worship.

Key issue for us today:

How can you shine the light of Christ in the world if you withdraw from it and build barriers between yourself and the people around you?

Yet that's what happens when we turn following Jesus into a primarily academic pursuit of knowledge and a long list of external do's and don'ts.

As well-meaning as we might be, focusing on making external rules and stating particular positions on social issues will not grow hearts of faith, and it will not strengthen the unity and testimony of the church. A lifestyle built on Christ's internal guiding principles differs greatly from one built on checklists of external do's and don'ts.

Paul is showing us the difference. He's teaching the Corinthians how to freely interact with their world without dividing the church or allowing the surrounding culture to compromise their love and devotion to Christ.

Jesus is the perfect example of what these principles look like in practice. He freely shared meals with tax collectors and sinners, attended weddings and celebrations, and turned water into wine, yet was not given to drunkenness or selfish indulgence, and never compromised his loyalty to the Father and his purposes. He put others before himself, showed kindness while speaking truth, and always brought glory to God.

Discuss in Community:

1. How can knowing what is right sometimes lead us to look down on others rather than love them?
2. When might exercising your freedom as a Christian hurt someone else? How could you respond differently?
3. Where do you find it challenging to participate in everyday social, professional, or cultural activities while remaining faithful to Jesus?
4. How can you tell when participating in something around you is beginning to compromise your loyalty to Jesus?
5. What is the difference between making decisions based on a list of religious rules and making decisions based on Christ's principles?
6. What is one choice you face in everyday life where you need to consider not just what you are free to do, but how your choice affects others and reflects Jesus?