

Sermon 9

Topic: Taking Care of God's Temple

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:31

1 Corinthians 10:31

"³¹So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God."

The need for self-care is a growing concern in our world. The exigencies of the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated preexisting challenges and have given prominence to many existential issues. One of the results of this is the concern regarding the state of health of our people as a whole and the way we navigate the present challenges as families and communities. Recent studies have shown that the affordability and availability of good and nutritious meals have steadily moved out of the reach of many persons. While governmental and non-governmental organizations must ramp up their support systems for these persons who are at risk, renewed activism on personal health must also take centre-stage. Physical, psychological and spiritual well-being is of critical importance and demand our full attention. It is important for us to remember that each of us only has one body and God's intention is that it should last us for a lifetime. When we are healthy then it puts us in a position to fulfill the purpose for which we were created. The care for our bodies, the temple of God, is a duty to which we are all called. We do this by consuming healthy foods, maintaining a balanced diet, and adopting a healthy lifestyle. The theme of responsibility is therefore being lifted up before us today for our attention. In addition to encouraging persons to seek healing through the legitimate ministries of the church and the society, we should also focus on prevention of illness in the first place. Too many persons end up spending a lot of their resources on curative health care, when preventative approaches would have borne incalculable benefits. In addition, prevention demonstrates better stewardship of our economic resources.

The discussion in the text in which our chosen verse is located is an interesting one. It raises questions of freedom and conscience and proposes to provide a balanced approach to the issues which accompany religious life. In other words, Paul, the writer, was trying to encourage the Corinthian church to avoid situations that cause confusion and offense, even when they were exercising their right and freedom to choose. He says, "whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." This command requires that we examine the ways that it is possible to glorify God in all areas of our lives generally but more particularly in our eating or drinking. We must discover God's way of living and being, in order to please and bring glory to God.

Doing things God's way is an ideal against which our human will struggles. We find it difficult to surrender to the will of God because our human nature is naturally uncomfortable with anything except its own way. Our desires therefore often run into contention with what God requires because it may not satisfy us. What glorifies God is often what we are unwilling or unable to accept or do. Things that glorify God are not always the easy and comfortable choice. If there is one area where this is true, it is with regard

to matters concerning food. There are so many food and drink products that are presented to us that it is not surprising that, in this maze of options, we lose sight of some basic principles regarding food. Paul seeks to elevate the appreciation of food from the purely physiological level to a higher spiritual and ethical plane. Food is not just for enjoyment or nourishment, he seems to say, it is also a part of our personal walk with God, in fact, it is a part of our worship.

Since we are called to an understanding of food consumption that glorifies God, here are three principles that may help us to do this.

1. Consume foods that are good for the body.

Our Public Health experts tell us that the Caribbean has a high prevalence and rate of premature mortality due to Non-Communicable Diseases, with unhealthy diets and obesity being the leading risk factors. We simply consume too many things that are not good for us. Our diets contain high levels of sugar, salt and fats, all items which can lead to ill-health when consumed indiscriminately. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has only worsened the quality and adequacy of diets in the region. But there are alternatives. There are available, nutritious, cost-effective and reliable sources of food and nutrition that will help to reverse these trends. We have abundant supplies of fruit, herbs and seasonally available vegetables which have the potential to transform our bodies and health and reverse negative and unhealthy conditions. The power to choose and to change is well within our grasp, it is up to us to take care of the temple of God and to glorify God in our consumption of food. Eating healthy is a good way to please God because it is a responsible way to care for the temple of God.

2. Consume food in ways that are good for the conscience

The text addresses food offered to idols as a matter of conscience, that is, the conscience of a weak member of the faith who may be offended by the Christian's participation. Paul says that good conscience should be one basis for the way we participate in the consumption of food and drink. This may be a strange concept for most modern persons who have little or no appreciation of food offerings for idol worship. The point however is the impact of one's action on another person who may be offended by choices that may be considered to be a challenge to or worse, a betrayal of faith in God. In our Caribbean context, there are taboos regarding substances such as alcohol, some herbs, and other legal substances. These are regarded as off-limits by some and to be used in limited ways by others. There are some dietary habits that we have as people of the Caribbean which are not only inimical to good health but also to good conscience. In this regard, the abuse of some substances has been a contributory factor in the disruptions and upheavals in home and domestic life and other social relationships. The good conscience of our loved ones and family members appears to be at stake when we selfishly indulge in consumption practices that do not glorify God. This goes against the responsibility

that we have to exercise care and concern for each other as well as the biblical teaching that we ought to be our brothers and sisters' keeper.

How does our freedom affect the sensibilities of others? Paul seems to suggest that we glorify God when we seek to act in ways that respect the consciences of others. So, we are free to eat and drink as we like, but the text raises the consumption of food and drink to the moral plane; to the level of conscientious regard for others. It appears that the best way to meet this demand, is to find out what will bring God glory. Two such means are the principles of abstinence and moderation/self-control. We exercise moderation when we make judicious and wise calculations on the portions which we should consume. We do this bearing in mind that overdoing things is the result of bad judgment and carries disastrous consequences. Self-control is a part of the fruit of the Spirit which Paul discusses in Galatians 5. We honour God and uplift our sisters and brothers when we exercise self-control. Once we follow these moral and ethical principles, we are likely to eliminate or at least minimize the possibility of causing offense to others. Doing what we can to support the health of others, whether physical or otherwise, is within the spirit of caring for the others. We should therefore not only take care of our temple, but we should take care of the temple of others. This could have serious personal implications as we sometimes benefit from the the poor eating habits of others; whe we build big businesses or we get special treatment at the expense of the health of others we act l ways that run counter to the spirit of care.

The responsible Christian will therefore be sensitive and respectful of the conscience of others, especially those who are weaker than they are, and seek God's glory in the process.

3. Consume food that is good for the health of the human spirit.

Our understanding of our existence is aided when we perceive and apprehend the spiritual nature of our being. We are not just flesh, blood and bones, but we were created in the image and likeness of God. We have attributes that are given to us by God which define us as spiritual beings. We therefore must come to the point where we accept that, just as there is food for the body, there is food for the soul as well. Jesus said in Matt 4:4 ***"One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."*** Spiritual food is the only nourishment for spiritual beings. The soul which we possess needs to be nourished by the food which is designed and provided for its sustenance, this is the word of God. Praying, reading and meditating on God's word daily are sources of support that cannot be matched by any other activity in which we can engage. When we pay attention to and satisfy our need for spiritual food, we build up spiritual health which helps us to deal with the life in the flesh which taxes body, mind and spirit. When we desire to flourish and grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, we set up reservoirs of strength that will redound to the eternal benefit of our souls and those of others around us. So, we ought to develop an appetite for spiritual food. We can consume it in scripture readings and meditations, singing and listening to spiritual songs and hymns, offering prayers for

ourselves and others, and engaging the sermons and Bible Studies which are prepared and presented by the shepherds and servants of the Most High God. In short, we must feast on the “bread of life” which provides us with “abundant life.”

Conclusion

The responsible Christian will be careful to watch what she or he consumes. Their consumption pattern will be one that enhances and ensures good health. This is the pattern in which food is consumed that is good for the body. Irresponsible and unwise eating habits will be rejected and good and healthy choices will be made. Further, the responsible Christian will consume foods in ways that are good for the conscience. We avoid feelings of guilt and shame when we seek to do all things to the glory of God. Finally, the responsible Christian will consume food that is good for the soul. Our feast on heavenly bread will build up our spiritual strength and enhance our spiritual growth, that we will no longer be “babes desiring sincere milk” but mature and “strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” In all these ways, let us take care of the temple of God. Amen.