**“Not All Things Are Expedient”**

Paul revealed in his first letter to the Corinthian church that many of their members were selfish. Their selfishness was apparent in their “us against them” attitude in chapter 1, their lack of concern for the spiritual welfare of a wayward member in chapter 5, the lawsuits of chapter 6, their abuse of the Lord’s Supper in chapter 11 and their jealousy over miraculous gifts in chapter 12.

In chapters 8 and 10, Paul used dietary decisions to illustrate an important principle: Selflessness toward brethren often means acting in their best interest even at the expense of our personal liberty.

In Paul’s day, local churches had a common problem. Some members had left idol worship to become disciples of Christ and they brought some emotional baggage with them. They grew up assigning religious significance to consuming meat that had been sacrificed to their idol. Now that they were Christians, they struggled to eat meat without thinking of the honor it was bringing to the god they no longer honored.

Other members of the same assembly shared Paul’s understanding that foods were created by God “to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth” (1 Timothy 4:3). They knew that they were at liberty to eat any meats available without regard to where it came from.

One other divine truth further complicated this situation. “All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense” (Romans 14:20). In other words, it is sinful to violate one’s own conscience even if those actions are not inherently wrong.

It is in this context that Paul makes the following observation: “All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify” (1 Corinthians 10:23). The first century Christian had quite a menu from which to choose; beef, chicken, pork, fowl, fish, vegetables, bread. But the selfless Christian’s first consideration would have been, what can my brother or sister eat in good conscience? How will my choices affect them? What is the likelihood that my decisions will influence them to violate their conscience and go along with my menu choices?

There is an overarching criteria constraining our personal liberty as saints: “Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor” (10:24). This principle applies in all areas of our lives, not just what we choose to eat. Of all the behaviors in which I am at liberty to engage, which would be to the greatest spiritual benefit to my brothers and sisters in Christ? The truth is, of the things that are lawful, not all are profitable and edifying. Spiritual maturity will motivate us to think less of self and more of the needs of others.

**John McKee**

**West Murray church of Christ**