

3/27/2011

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY Almighty and Everlasting God, you loved us eternally through the sacrifice of your Son. Help us by your forgiving love to be willing to sacrifice to love others in your name. Give us your guidance as we strengthen our bodies through the gift of food; We ask these prayers through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE EPISTLE LESSON Romans 14:13-22

(God's ways of working, through the cross, is considered foolishness by the world.)

13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. 14 As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. 15 If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.

16 Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. **17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.**

19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. **20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. 21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.** 22 So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves.

THE GOSPEL LESSON Matthew 11:1-19

(The Pharisees criticize John the Baptist and Jesus about food.)

1 After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee. 2 When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples 3 to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" 4 Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. 6 Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

7 As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? 8 If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. 9 Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is the one about whom it is written: "'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' 11 I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the

Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. 13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. 14 And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. 15 He who has ears, let him hear.

16 "To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: 17 "'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' **18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.'** 19 **The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners."** 'But wisdom is proved right by her actions."

INTRO - In 1975 I was at the seminary and attended a party with other seminarians. Only there was a man there from another school, and there was some tension about this fact. I greeted the man and made a joke to hopefully disperse the tension. Fourteen years later, I learned that joke was not taken as I meant it, and had offended my friend. The point here is I did not mean to offend my friend. I did not even know I had offended him till 14 years later.

How often have you offended or hurt others without meaning to do so, or even knowing you did so? I was counting the other day, and it was not just once or twice. Unfortunately, I expect that all of us have offended others, whether intentionally or not.

I. One area where Christians today might not even think there are sensitivities is the area of food. But, when Scripture talks about not offending others, food is one of the most talked about areas.

A. There are two reasons food was a topic regarding righteousness, and sensitivity.

1. First, for the Jews there were kosher laws, laws that described which foods the Jews could and could not eat and still be ceremonially clean for worship, for example, pork was forbidden.

A. Some think that God gave these laws to Jews for health reasons.

B. Whatever the reason, these food laws set the Jews apart from others as the children of God.

C. But, Jesus surprised the people of his time by saying all foods are clean. In Mark 7 we read. **18 "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? 19 For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.") 20 He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.'**

D. Paul talks about this issue too in our Epistle lesson for today in verse 14. **As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself.**

E. Do you see how much this was discussed, and how people were offended?

3. The other area of food sensitivity was food sold in the market in Roman and Greek towns, for which had been offered to idols. In some cases this was considered idolotry.

A. This was a topic of discussion for a Council or meeting in Jerusalem we can read about in Acts 15.

B. Actually, Paul points out that the idols are not real gods, but false or imagined gods. So He says in **1 Corinthians 10: 25 Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience,**

B. But, just because a Christian, at least in Biblical times, was free to eat anything, whether or not it was kosher, whether or not it was offered to idols, the

question was still raised, in exercising my freedom do I harm the conscience of another?

1. Today's epistle lesson says in verses 20-21, **20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. 21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.**

2. There is a greater law above and beyond what is legal, and that law is what is loving others, accomplishing God's purpose.

3. We don't want to offend others, we don't want to hurt their faith.

C. However, it should also be noted that sometimes, no matter what we do you can't help but offend someone. Listen to what Jesus says in today's Gospel lesson. **18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners." 'But wisdom is proved right by her actions.'**

II. For Christians, the bottom line is we want to live for Jesus. This means loving God and loving people. So, because God loved us, we see to serve Him even in what we eat, According 1 Corinthians 10:31 **"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.**

A. Remember my beginning story? Remember how easy it is to offend people? And, remember this is an area that has so much written in Scripture. There are still ways we can offend without meaning to do so.

1. For the most part we don't have to worry about kosher laws or food offered to idols, though, there are some churches that still abide by the Old Testament Laws, even though Jesus and Paul say we don't have to do so. The best advice is don't tell someone else what they have to do if it isn't commanded or forbidden by God..

2. There are also people who are vegetarians or vegans. At times Christians can look down on others who do something Scripture does not require. At times, Christians who follow this kind of life-style can look down on those who do not. Again, we are to live loving others. The best advice is be sensitive and don't tell others what they have to do, if it is not commanded or forbidden by God.

3. However, There is an area where how we use food is part of our relationship with God. 1 Corinthians 3:16 and other verses say our body is God's temple. **16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?** It is important that we take care of our bodies and food is part of that healthy self-care. Now, I've read some books that say one thing, and other books say others about diet. But, for the most part we know what healthy is. We are to keep our bodies healthy as possible so that we can serve God.

B. All this talk can seem a little confusing. Our Epistle lesson tells us the bottom line **17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and**

drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. If eating gets in the way of serving God or loving others, we need to refrain.

CONCLUSION - In 1989 I heard from the friend I had earlier offended. I wrote and apologized. No joke is worth offending another. Being right is not more important than righteousness, peace, joy, and love. Isn't it a shame when something small keeps us from loving others. That's why even in matters of food we follow the sacrifice of love.