Text: I Corinthians 8:4-13; 10:31-33
"High Definition Living … Liberty with Limits"

INTRODUCTION

Now take out your Bibles and open them to I Corinthians 10:31. This morning I'm continuing a series of messages from I Corinthians 8-10 entitled "High Definition Living." I'm talking about living in such a way that the glory of God is seen as clearly as it ought to be seen through our lives. High Definition Living means that I'm living my life to accurately reflect the glory of God.

> **ILLUSTRATION** – "High definition" is the new technology that will take over the way we look at things on a TV screen or even listen to the radio in our cars. In non-engineering terms high-definition potentially offers a much better picture quality than, say, your standard television. High definition broadcasts offer a greater clarity. The picture on screen will be less blurred, less fuzzy. Hi Def also brings to us smoother motion, richer and more natural colors, and awesome sound. The image details on screen will be more vivid that your eye has ever detected.
>
> Now you may not be able afford tickets to the NBA playoffs, but with Hi Def TV, the image you see will make it seem like you're sitting right there at courtside. Now obviously it isn't perfect, but it's very close to the real thing.

Now the Bible says that no one has ever seen God the Father. But God the Son came to reveal Him. The Bible says that when Jesus came, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth." So in the face of Jesus we see the real, authentic glory of the Father. And just as it was the Lord Jesus' mission to bring glory to the Father, so it is ours. God wants to reveal His glory through the lives of His people.

> Now just like Hi Def TV, it's not the real thing; but it's a very good look at it. And you and I as believers are not God. Our glory is a reflected glory. And people ought to get a glimpse of the glory of God in the way that we live our lives.

And that's what the Bible says in I Corinthians 10:31. Look at it:

"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31 NIV)

> NOTE: We're going to memorize this verse over the next few weeks. Boys and girls, I have a little gift for you when you come up and recite this verse for me. Let's repeat it again.

High Definition Living means that I live my life in such a way that God's glory results from my life.

> **Matthew 5:16 (NIV) - Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise** (glorify) **your Father in heaven.**

Is there something about the way you live your life that causes others to recognize that God is working in you and through you? And the result is not that glory comes to you; instead it goes to God.

ILLUSTRATION – Jack Keen, our deacon chairman, reminded our deacons last week about the tendency of people to say, "Hey everyone, watch this." And then they do something that they hope will impress others. I was reminded of my daughter Allison telling me about some boys who live in their neighborhood and who love to push the limits with their bicycles. At first they made a little ramp to run their bikes up, catch a little air and land. And as each one started down the street they would holler, "Hey watch this!" Then they got a little bolder and built two ramps … one to go up on and one to land on. And each little guy would take off and holler "Hey watch this!" The next thing they knew one of them laid down between the two ramps, while the other one flew his bike over, (Children, do not attempt this. This stunt is only to be performed by people with no brains.) My son-in-law walked out to the street and said, "Are you boys sure that's a safe thing to do?" And the one on the bike said, "Sure, we tried it out on our little brother first."

The thing is that as believers we live our lives not to say, "Hey watch this," so others will be impressed with what we do. No, it is that others will watch our lives and see God's character, His glory in Hi Def, and give Him the glory.

Now just take your Bibles and find I Corithians 8-10. Place those pages between your fingers. This section in First Corinthians shows how we bring glory to God in high definition. We have the opportunity every day we live to demonstrate the glory of God in high definition:

Two areas where the glory of God is manifested:

- **<u>Edifying</u> believers (8:1)**

  1 Corinthians 8:1 (NIV) - We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but <u>love builds up</u>.

- **<u>Evangelizing</u> non-believers (9:19,22)**

  1 Corinthians 9:19 (NIV) - Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to <u>win as many as possible</u>.

  1 Corinthians 9:22 (NIV) - To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I <u>might save some</u>.

So when Paul says, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God," he's saying that in the way we live our lives we bring about glory to God in our efforts to edify other believers, and to evangelize non-believers.

Now you notice that in the verses we read earlier we saw statements like "we all possess knowledge" and "I am free…" You know, Jesus said…

John 8:32 (NIV) - Then you will <u>know</u> the truth, and the truth will set you <u>free</u>.

Jesus said that when the Son of God sets you free, you are free indeed.

We are released from the stains and the chains of sin. We are set free from the condemnation that has come because we are sinners. We are freed from the tyranny of having to keep the Law in order to be saved. I'm not saved because I keep the rules, but because Christ fulfilled every requirement of God on my behalf. Christ did that for us on the Cross. It's a glorious thing to be set free in Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:17b (NIV) - Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

So we live in freedom … freedom from sin, but not freedom to sin.

I can celebrate this freedom, this liberty, in my relationship with God. But there will be times when I limit my liberties for the sake of the well-being of others … that they can be saved and built up in their faith. And in this way, I can display the glory of God in hi-def.

And there are two examples found here in this part of I Corinthians. To best display the glory of God in my everyday life…

1. I LIMIT MY <u>SOCIAL</u> LIBERTY IN ORDER TO BETTER <u>BUILD</u> <u>UP</u> OTHER BELIEVERS (I Corinthians 8).

Last week I told you about the polytheistic world in which the NT was written. The worship of various gods and goddess was a common thing. And part of that worship was the offering of meat to these false gods, many times these offerings were made at a social gathering just before the steaks were thrown on the grill. Should Christians eat this meat, whether at this party, or in the marketplace where the leftovers from the slaughtered animal were put up for sale?

And some concerned believers in Corinth wrote a letter to Paul to ask if it is alright for Christians to go to these social functions where this kind of activity was taking place. Should they eat meat that was sacrificed to idols?

Now the Bible talks here about…

- **Liberty to enjoy myself in a social setting (vv.4-8)**

  You know, Jesus went to parties, to banquets. He went to weddings. He accepted invitations to eat in the homes of people, even people whose reputation was not that great. And He enjoyed Himself and the company of others.

  Note: This liberty to enjoy myself is in matters that are not taught in Scripture to be immoral, illegal or unethical. I wouldn't be free to go to a party and engage in sexual immorality, or break the law, or to steal stuff from others.

  But what the Bible is addressing here seems to be not immoral, illegal or unethical.

1 Corinthians 8:4 - So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one.

And he goes on to say in …

1 Corinthians 8:8 - But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

Under the new covenant in Christ, the eating of or abstaining from certain foods doesn't make us more spiritual or less spiritual.

So the Bible talks here about the liberty we have to enjoy ourselves in a social gathering, as long as we are not specifically violating a command of the Scripture. But it also talks about…

- **Liberty <u>with limits</u> in order to achieve the glory of God by building up other believers (vv.9-13)**

  Here's the deal: You see, not all believers were mature in their knowledge and understanding of this truth. Some were new Christians, just saved out of paganism and its many temptations and evils. They still thought that idols, though evil, were real and that the gods the idols represented really existed.

  They knew that there is only one *right* God, but they had not yet fully come to understand that there is only one *real* God. And the experiences of their past in paganism were so fresh that they wanted to reject everything that was related to it.

  So, to participate in any way in these feasts was to be tempted to fall back into their former practices. Their consciences were not yet strong enough to allow them to eat this kind of food without having it pull them back their old way of life.

  So Paul says …

  1 Corinthians 8:9 (NIV) - Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

  So we limit our social liberties if by doing so we can glorify God by building up other believers, not tearing them down.

  The word for "stumbling block" was associated with the putting of something in the path of another that would cause them to be tripped up.

  ILLUSTRATION – I remember when our kids were little and we had toys scattered everywhere. Most of the time we asked them to put their toys up before they went to bed, but sometimes they would leave something out. And if you got up in the middle of the night to get a drink of water, you soon found out what a "stumbling block" was.

It's one thing to leave something out accidentally. We're talking here about choosing a course of action that would truly hurt another believer.

So what would not otherwise be wrong for us becomes wrong if it is puts a stumbling block in the path of another believer. Obviously, there were some Corinthian believers who could not handle this liberty; it would pull them down into the pit from which they had been delivered.

If an immature brother sees us doing something that bothers his conscience, he's not edified, not built up in his faith. We should never influence a fellow Christian to do anything the Holy Spirit, through that person's conscience, is protecting him from.

Now another believer looks at that practice and sees no harm in going to one of those social functions in a pagan temple. He does not accept those pagan beliefs or participate in the pagan practices, but he can associate with pagan people because he is spiritual strong. He has spiritual knowledge that allows him to do that.

But if a Christian who has a conscience that is weak sees that mature brother eating in the temple, the weak brother is likely to be tempted to go against his own conscience and to eat in temple.

ILLUSTRATION: A small child is not allowed to play with dad's tools in the garage, or with mom's sharp knives in the kitchen. They're not old enough yet to handle those things without hurting themselves or someone else. Now those restrictions are gradually lifted as the child grows older and learns for himself what is dangerous and what is not. And he learns how to use that tool or that knife without hurting himself or others.

In the same way, God limits His spiritual children by their conscience. As they grow in knowledge and maturity the limits of conscience are expanded. We should never run ahead of our conscience. And we should never encourage by our words or actions someone else to do that.

As we mature, conscience allows us to go more places and to do more things because we will have more spiritual strength and better spiritual judgment.

So it may not be sin, but if we do it and it causes a brother to be offended, then it becomes sin. We should be eager to limit our liberties at any time and to any degree in order to help a fellow believer – a brother we love, and a precious soul for whom Christ did.

Think about it: Is the enjoyment of some of these social liberties worth the damage that may be done to a fellow believer? Just look at the potential damage that can be done:

We could become "a stumbling block to the weak…" (8:9)

"This weak brother … is destroyed…" (8:11)

The word for “destroyed” means to utterly ruin someone.

We could “wound their weak conscience…” (8:12)

“Wound” is to literally hit or strike against someone.

It goes on to say in v.12 that when I sin against a brother or sister in this way, I sin against Christ, who died to redeem them.

Because of our actions “their conscience is … defiled”(8:7)

“Defiled” means to be stained or to be made dirty.

My actions may “cause my brother to fall into sin…” (8:13)

That phrase translates the word from which we get our word “scandal,” and it means to “put a snare in the way of another to trap them or cause them to stumble.”

1 Corinthians 8:13 (NIV) - Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

There are some areas in life that are clearly out-of-bounds for us. God’s word tells us specifically that certain things are wrong or right. And we do not have the freedom to go outside those limits. But in our world there are some other areas that are not specifically called sin or disobedience. Oh, you might could build a strong case for not doing this thing or that, by applying other principles. But even at that you would find genuine students of the Bible who would not agree with you in your application of that truth.

And there are many issues that fall in this category. The consumption of alcoholic beverages is one. Various kinds of entertainment or fashion would fall into this category.

I am seeing a trend in this regard today in the church as it pertains to the consumption of alcoholic beverages … wine and beer. Where in the past the issue was pretty clear cut as far as drinking goes, now I hear people saying, “I don’t see any prohibition in Scripture to the use of alcoholic beverages, so I’m free to do it, and I think people who don’t are being legalistic.” I’m hearing that a lot, even from pastors. What they’re saying is, “I’m mature. I have this knowledge, and I don’t see anything wrong with it.” But not everyone has this knowledge.

Again, this limited liberty is for a purpose. It is to achieve the glory of God in my life in high definition in the edification of fellow believers.

CONCLUSION

I told you last week I’m not going to provide easy answers. I want you to pray, and read the Scriptures and let the Spirit of God inform your conscience about what you eat, or drink, or whatever you do.

Questions:

- Am I going overboard in this? Is it excessive?
- Is this really helpful or useful? Or is it just something I want to do?
- Can I imagine Jesus doing this and giving thanks to the Father for it?
- Can I invite others to join me in this and know that it will not harm them?
- Is this pointing another person to Christ?
- Is this building up another believer?
- Will the Lord be glorified?

1 Corinthians 10:31 (NIV) - So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.