

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 11/9/11 Wednesday Evening
1 Corinthians 10:14-33 “To Do Or Not To Do, That Is the Question”

To do or not to do, that is the question. The Christian life is full of choices. Some are black and white. Should I tell a lie? Should I steal? Should I go to church and worship the Lord this Sunday or spend the day on my boat?

Then there are the gray issues. What kind of music should I listen to? Is it okay to read a certain book by a non-Christian author? What kind of fashion styles should a Christian wear? Does the Bible say anything about body piercing? Is it okay to rent a video, and if so, are there certain videos a Christian should not watch?

Again, to do or not to do, that is the question. 1 Corinthians 10 can help us.

Only God is unique. We are not. When we face a situation and think we’re the first person ever to encounter such a challenge, we are mistaken.

What’s more, we need not face situations as though no one had ever been down that path before. The path of life is well worn. God has been dealing with His people for a long time now. He wants us to learn from the past. That’s one of the reasons why He gave us the Scriptures.

We, like the Israelites, are prone to allow problems to distract us (and even disqualify us) from meaningful service to God. We can learn a great deal from the Israelites. Let’s consider our forefathers from four perspectives, as given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:1-14.

Review: From last time...

I. Consider the advantages our forefathers experienced (1-4).

A. They experienced God’s presence (1a).

They were “under the cloud.”

B. They experienced God’s power (1b).

They “passed through the sea.”

C. They experienced God’s provisions (2-4).

1. *God gave them a great leader (2).*

2. *God gave them spiritual food (3).*

3. *God gave them spiritual drink (4).*

The Israelites had lots going for them, plenty of divine advantages. But the next word indicates a problem. V 5—“Nevertheless.”

II. Consider the outcome our forefathers experienced (5).

A. God was not pleased with most of them.

B. They died in the wilderness.

Paul says their “bodies were scattered over the desert.” And what is one reason this happened, according to v 6? For an *example* for us.

III. Consider where our forefathers went wrong (6-10).

A. Here’s what they did.

Paul mentions 5 sins...

1. *They set their hearts on evil things (6).*

2. *They committed idolatry (7).*
3. *They committed sexual immorality (8).*
4. *They tested the Lord (9).*
5. *They grumbled (10).*

B. Here are the consequences they experienced.

1. *In one day 23,000 died (8).*
2. *They were killed by snakes (9).*
3. *They were killed by the destroying angel (10).*

IV. Consider the implications of our forefathers' actions (11-22).

A. We must learn from the past (11).

B. We must be careful in how we respond to problems in the present (12-13).

In v 13 Paul explains how times of testing and temptation work. Israel failed during her time of testing. We, too, can fail if we're not careful. But we can succeed if we take seriously the three truths presented in v 13.

1. *Our problems are not unique.*
2. *God is faithful.*
3. *We can stand up in any situation if we face it God's way and by God's help.*

C. We must flee from idolatry (14-22).

That's where we left off last time...

New Material...

Remember, the issue being discussed in this section of the letter is food offered to idols. Food is just food, as we've seen. But that doesn't mean this is a trivial matter. Idols are not just trinkets to play around with. Idolatry is a real danger. It captured the Israelites. It allures us in many ways, shapes, and sizes.

So Paul begins to apply the lessons from history in some very practical ways for the Corinthians (and us). He exhorts us to *flee from idolatry*.

Q: Do Christians struggle with idols? We surely do. An idol is anything which takes the place of the true God in our lives. Think of some examples. In the first century an idol took the form of a stone statue. But that's not what Paul has in mind here. A Christian won't bow down to a stone idol. But he will give his heart to other things.

Good things can become idols. A job. A person you care about. Pleasure. Insistence upon getting one's *rights*. "I've got a right for some respect around here." Or, "I've got a right for people to pay attention to me."

Calvin called the human heart an "idol factory." It constantly manufactures things, other than Christ, that become the focal point in our lives.

Discuss: What particular idols did Paul have in mind when he gave the Corinthian Christians this charge to flee idolatry?

Now the question *why*. Why should a Christian flee idolatry? Three reasons...

1. *Common sense says we should (15).*
Q: What did Paul call the Corinthians in v 15?
2. *Communion says we should (16-17).*
In what way? Read verses 16-17.

Q: What happens when we participate in Communion? We remember our Savior. We worship Him. We are reminded of our participation with Him and each other. He is our Savior and Lord. How then can we bow our hearts to another?

3. *The example of Israel says we should (18-22).*

In v 18 Paul commands us to “Consider the people of Israel” (KJV “Behold Israel”). Keep learning from the past.

Read verses 18-22.

What can we learn from Israel? Here are some lessons about sacrifices and their significance (keep in mind the current controversy in Corinth).

- A sacrifice offered to an idol is nothing (19).

Meat is meat. A block of wood is a block of wood.

- A sacrifice offered to an idol means something (20).

Q: If the sacrifice is *nothing*, how can it mean *something*? What does Paul say the significance is in v 20?

- A Christian must not participate in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons (21-22).

Q: Why not? What will happen if we do? V 22

D. We must understand biblical freedom (23-33).

To do or not to do, that is the question. How do we know whether we should do a certain activity? For the Corinthians the question had to do with whether to eat meat after it had been offered to an idol. We have other questionable activities.

In PNG—should a woman wear slacks? For Pat Robertson recently—can a Christian race horses? Can I own a television? Etc.

Eight questions to ask yourself to determine if you should do something...

1. *Is it beneficial? (23)*

Paul begins by quoting the same statement he used back in 6:12. Some things are permissible for me, but not beneficial. The KJV word is “expedient.”

2. *Is it constructive? (23)*

The KJV says, “All things edify not.”

Q: Where is the focus in these first two questions? It’s not on *me*, but on others. The determining factor on whether I should do something isn’t merely, *Do I like it and want to do it?* but on others. Paul states that specifically in v 24.

3. *Is it for the good of others? (24)*

What would happen in the church if everyone asked this question before taking action?

A followup question. How do I know what “the good of others is?” It’s not something I determine. It’s not even necessarily what another person wants.

Discuss: Just what is the *good* of others?

4. *Will it violate my conscience? (25-26)*

Q: What did Paul here say the Corinthians were allowed to do? Eat meat sold in the market. What kind of meat does he have in mind? All kinds, including some that had been previously offered to idols.

So it's okay to eat meat that had been offered to an idol, right? Yes. And no. It depends. If something violates my conscience, I must not do it. But if something doesn't violate my conscience, I *may* do it. The piece of meat bought in the market didn't necessarily have the connotations of the piece purchased in the pagan temple. So I could buy and eat it—at least on certain occasions.

“Certain occasions?” you say. “I thought if something was right, it was always right!” Not so, not when we're talking about matters of Christian liberty. Not all issues are black and white issues. The next question is vital...

5. *Will it violate someone else's conscience? (27-30)*

Read the scenario Paul describes in verses 27-30...

Q: According to v 27 what should you do if a non-believer invites you to eat a meal with him?

Q: What should you do, according to v 28, if just prior to eating someone says, “But that meat came from a sacrifice made to Aphrodite!”?

Q: In that situation, why would it be inappropriate to eat the meat? Vv 29-30

6. *Can I do it for the glory of God? (31)*

Q: What does it mean to eat to God's glory? (remember the context)

7. *Will it cause anyone to stumble? (32)*

Notice the groups Paul mentions, three groups. What are they? He was concerned about all three groups. So must we be.

8. *Will it contribute to the salvation of others? (33)*

Here's the bottom line when it comes to making decisions. This should be the driving force behind everything we do. Here we see “the good” we're supposed to seek in life. It's why we are here—to know Him and make Him known to others.

Are you facing any tough decisions in life? Use this grid to determine what would please God. Ask yourself these eight questions...