**Do It All for the Glory of God**

March 7, 2021

1 Corinthians 10:1–11:1

Key Verse 10:31 “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

There are many things in the Bible that are forbidden. There are many things in the Bible that are encouraged. There is a gray area where things are perfectly legitimate in themselves, and yet where for other reasons it would not be wise for a Christian to participate. What is a guideline? For example, these days Halloween became a North American holiday where kids get dressed in costume and get candy. But it is associated with witchcraft. Can a Christian participate in a Halloween celebration? What about Harry Potter books? Some Christians think that they are a witchcraft and should be banned. Should I not read Harry Potter books? In the case of Corinthian Christians, it was about eating meat offered to an idol. As we learned last week, we have freedom in Christ, but we need to use our freedom to build up others in love. It is one thing to eat a piece of meat that you bought in a market which might have been offered to an idol; it is one thing to go to somebody’s house for dinner and eat something that might have been offered to an idol. But some people were pushing their freedom too far to the point of attending idol festivals, idol celebrations, pagan feasts. In this passage, Paul uses the example from Israel’s history to warn against such overconfidence and against pursuing idolatry. Then he gives a clear guideline in life: Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Look at verse 1. “For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea.” The Israelites were slaves in Egypt for 430 long years. They were miserable and without hope. All they could do was to cry out to the Lord in helplessness and agony. Then the Lord had mercy on them and sent Moses to them as a deliverer. Through Moses, God broke Pharaoh’s iron grip and set them free. They were no longer slaves of Pharaoh, but became children of God. God had a vision for them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. However, there was a problem. The Israelites still thought and acted like slaves. They needed divine training. So God led them through the desert. While living in the desert, God provided manna every day for forty years. When they needed meat, God provided quail for them. God nourished them and made them strong. God also provided water. Paul calls it “spiritual” food and drink. This means that God provided it, and it had a spiritual meaning. In Deuteronomy 8:3, Moses clearly tells them: “[God] humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” Through manna training, God taught them that man needs spiritual food as well as physical food. Man is not just an animal. Man cannot be satisfied with physical food alone. When we eat spiritual food, then we can be satisfied. So Jesus said in John 6:35, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”

In verses 1-4, the word “all” appears five times in the original Greek. “All” is the key term. It stresses the fact that the whole nation of Israel received the privileges of divine blessing. They “all” were a part of it. “All” who belonged to that nation were under the cloud. “All” who belonged to that nation passed through the sea. “All” ate the same spiritual food. “All” drank the same spiritual drink. They “all” received God’s grace in the desert without exception. So there was no reason for them to distrust God. Look at verse 5. “Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.” This refers to the event recorded in Numbers chapters 13-14. The Israelites were at the border of the promised land. According to God’s instruction, Moses sent twelve leaders to spy out the land for forty days. When they returned, ten of them reported, “The land is flowing with milk and honey. But there are strong and powerful people living there. They live in fortified cities. They all look like King Kong and we look like grasshoppers” (Num 13:27 ff.). These ten men forgot God’s grace and God’s mighty work among them. They only saw the situation and the size of their enemies, trembled in fear, and gave a bad report. Their bad report spread bad influence like a contagious disease.

However, Caleb and Joshua were different from them. They remembered God’s grace and power. They believed that God would give them victory if God was pleased with them. But the people did not listen to them. They listened to the bad report. People have a tendency to accept bad news without examination. Then the whole Israelite community began to weep and wail in fear and distress. They grumbled against Moses and Aaron and decided to choose a new leader and go back to Egypt. They totally forgot God’s abundant grace. They became stubborn and rebellious. So God was not pleased with them. God became angry with them; their bodies were scattered all over the desert. Only Caleb and Joshua, the men who had faith in God, entered the promised land. They were men of courage and spirit who could see things from God’s point of view. They were ready to challenge the impossible by faith. So God was pleased and blessed them with victory throughout their lifetimes. Caleb was strong and full of spirit, even at the age of 85. Joshua led Israel to conquer the promised land. The man of unbelief and the man of faith may witness the same event, yet see it differently. The man of unbelief sees things negatively and says, “It is impossible.” However, the man of faith sees everything in God and says, “It is possible.” The man of unbelief complains about everything. However, the man of faith always thanks God in all circumstances. The man of unbelief makes excuses not to participate in God’s work. But the man of faith builds up the work of God at every opportunity. The man of unbelief easily despairs and gives up. However, the man of faith never despairs and never gives up; he can do everything by faith in Christ who strengthens him (Php 4:13).

Look at verse 6. “Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.” Someone said, “Those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it.” So we need to study history. Israel’s history teaches us not to set our hearts on evil things. In verses 7-10, Paul warns against idolatry, sexual immorality, testing the Lord, and grumbling. Look at verse 7. “Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: ‘The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.’” This refers to the event when the Israelites made a golden calf, bowed down to it, and said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of Egypt’” (Ex 32:6). In verses 8-10, Paul warned them that we should not commit sexual immorality, and that we should not test the Lord, and we should not grumble. We don’t usually think of grumbling as a serious matter. But here, the grumbling is against God and his servants. Moses told the Israelites, “You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord” (Ex 16:8; Nu 16:11). Grumbling in this way is the sin of rebellion and it spreads like a wildfire to contaminate communities and even nations. The Israelites were assuming that God didn’t know what was best. They were assuming that God didn’t do what was best. They were assuming that their plan was better than His. God deals with the sin of grumbling against him seriously.

Verse 12 warns those who have strong faith and are able to eat food sacrificed to idols. There is a danger that those with strong faith may not rely on God absolutely through prayer. They think, “I can handle it.” In that moment they become vulnerable. We must be aware of Satan’s work. We must depend on God and pray to God always. We should not be proud, but humble before God. Look at verse 13. “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” Even though we depend on God, Satan tempts us. So we face many difficulties. But God is faithful. So God provides a way out so that we can bear up under it. If we are not proud, but humbly depend on God, he will take care of us. He will help us not to fall into temptation, and even if we are tempted, he will provide a way out.

After giving them history lessons, Paul gives direct advice in verse 14: “flee from idolatry.” This means to run away like Joseph did when he was tempted by Potiphar’s wife in Genesis. We need to flee from everything that stimulates our sinful nature and lustful desires, including evil friends who tempt us. Some Corinthians tried to participate in Christian fellowship and at the same time idol feasts. But idol feasts lead to demon worship. We cannot worship the holy God and evil demons at the same time. Paul is saying to the Corinthian Christians, “In the name of freedom, you have gone too far as to expose yourself to idol worship. That’s dangerous, and you will fall into sin.” There is only one response to idolatry: run from it” – present tense, present imperative – “continually flee from idolatry.” Continually be running away from it.

What is idolatry? Firstly, idolatry is slander on the character of God. Today North American religion is called a “moralistic, therapeutic deism” that preaches a “me-centered” message about a distant, therapeutic god, who wants us to feel good. They want to worship God in their own way as long as they feel comfortable. Idolatry is not just kneeling before an image. Civilized people in our society don’t do that very much. But idolatry is assuming God to be something he is not. It is to have either unworthy or wrong views of God. That’s idolatry. Secondly, when you doubt God, that’s idolatry. When you disbelieve God, that’s idolatry. When you are not sure God can come through and solve your problem, that’s idolatry because you have manufactured a god who can’t be trusted, and that is not the true God, because the true God can be trusted. Thirdly, idolatry is having any idol in the heart, anything that you set up as a god you bow down to, is idolatry: money, fame, prestige, whatever. Idolatry is covetousness, and idolatry is lust. Worshipping the god of materialism in the case of covetousness; worshipping the god of desire in the case of lust.

We must worship God alone. Idolatry is a serious sin. These days many people try to make their own god, by combining the things they like from all the different religions and philosophies. Then they say, “This is my god.” The problem is that demons are real and they actively draw men to worship them. Some people seek spirituality through new age religion, and by going to rock concerts or movies. We must have spiritual discernment to recognize the work of demons and avoid it. Paul warns the Corinthian Christians not to put Christ to the test. The implication is that they would be testing Christ if they were to eat at both his table and an idol’s table. So we can celebrate Halloween, handing out candies. But we should not participate in demon worship, dressed as a devil or vampire. We can read Harry Potter books, but we should not get into witchcraft.

Verses 23-24 reiterate that we have freedom. But we must use this freedom for the good of others. Verses 25-30 are examples. We are free to eat anything, even meat sold in a market, even if it may have been offered to an idol. Our conscience should not be bothered at all. We can freely eat and drink with unbelievers, even if it may have been offered to an idol. But if an unbeliever tries to test us, saying, “This has been offered to an idol,” then we should not eat. If we continue eating, the unbeliever would laugh at us, saying, “Christians are no different from us before delicious food.” We should make it clear that we don’t condone idolatry. If we go with a weaker brother and he says out of his guilty conscience, “This has been offered to an idol,” we should not eat for the sake of his weak conscience.

Look at verse 31. “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” This is the general principle of Christian life and our spiritual direction: “Do it all for the glory of God.” Paul tells us to begin with eating and drinking. These are ordinary activities that most people don’t think too much about. Many may say that generally they eat and drink in order to enjoy themselves and be healthy. But Paul explains that Christians do these things for the glory of God. If we can do eating and drinking for the glory of God, we can do everything for the glory of God. We must do whatever we do for the glory of God. When we have a clear purpose to live for the glory of God, we can have spiritual discernment. Sometimes we don’t know if something is right or not, or what to do when several options arise that conflict with each other. But when we do everything for the glory of God, God gives us spiritual insight to know what we should do and what we should avoid. Here is a good rule to apply: Is it for the glory of God? Is it encouragement to others?

Look at 11:1. “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” Jesus glorified God by completing his mission. Jesus’ mission was to raise twelve disciples. Jesus’ mission was to die on the cross for our sins. To carry out this mission Jesus had to deny himself through Gethsemane prayer. In this way Jesus glorified God. Paul followed Jesus’ example, and so should we. Then we can please God and we can live a victorious life throughout our lifetime.

Big Idea: Guiding principle in life: for the glory of God