DO IT ALL FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

1 Corinthians 10:1-33

Key Verse: 10:31

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

In chapter 10, Paul again deals with the problem of idol feasts. This time, his aim is to warn of the real danger involved in such feasts. This warning is balanced with encouragement to live with a clear principle in all we do: Do it all for the glory of God. Let’s listen to Paul’s teaching.

I.  Warnings from Israel’s history (1-13)

As Paul thought about and dealt with the problems of the Corinthians, he found a striking resemblance to the people of Israel in the time of Moses. In order to give the Corinthians spiritual direction and encouragement, Paul reviewed the history of Israel. The Spanish philosopher George Santayana (1863-1952) has said, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” However, merely remembering the past is not a guarantee that we will avoid the same mistakes in the future. Paul does more than remind the Corinthians. Paul teaches the Corinthians how to live victorious lives for the glory of God.

In order to reveal the validity of his comparison, Paul helps the Corinthians to understand that they are in the same situation that the people of Israel were during Moses’ time. As the Israelites passed through the waters of the Red Sea, it was a kind of baptism. God delivered the Israelites from bondage to Pharaoh and Egypt by his mighty acts of judgment. The Israelites were set free to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:6). God delivers Christians from bondage to Satan and sin through the precious blood of Christ. God wants to use us as a royal priesthood and a holy nation (1 Pe 2:9). After the Exodus, the people of Israel were under the leadership of Moses, who listened directly to God. After baptism, Christians are under the leadership of Jesus Christ, who is the only mediator between God and men. Just as God provided everything for the Israelites during their wilderness training, God provides everything for his church. We live in a blessed state and in relationship with God.

Look at verse 5. “Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.” After receiving overflowing blessing from God, the Israelites did not please God. God led them to the promised land, flowing with milk and honey and wanted them to conquer it for his glory. However, they failed. In the time of crisis, they forgot all the promises of God and God’s grace to them and fell into unbelief. They became fearful and completely rebellious. So God promised them that the entire generation who rebelled against him would die in the desert without entering the promised land. As God had said, only Caleb and Joshua, men of faith in that generation, entered the promised land. All the rest of the Israelites died in the desert and their bodies were scattered. Then God began to raise the next generation as his covenant children. Here we must acknowledge that the purpose of God’s abundant grace is to reveal his glory. God wants his people to live to please him.

Look at verse 6. “Now these things happened as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.” Paul admonishes the Corinthian Christians and us to learn from the failure of the Israelites. How, then, did the Israelites fail to please God? In verses 7-10, Paul details four specific sins the Israelites committed which we should avoid.

First, idolatry. 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 pagan revelry.’” While Moses was up on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments, the people grew impatient and demanded Aaron to make gods who would go before them. So Aaron collected the gold earrings and jewelry that the Israelites had gained from the Egyptians and used it to make a golden calf. Then they declared, “These are your gods.” Early the next morning the Israelites offered sacrifices to the golden calf, ate and drank, and began to have a wild orgy party. They imitated ungodly people exactly. In this way, they provoked God to anger and were punished. The Corinthians lived in a culture imbued with idol worship. Idol worship leads to debauchery and sexual immorality. Idol worship ultimately leads to the worship of Satan. Jesus overcame this temptation with the words, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’” This is the first and most important commandment for any human being.

We may say that idolatry is not a problem in our time. We don’t ordinarily see people going to a temple with statues and bowing down to them. However, we may say that media consumption of images in our time is the same as idolatry. Dr. Read Schuchardt, an assistant professor of media ecology at Wheaton College, has calculated that Americans spend 11.7 hours per day attending to mass media, of which 5.3 hours are devoted to viewing television. That is nearly 40 hours a week, only for television. If we spend two hours in church on Sunday and another five hours during the week in prayer, Bible reading, one-to-one Bible study, and fellowship meetings, we would still have watched television five times more than we listened to the word of God. If television images control our thought world, social activities and buying patterns, have we not engaged in idolatry, just as effectively as those who bowed down to idols? Here we need to carefully evaluate how much time we spend consuming media and what kinds of things we are watching and listening to. Paul warned, “Do not be idolaters.”

Second, sexual immorality. Look at verse 8. “We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died.” The Israelites were on the border of Moab, and looked like a mighty invading army. The Moabite women, using one of the oldest military strategies in history, seduced the Israelite men, stole their minds and hearts, and led them into idolatry. The Israelites became totally useless and were completely defeated. What is worse, they aroused God’s anger. Then 23,000 of them died from a plague, perhaps a sexually transmitted disease that brought immediate death. The plague was abated only when Phinehas, zealous for the Lord’s honor, drove a spear through an Israelite man and a Moabite women who dared to enter their tent while the assembly of Israel was grieving publicly over the tragedy. In recent years, we have seen a dramatic shift in America in our attitude toward sexual immorality, and perhaps most notably, homosexuality. Now there is strong pressure in our society to accommodate homosexuals, even in high schools. This week a Christian man, Principal Eddie Walker of Irmo High School in South Carolina, resigned over the forced formation of a gay club in the high school. What a shock that a Christian principal had to resign over such an issue! Sexaul immorality is like a deadly disease and it spreads like a wildfire. It can ruin a community or a nation in a short time. When Sodom and Gomorrah were totally corrupted by sexual immorality, God rained down fire from heaven and destroyed them all. Like Phinehas, and Principal Walker, we must stand up and resist the trend of sexual immorality, in our church and in our society.

Third, testing the Lord. Look at verse 9. “We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes.” The Israelites had seen great miracles of God to deliver them and bless them. But due to their own sin of unbelief they had to go through wilderness training. God was patient with them and endured them, helping them to grow in faith until they could receive his promise of the land flowing with milk and honey. But along the way they became impatient. Then they began to complain about the food and the water and the living conditions. They tested God’s patience, not realizing that they were swimming in God’s patience. God was not pleased with them and sent venemous snakes among them to bite some of them to death (Num 21:4-9). In this way, God brought them back to their senses and helped them to live by faith. We must accept God’s divine discipline during our lives of pilgrimage. God trains us to make us useful to him and to reveal his glory. It is true that no discipline is pleasant, but painful (Heb 12:11). However, it is for our spiriutal good. We must cultivate an attitude of patience toward God’s discipline and endure it with gratitude.

Fourth, grumbling. Look at verse 10. “And go not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.” There are several incidents in which the Israelites grumbled against God and his servants, but this verse seems to refer to the incident in Numbers 16 when three Levite leaders rose up against Moses. They did not want to follow Moses’ direction any longer. They wanted to be recognized as top leaders themselves. In fact, it was not Moses they were grumbling against, but the Lord. So the Lord intervened in the matter. In a divine judgment, the Lord opened the ground beneath the three leaders. They and their whole households, including all of their little ones, were swallowed up by the earth. Grumbling is a very serious sin against God. It is rejecting God’s sovereignty and it is despising the grace of God. Through grumbling people, Satan can work to destroy a Christian community. The antidote to grumbling is to thank God. We always have abundant reasons to thank God. Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, “Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

In this part, Paul warns the Corinthians that God disciplines his people so they may live for his glory and serve his holy purpose. When they sin, they will be punished. Especially he warns them about idolatry, sexual immorality, testing the Lord, and grumbling. We must take such sins seriously in our personal lives and in our Christian community. These days the influence of postmodernism has led many to have an attitude in which they ignore history or collective identity. Instead of learning from God’s discipline in their lives, many want to ignore it and live according to their feelings. But God wants to discipline us and refine us as individuals and as a community. We must be sensitive toward sin and learn to rely on the blood of Jesus in a real and meaningful way every day.

Look at verse 13. “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to us all. 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 stand up under it.” Christian life is a spiritual battle to receive God’s discipline and to overcome the temptation of the devil. The devil always wants to make us complain and grumble and seek pleasures becasue the life of faith requires us to endure hardships. However, Paul teaches us how to overcome temptation and live a victorious Christian life. To do so, we must understand that everyone is tempted. Sometimes we think we are the only person going through temptation and that no one has a more difficult time than we do. But in fact, temptation is common to all people. The only difference is that some overcome it and some yield to it. How can we overcome it? The Bible says that God is faithful. That means that God will keep his promises to us without fail. When we trust in the faithfulness of God we can overcome temptation.

We can claim two promises from God here. The first is that God will not allow temptation beyond what we can bear. Sometimes we think we can bear great temptation, when in fact, we cannot. On the other hand, we sometimes think that we cannot bear any more, when in fact, we have a greater capacity to bear temptation than we realize. God knows our capacity better than we do. And he promises not to let us be tempted beyond what we can bear. We must believe this promise. The second promise is that God will give us a way out so that we can stand up under the temptation. This does not mean that he will take away the temptation, but he will give us the means to cope with it in such a way that we can stand our ground as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Actually, Jesus has already won the victory over the devil. Jesus gives us victory when we depend on him and on his powerful word. So, as we go through the trials and troubles of life, let us keep our eyes on Jesus, resist the devil and look for God’s deliverance.

II.  Seek the good of others (14-33)

In the time of temptation, we must not only claim God’s promises, but there is something we must do as well. Look at verse 14. “Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.” We must flee from idolatry. Many of the Corinthians went to idol feasts with their old friends, thinking they would not enjoy the feast, but only eat the food. But they could not do so. They became weak and stumbled and fell back into idolatry. Everyone has a weak point in regards to sin and temptation. To some it is sexual immorality, to others it is money, to some it may be human honor or fame. In regards to that weak point, we must flee. We must remember Joseph who ran away from the woman who was tempting him. So we must be careful about where we go and who we associate with. We are free in Christ, but we must learn to flee from the temptation of the devil.

In verses 16-20, Paul gives a strong warning against participating in idol feasts. It is because those who participate in them participate with demons. As Paul has said, idols are nothing and food sacrificed to them is unaffected by them. However, idol feasts were a kind of worship service to demons. To participate in them was to participate with demons. This is the danger that many young people face today by going to ungodly people’s parties or to certain concerts. They are demon’s festivals. Our Holy God will destroy all unrighteousness and his holiness breaks out against unclean evil spirits. We must never associate with them in any way.

In verses 23-30, Paul returns again to the issue of food sacrificed to idols. We covered this in chapter 8. Paul repeats here that we are free to eat food sacrificed to idols and that we can join unbelievers in eating a meal together without raising questions of conscience. However, if the unbeliever raises the issue, we must not eat. This will send a wrong signal to the unbeliever that we condone idol feast and demon carnivals. For the good of others, we must express a clear attitude to worship God only. Look at verse 24. “No one should seek his own good, but the good of others.”

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 principle which we must live by. When we live by this principle we will make right decisions and take right actions in what can be complex situations. This principle regards our motive. We must do everything for the glory of God. Eating, drinking and sleeping must be done for the glory of God. Studying, working, ministry and family duties must be done for the glory of God. Why? Because God is our Creator and our Redeemer. Genesis 1:31 says, “God saw all that he had made and it was very good.” When we live as stewards of God’s world and do everything for his glory and honor God is pleased. When God is pleased we find our utmost happiness and the absolute meaning of life. Not only did God make us to live for his glory, but he redeemed us to live for his glory. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepare in advance for us to do.”

One of the most glorious things we can do is participate in God’s world salvation work. God is glorified through the salvation of souls and the fulfillment of his world salvation plan. To be used by God in the saving of souls from among all people, Jews, Greeks and all people, brings great glory to God.