

Journey Into Biblical Problem Solving

LESSON 13 . . . Being Who God Called You To Be (1 Corinthians 7:17-40)

NOTES

This passage contains principles to follow if you are to become who God called you to be. The **situation** in this passage may not apply to you, but the **principles** do. When you read a passage in the Bible, always look for principles, which never change. Therefore, let's look at the first principle for **being who God called you to be**.

Minister locally (7:17-24).

Paul puts it like this: *Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him (7:17a)*. The principle is that conversion radically changes us spiritually but need not change physical relationships, as long as they are not immoral. This principle applies to all Christians of all time. That's why Paul writes: *This is my rule in all the churches (7:17b)*.

Paul writes it doesn't matter if a believer is a Jew who is circumcised or a Gentile who is not. It makes no difference whether a man has been circumcised or not (7:18-19a). Why (7:19b)?

In verses 20-24, Paul tells *slaves* not to rebel because if God *called* them while they were slaves, they can live the Christian life as slaves. He also tells them, if they can gain their freedom, then they should do so (7:20-24). However, even if slaves must remain slaves, they are each the Lord's *freedman* (7:22a). This means, in Christ, their souls are free from the power of sin. Paul also makes it clear we are all the same in Christ. Why, according to 7:22b?

Paul is not saying that after becoming Christians, we should not try to improve our situations in life. He is saying, even if a person is a slave and must remain a slave, he or she is still able to live a Christian life. Paul despised slavery and listed it with other horrible sins (1 Tim. 1:10).

Regardless of where you work, as long as it is not illegal or immoral, you can live the Christian life there. You don't have to quit your job or stop

going to public school. The principle is this: Grow and minister where God has *called* and planted you.

Paul continues: *You were bought with a price* (7:23a). We have been *bought* by God with the precious blood of Jesus and, therefore, belong to Him. Because we belong to God, we should *not become slaves of men* (7:23b). This means we should not become slaves to the ways of the world—drugs, alcohol, gambling, sex, greed, success, fame, power, money, or anything else. In verse 24, Paul reiterates the basic principle of this passage. Personalize and write it below:



It doesn't matter if you are in law enforcement, a school teacher, a mechanic, a home builder, a lawyer, CEO, or whatever you are called to, serve God where you are. You are to be a "fisher" of people in the situation God called you. You don't have to become a pastor or missionary to serve God.

To be who God called you to be, **minister locally** and . . .

Make decisions biblically (7:25-40).

There is no decision in which this is more important than the decision to marry. This section begins: *Now concerning the betrothed*, or "virgins" (7:25a). Paul now answers another question the Corinthians had written to him (7:1). He again addresses the subject of singleness and writes, *I have no command from the Lord* (7:25b). In other words, the Lord Jesus did not directly address this situation. However, Paul writes, *but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy* (7:25b). Paul is *trustworthy* because he is writing under the inspiration of God.

Therefore, he writes: *I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is* (7:26). The *present distress*, or crisis, probably refers to the persecution of Christians, in which believers were being imprisoned, tortured, and executed because of their faith. What warning does Jesus give all His followers in John 15:20b-c?

Paul advises, if a man has a wife, he should not seek a divorce. He also advises, if a man does not have a wife, he should not seek one. However, if a believer does get married, it is not a sin. Also, if *a betrothed woman marries* she has not sinned. *Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that* (7:27-28).

Paul knows the persecution will get worse, and it did, eventually costing him his life. The persecution would be more difficult for married persons to bear, especially if they had children. Paul just wants to *spare* them additional suffering and pain. Marriage is a biblical option, but single people should always consider the advantages of remaining single until it is clearly God's will for them to marry.

Paul explains: *This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short* (7:29a). This probably refers to the coming persecution that would bring Christians horrible suffering. Therefore, he writes: *From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none* (7:29b). This may mean the persecution would cause husbands and wives to be separated from each other. Marriage is for life, but being married doesn't lessen our obligations to the Lord, even if spouses are separated because of difficulties, such as imprisonment. How does Jesus warn of the high cost of discipleship in Luke 9:23?

Paul continues: *and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing* (7:30a-b). Neither grief nor happiness should keep us from doing God's will. In this life, loved ones will die, and we will *mourn*, but we are still to serve the Lord. On the other hand, we will have many blessings that make us *rejoice*, such as financial success. However, during those times also, we are not to forget to serve the Lord.

Also, when we *buy* something, we shouldn't act like it is ours to keep (7:30c). Whatever we have, we shouldn't get too attached to it because *the present form of this world is passing away* (7:31b). We are only temporary stewards of what God has given us. Therefore, remember what fact in 1 Timothy 6:7?



In verses 32-34, Paul compares single and married believers. Paul doesn't say one is better than the other, but unmarried people can have more time to focus their energy on serving the Lord. This is because marriage requires tremendous commitment and responsibility. For a marriage to be successful, both partners must put forth great effort in the relationship. Both must also try to *please* the other and meet each other's needs. If you are not married, you should take time to think and pray before getting married. In God's eyes, marriage is for life, and it is not easy to stay married—the devil will see to that.

Paul explains: *I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord (7:35)*. Paul is not saying unmarried believers should remain single, but he wants Christians to know they have the freedom in Christ to remain single or to marry. However, whether you choose to remain single or marry, you must make the decision biblically, which takes time. Therefore, what principle in Proverbs 20:25 applies to marriage?

In verses 36-38, Paul basically writes that if a man and woman want to marry, they should. However, even if they are engaged and decide not to get married, they shouldn't. Marriage should never be due to pressure from parents who may want grandchildren, or even due to a prior agreement, such as an engagement ring. Even if on the day of the wedding, you feel you should call it off, do it! Don't get married just because you are afraid of what someone might think.

A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord (7:39). Obviously, the same principle would apply to a Christian man whose Christian wife dies. Remember, if the surviving spouse remarries, it must be *in the Lord (7:39c)*, which means the partner must be a Christian.

However, just because widowed believers **can** remarry doesn't mean they **should**. Paul writes: *Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is (7:40a)*. Remarriage is not the best choice for every widowed person. Paul may be addressing a specific case, in which he knows the woman would be *happier* if she does not remarry. It obviously depends on the situation as to whether a widowed believer should remarry. Marriage is a good thing, but it is never easy. Also, what does Proverbs 18:22 declare?

Certainly the same is true of a woman who finds a good husband.

Apparently, some in Corinth were contradicting Paul's teaching about marriage and singleness, claiming the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Paul writes *I think that I too have the Spirit of God (7:40b)*. This is an intentional understatement because Paul is an inspired apostle (1:1).

To be who God called you to be, **minister locally and make decisions biblically**.



Journey Into Biblical Problem Solving

LESSON 14 . . . When Something Right Is Wrong (1 Corinthians 8:1-13)

NOTES

In this chapter, Paul answers a question about eating food sacrificed to idols. The situation in this passage may not apply to us but the principles do. When reading a passage in the Bible, always look for the principles, which are timeless. This chapter addresses **three** principles that reveal **when something right is wrong**, beginning with . . .

Biblical knowledge must be wrapped in love (8:1-3).

Paul begins: *Now concerning food offered to idols* (8:1a). Most likely, Paul is referring to meals eaten in pagan temples after the meat had been sacrificed to *idols*. The later discussion in 10:23-11:1 concerns food purchased in the market place and then eaten in homes.

Next, Paul writes: *we know that all of us possess knowledge* (8:1b). Paul begins by explaining the Corinthian believers are on common ground. They know there are no other gods except the one true God. This *knowledge* is causing some believers to think eating a meal in a pagan temple is insignificant. Technically, there is nothing wrong with this, as Paul points out later, but there is more to consider when eating in a pagan temple. *Knowledge* alone is not enough. Why, according to 1 Corinthians 8:1c?

Apparently, some believers at Corinth were saying, "What the pagans believe is just fairy tales. It doesn't matter if I go to a pagan temple to eat a great meal." *Knowledge* alone leads to arrogance. That is why so many college professors are anti-God and anti-Christian. "*Knowledge*" *puffs up* and makes people very egotistical.

In the Christian life, *knowledge* must never be separated from *love* because *love builds up* (8:1d). What does Paul later write about *love* in the last phrase of 1 Corinthians 13:4?

You can obey every command in the Bible, but if you don't have *love*, you can still be guilty of wrong behavior. Acting on biblical *knowledge* without *love* can harm other believers. However, biblical *knowledge* wrapped in *love* **builds up**.



As Christians, we never stop learning and growing. This is why Paul writes: *If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know* (8:2). This means there is always more to *know* on the subject. You can memorize a verse in the Bible, quote it a thousand times, but yet not fully understand it. There are always other things to consider—a new application or a new insight from which to look at that knowledge. If you want to really know God, Bible knowledge without love is never enough.

That's why Paul writes, *But if anyone loves God, he is known by God* (8:3). It is possible to know all about the Bible and not love God. Loving God, not just Bible knowledge, is evidence we are really *known by God* as His children. How does 1 John 4:20a-b express this truth?

The first principle for knowing **when something right is wrong** is **biblical knowledge must be wrapped in love**. The second principle is . . .

Edification trumps Christian freedom (8:4-8).

Paul explains: *Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one"* (8:4). All Christians *know* there is just *one* God. However, Paul writes: *For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"* (8:5). The word *gods* and *lords* refer to different deities in various pagan religions. We know they don't exist, but many people in Paul's day thought they did.

Therefore, Paul writes: *yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist* (8:6). This means *God, the Father* is the source of *all things*, and the Lord Jesus is the Agent through which we receive them. Everything God gives us, He gives us in Christ. In Ephesians 1:3a, Paul praises God the Father and *our Lord Jesus Christ*. Then, what does he write in the next phrase (1:3b)?



However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled (8:7). There are new believers in Corinth who cannot separate **eating** food sacrificed to idols from **worshiping** the idols.

Therefore, their immature *conscience* is being *defiled*. Seeing mature believers eat food at pagan temples could lead new or immature believers back into pagan practices. The principle is this: **edification trumps Christian freedom.**

For example, imagine a believer who has a gambling problem with five-card stud or blackjack. Every time he sees a deck of cards, he wants to gamble. Would it be wrong for you to invite him into your home for a game of spades or hearts? One of the greatest problems among our youth is underage drinking and even alcoholism. Is it wise for a mature Christian to drink in front of them?

Paul explains: *Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do* (8:8). Food is neutral; therefore, we can't gain or lose God's approval by what we eat. Abstaining from certain foods makes us neither more spiritual nor less spiritual. How does the Lord Jesus express this fact in Matthew 15:11?

There are some things Christians shouldn't do because **edification trumps Christian freedom.**

The principles are **biblical knowledge must be wrapped in love, edification trumps Christian freedom, and . . .**

Never influence people to violate their conscience (8:9-13).

Any food that is not harmful to our health is okay for Christians to eat (1 Tim. 4:4). However, Paul also writes, *take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak* (8:9). A *stumbling block* is something that might cause another believer to trip and fall into sin. We must consider how our behavior might affect other believers.

Paul writes specifically about an immature Christian seeing a mature Christian eating in the temple of an idol (8:10). What could be the result (8:11)?

In other words, the *knowledge* that the mature Christian carelessly applied to this situation could cause an immature believer to violate his or her *conscience* and be *destroyed*. The word translated *destroyed*, or "perish," (APOLLYMI, uh-pol'-loo-me) carries the idea of being ruined by sin. **If something violates a person's conscience, it is wrong for that person.**

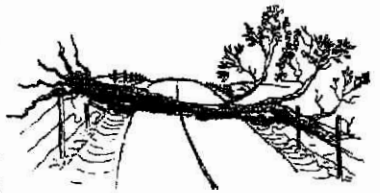
Therefore, never influence people to violate their conscience. A good conscience is critical for living the Christian life.

Never do anything to encourage a believer to do something that goes against his or her conscience. This is because our consciences are built-in sin detectors that are damaged when violated. Not having a *good conscience* will *shipwreck* your Christian life (1 Tim. 1:19). What does Paul write about false teachers in 1 Timothy 4:2?

When something is *seared* (like with a branding iron), scar tissue covers the burn. Scar tissue is insensitive. Each time you violate your conscience, it is seared just a little more and will eventually destroy your God-given sensitivity to sin. If your sin doesn't bother you, you have a *seared* conscience.

Paul warns: *Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ* (8:12). It is a horrible sin to influence someone to violate their conscience because it violates the second greatest commandment. Write it below (Matthew 22:39b):

So, Paul writes: *Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble* (8:13). The word translated *stumble*, or "offend," (SKANDALIZŌ, scan-da-liz'-oh) is the word from which we get our word "scandal." It originally meant "the unseemly conduct of a religious person that discredits religion or causes moral lapse in another." So, something that might not otherwise **be** wrong is wrong if it puts a *stumbling block* in the spiritual path of another believer.



Our culture is obsessed with personal freedoms, and this has greatly influenced the thinking of many Christians. However, according to Philippians 2:3, what is the Christian way?

Something right is wrong if it violates one of these principles: **biblical knowledge must be wrapped in love, edification trumps Christian freedom, and never influence people to violate their conscience.**

Journey Into Biblical Problem Solving

LESSON 15 . . . Winning in Your Christian Life (1 Corinthians 9:1-27)

NOTES

This chapter is a continuation of what Paul wrote in the previous chapter about limiting our social freedoms for the benefit of other believers. Now, Paul uses his life as an example of limiting personal freedoms for the sake of others. In so doing, he gives us **three** principles for being winners in the Christian life.

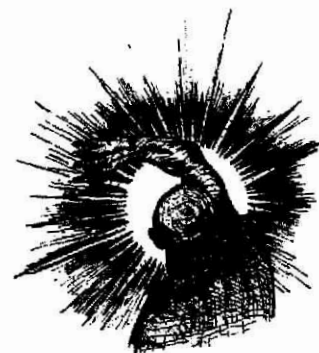
Submit to the authority of the Bible (9:1-2).

It appears some had misunderstood Paul limiting his own rights while in Corinth. Therefore, he begins this chapter with four rhetorical questions. The first is, *Am I not free?* (9:1a). Paul has freedom in Christ to eat or drink anything. However, there are things we should cherish more than exercising our social freedoms in Christ. The two most important things in the Christian life are edifying other believers and winning the lost.

Apparently, some Corinthian believers didn't like what Paul wrote, so they questioned his authority as an inspired apostle. Therefore, Paul asks, *Am I not an apostle?* (9:1b). Paul is an *apostle* commissioned by the Lord Jesus Himself. When Paul established the church in Corinth, he no doubt shared with them his conversion experience. When Paul was saved, what did the Lord tell Ananias concerning him (Acts 9:15b)?

Next, Paul asks: *Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?* (9:1c). A qualification for being an apostle was personally seeing the Lord after His resurrection (Acts 1:22b). For Paul, this happened at his conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-18). Finally, Paul asks: *Are not you my workmanship in the Lord?* (9:1d). Through Paul's preaching in Corinth, Crispus (kris-pus), the ruler of the synagogue, and all his household become believers (Acts 18:8a-b). Then, after hearing Paul, what else happens (18:8c)?

The church at Corinth was established as a result of the powerful preaching of Paul, an inspired apostle. Therefore, His authority is unassailable. The



Corinthian believers are the *seal* of Paul's *apostleship in the Lord*. (9:2). As we study this book, we need to remember it is the writing of an inspired apostle who writes with the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

To win in your Christian life, **submit to the authority of the Bible** and . . .

Support your pastor and staff financially (9:3-14).

Apparently, some were questioning Paul's authority because he did not accept financial support from the churches he founded. So, he asks, *Do we not have the right to eat and drink?* (9:4). This means, "Didn't he have the right to be supported by the churches?" Paul continues: *Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife* (9:5a). Then, what does Paul write (9:5b)?

The word *brothers* refers to the Lord's biological half-brothers, such as James and Jude, or Judas, (Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3), who wrote the epistles that bear their names. Paul probably singles out *Cephas*, or Peter, because he has a strong following in Corinth (1:12). It was the custom for the churches to cover the expenses of the wives as well. Some people are surprised to learn Peter was married, but clearly he was (Mt 8:14).

Paul now asks, *Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?* (9:6). Barnabas was Paul's associate on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-2). Though they had the right to expect financial support from the churches, Paul and Barnabas chose to work to support themselves, so they would not be a burden to their new converts. Paul was a tentmaker (Acts 18:3) and used his trade to support his ministry. However, some Corinthian believers apparently thought, since Paul didn't accept support from the churches, he was not equal with the other apostles.

In verse seven, Paul points out that soldiers, farmers, and shepherds are all supported by their work. The principle is pastors, church staff, and missionaries also have a right to make a living from their work. To reinforce this principle, Paul writes that the Law teaches the same thing (9:8). Then, he quotes Deuteronomy 25:4 (9:9b). Write it below:

In ancient times, oxen were used to thresh out grain. The Law demanded they be allowed to eat some of the grain they threshed. In verses 9c-10, Paul explains this law was not given just to protect oxen but to establish a

principle. However, part of the principle is that mistreating animals is a sin.

If God expects animals to be properly taken care of, then certainly that is even truer of His ministers. Therefore, Paul writes: *If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?* (9:11). This means *material* payment should be given for *spiritual* work. When a church fails to pay its pastor a fair financial package, God will move that person to a church where they will be properly compensated. Then, He will send the delinquent church the pastor they deserve.

Though Paul has the *rightful claim* of support from churches, he does not use this right because it might be *an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ* (9:12). Paul doesn't want a prospective convert to think his ministry is just about money.

In verse 13, Paul reminds his readers that priests who served in the tabernacle, and later in the temple, were supported by receiving portions of the crops and animals brought as offerings to the Lord (Num. 18:8-24). Then, what does Paul write in verse 14?

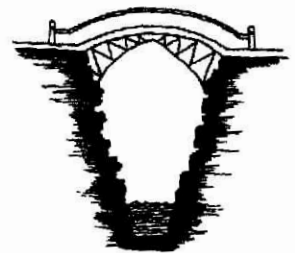
To be a winner in your Christian life, **submit to the authority of the Bible, support your pastor and staff financially, and . . .**

Supply bridges, not fences (9:15-27).

Concerning his decision to voluntarily forfeit his *rights* to receive support from the churches, Paul writes: *For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting* (9:15). This means he *would rather die* than lose the joy of preaching without monetary compensation. Paul explains that preaching the Gospel is not something he can boast about, because *for necessity*, or obligation, he has to do it (9:16a-b). Then, what does he write in the last phrase of verse 16?

The word translated *woe* (OUAI, ou-eye') is an exclamation of grief or denunciation. If Paul didn't preach the Gospel, it would bring deep grief to the Lord. Money had nothing to do with it.

To Paul, preaching the Gospel was a solemn *stewardship*, or "dispensation," the Lord *entrusted* to him (9:17). If he receives money, he writes, *what then is my reward?* He explains his *reward* is the opportunity to



preach the Gospel *free of charge*. That's why he does not *make full use* of his *right* to request money from churches (9:18).

Paul further explains his motivation. Though he is *free from all* people, he has made himself a *servant to all*, that he *might win more* (9:19). To the Jews, he becomes as a Jew—obeying their dietary laws that he *might win those under the law*. When with Gentiles, he doesn't obey Jewish law—meaning he eats foods the Jews consider unclean, or not kosher, to *win those outside the law*. To the *weak*, which probably means the intellectually *weak* who have difficulty understanding the Gospel, he explains on their level of understanding to *win* them (9:20-22b).

Paul always built bridges by finding common ground with unbelievers. Today, Paul might ride a Harley or maybe wear a cowboy hat and boots. If it would help spread the Gospel, he would eat grits and boiled okra with a smile. Why, according to 1 Corinthians 9:22d?

One man put it this way about the person who won him to Christ: "He built a bridge from my heart to his, and Jesus walked across it." Paul built bridges *for the sake of the gospel* so he could share *its blessings* (9:23). Paul may have changed his methods to be more effective in reaching the lost, but he never changed the message.

Finally, Paul compares the Christian life to running a *race*. The winning runner receives a *prize*. Athletes exercise *self-control in all things* concerning their training. They do it to win a *perishable wreath*, or "crown," *but we an imperishable*. All disciplined Christians who forfeit their social rights to build up or win others are winners, and will receive *an imperishable crown*, or reward (9:24-25).

Paul didn't run the race *aimlessly*, or "uncertainly," veering from side to side. Neither did he live like a shadow boxer, punching *the air* (9:26). Instead, Paul writes: *But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified* (9:27). The word *disqualified*, or "castaway," means unfit or rejected for use. Many gifted believers today are *disqualified* because they lack *discipline*. That's why you should *lay aside every weight, and sin* that hinders you (Heb. 12:1b). Why, according to Hebrews 12:1c?



To win in your Christian life, **submit to the authority of the Bible, support your pastor and staff financially, and supply bridges, not fences.**

Journey Into Biblical Problem Solving

LESSON 16 . . . How To Avoid Sin (1 Corinthians 10:1-13)

NOTES

In this passage, Paul warns that lack of self-discipline leads to sin, which results in consequences. Apparently, some of the Corinthians think that, since they go to church and observe the Lord's Supper, they can live any way they want. Therefore, in this passage, Paul reveals **three** requirements for avoiding sin, beginning with . . .

Reflect on God's provisions (10:1-5).



Paul begins this section with an Old Testament illustration of what God does when His children persist in sin. He writes, *For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea* (10:1).

Paul uses the word *all* five times in the first four verses of this chapter. The point is *all* the Israelites experienced God's blessings and miracles as they were delivered from Egyptian bondage and wandered in the desert. According to Psalm 105:39, what daily miracle did they *all* experience?

Every day they walked through the desert under the shade of a divine cloud. At night, because God provided a pillar of fire in the sky, they were never in complete darkness.

Next, Paul writes, *and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea* (10:2). This means the Israelites were identified as followers of Moses through the cloud and Red Sea miracles. The same is true of believers' baptism; it identifies a person as a follower of Christ.

Paul adds that they *all ate the same spiritual food* (10:3). Every day, God rained down food from heaven. When the Israelites first see this food, what do they say to each other (Exodus 16:15c)?

They call the *bread* "manna" (Ex 16:31), which means "what is it." It is called *spiritual food* because it was given by supernatural means.



They also *all drank the same spiritual drink* (10:4a). In the desert, God provided drinking water for them by commanding Moses to strike a rock with his staff and water came forth (Ex 17:6). Then, Paul writes: *For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ* (10:4b).

Paul identifies both the manna and water as *spiritual* because they were supernaturally provided. They also have spiritual symbolism because both were shadows of Christ. Jesus told the woman at the well He would give her a perpetual spring of water, imparting "*eternal life.*" (Jn 4:14b). What did Jesus also say of Himself in John 6:33?

In spite of all God's miraculous provisions, Paul writes: *Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness* (10:5). Of the fighting men (twenty years and older) who left Egypt, all but two died wandering in the desert (Num. 32:11). Only Caleb and Joshua had the faith that pleased God and the discipline that obeyed God, so they were allowed to enter the Promised Land (Num. 14:30).

Like many Christians today, most of the Israelites didn't understand that God doesn't just save us **from** something, but **for** something. Therefore, many Christians today are living and will die in a spiritual desert. They forget God's provisions of salvation, empowerment of the Holy Spirit, divine purpose for their lives, and His divine guide, the Bible. They also forget what promise found in Philippians 2:13?

As a result, many—if not most—Christians never experience the fullness and victory God wants to give them. To avoid sin, **reflect on God's provisions** and . . .

Remember God's punishments (10:6-11b).

Since the Corinthian believers were lacking in self-discipline, Paul writes: *Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did* (10:6). Even though they all received God's provisions, not all loved and served God in return. Instead, Paul warns: *Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play"* (10:7).

Paul is quoting from Exodus 32:6, when the Israelites made a golden calf

to worship and then *rose up to play*. The word *play* suggests sexual *play*, or even an orgy. Therefore, referring to Numbers 25:1, what does Paul write next (10:8a)?

Because of their sexual immorality, *twenty-three thousand* Israelite men died in one day (10:8b). The comparison is obvious because much of the pagan worship in Corinth involved sexual immorality of all kinds. Paul's warning is that God's judgment on sexual immorality is harsh. This example and that of Sodom and Gomorrah are warnings to all of us.

Next, Paul warns against whining and complaining. He writes: we should *not put Christ to the test, as some of them did* (10:9a-b). This refers to the account in *Numbers* of the Israelites complaining against the Lord and Moses, accusing them of bringing them into the desert to die. They complain they have nothing to eat or drink and hate the horrible food (Num. 21:5).

God provided them with water and manna. But they wanted more! Like many people, they want to see how much they can get from God and how far they can push God. Because of the Israelites' complaining, what happens (Num. 21:6)?



Next, Paul refers to the time the Israelites grumble against God's appointed leaders, Moses and Aaron (Num. 16). He warns we shouldn't *grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer* (10:10). God was so disgusted with their complaints, almost 15,000 Israelites died in divine judgment (Num. 16:49).

In verse 11a-b, Paul restates the principle he has already made in verse 6. Personalize and write it below:

Like the Israelites, if we sin with no repentance, we too will receive divine punishment.

To avoid sin, **reflect on God's provisions, remember God's punishments, and . . .**

Rely on God's promises (10:11c-13).

Referring to the time of the Messiah, or redemption, Paul writes *on whom the end of the ages has come* (10:11c). Primarily, he is writing about the death of Christ on the cross for the sins of the world (Heb. 9:26b).

When we become over confident about not falling into sin, Paul warns that *anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall* (10:12). This means if you think you can be careless in your Christian life and be free from punishment, you are "dead" wrong!

Reading of the Israelites' failures under Moses' leadership might cause us to think sin is inevitable in our lives. Therefore, Paul writes one of the most famous and important verses in *1 Corinthians*. How does it begin (10:13a)?

This means your temptations are not unique. Others have faced the same temptation you are facing and have resisted successfully. You **can** resist temptation because *God is faithful* and will not desert you or fail to keep even one of His promises (10:13b). Therefore, *he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability to resist* (10:13c). Instead, *with the temptation he will also provide a way of escape, that you may be able to endure it* (10:13d-e). God doesn't remove the *temptation*; He gives you a way out.

What is the way out of temptation? Does God send an angel to snatch us out of the situation? No! Does He cause the temptation to miraculously disappear? No! In Mark 14:38a, what does Jesus say is the way of escape?

First, *watch* means to be alert to spiritual dangers. Be careful about the friends you choose and the places you go. Second, *pray* for sensitivity to sin and to the leadership of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:14). If you *watch* and *pray*, the promise is God will *provide a way of escape*.

To avoid sin, **reflect on God's provisions, remember God's punishments, and rely on God's promises.**

Journey Into Biblical Problem Solving

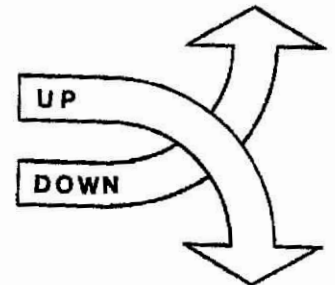
LESSON 17 . . . How To Make Good Decisions (1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1)

NOTES

One of the most important elements of the Christian life is influence. When people are “under the influence” of something or someone, their whole direction in life can be changed because of decisions they make. Making good decisions involves being aware of at least two things.

Be aware of demonic influence (10:14-22).

Paul begins this section by assuring the Corinthian believers of his love, referring to them as *my beloved*, or “my dearly beloved” (10:14b). Paul is their former pastor and loves them in spite of their stubbornness and sin. In this epistle, he is practicing what principle he writes about in Ephesians 4:15a?



In love, he tells them to *flee from idolatry* (10:14c). The sins we are most tempted to commit after becoming Christians are the same sins we committed before coming to faith. For the Corinthians, that sin is *idolatry*, or worshipping pagan gods. *Idolatry* is anything in our lives that is more important to us than obeying God.

Paul writes: *I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say* (10:15). This means reasonable people will agree with what Paul writes in this section. Therefore, he asks some rhetorical questions, beginning with: *The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?* (10:16).

The word translated *participation* (KOINŌNIA, coin-oh-knee'-uh) means “fellowship” or “sharing together.” This is why the Lord’s Supper is also called “communion.” It is a time we remember Christ’s sacrifice and draw closer not only to Him, but also to one another. When we have the proper relationship with the Lord Jesus, we will also have proper fellowship with one another. Why, according to 1 John 1:7a-c?

Paul reminds his readers that partaking of this sacred Supper implies unity between all those partaking. He writes: *Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread* (10:17). He continues: *Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?* (10:18). The Israelites identified themselves with what was sacrificed.

In verses 19-21, Paul makes it clear the idols the Corinthians are not tempted to worship are not real but represent what is demonic. Therefore, participating in ceremonies and meals for pagan idols is being *participants with demons*. Demonic activity is still alive and well in America today. I don't think any *sensible* person could deny the demonic bent of television, movies, magazines, etc. They have become more and more filthy and vile, as well as blatantly irreverent.

Another place we see demonic influence flourishing is the internet. It is filled with thousands of hardcore porn sights to which men, and even young boys, by the tens of thousands become addicted. Internet pornography on the internet is the fastest growing addiction in America. Viewing pornography is being *participants with demons*.

Next, Paul asks another rhetorical question: *Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy?* (10:22a). Participating in pagan worship activities provokes *the Lord to jealousy*. When the Israelites turned to pagan idols, God severely punished them. So, Paul finally asks: *Are we stronger than he?* (10:22b). In other words, "Do you think you can resist God's judgment?" God has a holy *jealousy* and demands there be no other gods in our lives, as He makes clear in the first two of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:3-4). What does God say about the Israelites in Deuteronomy 32:21a?

To make good decisions, **be aware of demonic influence** and . . .

Be aware of your own influence (10:23-11:1).

Paul explains: "*All things are lawful,*" *but not all things are helpful.* "*All things are lawful,*" *but not all things build up* (10:23). The phrase "*all things are lawful*" refers to things not forbidden in Scripture by a command or principle. The word *helpful* refers to what builds up other believers. This requires following what exhortation in Romans 14:19?



Next, Paul writes: *Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor* (10:24). Good decisions are regulated by love and concern for others. This requires not being legalistic and sanctimonious. Therefore, Paul writes, *Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience.* ²⁶ For *“the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof”* (10:25-26; Psa. 24:1). When buying meat with the intent of eating it privately at home, a person doesn’t have to ask whether or not it was offered to idols. When the meat reaches the meat market or supermarket, it is just meat and part of the food God provides through the *earth*.

Paul continues: *If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience* (10:27). If a non-Christian asks you to his or her home for a meal and you accept the invitation, eat whatever food is offered to you. Don’t ask any questions about it and appear spiritually condescending. Don’t act “holier-than-thou” and offend someone who is trying to be nice. Build bridges, not fences. Regarding food, what does 1 Timothy 4:4 declare?

However, Paul also writes, *But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience* (10:28). For the sake of the other person’s conscience, such food is not to be eaten. It is a sin to influence people to violate their consciences. Therefore, always be aware of how your actions could be misinterpreted.

Paul explains: *I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else’s conscience?* (10:29). We should not let the *conscience* of another person alter our consciences, but we might need to alter our behavior. Verse 30 is difficult to translate but could mean that if eating the meat harms others, then giving thanks is meaningless.

The basic principle of this entire passage—and of the Bible—is found in verse 31. Write it below:

The word translated *glory* (DOXA, dox’-ah) means honor resulting from a good opinion. In every decision we make, our primary concern should be to bring honor to God in a way that causes others to have a good opinion of Him.

Our lifestyles should be so righteous and loving, we just naturally don't offend others—*Jews, Gentiles, or the church of God* (10:32b). We are never to do anything that might hinder an unbeliever from receiving Christ or cause an immature believer to stumble.

In verse 33, how does Paul explain how he tries to win people?

The first verse of chapter 11 is really the conclusion of chapter 10. (Remember, chapter numbers and verses are not inspired; they were inserted by scholars for the sake of reference.) Paul concludes this passage: *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ* (11:1). We must all follow the example of Christ, who always made good decisions.

Because Jesus was comfortable at parties and social gatherings, His critics called Him *a glutton and a drunkard*, or “winebibber” (Lk 7:34). That description was a lie, designed to discredit Jesus. However, His critics did say something true about Him; they thought it would discredit Him, but it really made Him more attractive to sinners like you and me. How do Jesus' enemies describe Him in the last phrase of Luke 7:34?

This is how every believer who wants to be a fisher of men should want to be known. How do your decisions influence the people who know you? They either draw people to Christ or drive them away from Him. They either build up believers or hinder their growth. Which is it?

To make good decisions, **be aware of demonic influence and be aware of your own influence.**

