

Decisions, Decisions – 1 Cor 10:23-11:1

I'm glad you've joined us for worship on this Memorial Day weekend

And I hope you take some time to reflect on the sacrifice of life that makes it possible

I'm also glad that we've come to the close of chapter 10 in our study of 1 Corinthians, and Paul's warnings about complacency and false worship

In fact, this text closes out Paul's larger discussion on freedom and constraint, in chapters 8-10; 1 Cor 10:23-11:1 (**Intro**)

Helpful as they are, this is one of the more unfortunate chapter and verse divisions in all the Bible – separating 11:1 from chapter 10

And I can say that b/c such divisions are not inspired; They were put in place by the Archbishop of Canterbury in the 13th century

And while for the most part they're very helpful, this is one instance where it's not

- But it doesn't change the fact that this passage is a summary of sorts
A Cliff Note version of the previous chapters, that reiterates the key points, and leaves us with the most important thoughts foremost in our minds
Points and thoughts that help us make God-honoring *decisions* in our lives
That's what all this talk of idols, and temples, and meat comes down to – decisions
Decisions, decisions

Which sociologists say we make about 200 of every single day

From which shoe to put on first, to the emails you'll answer, the stores you'll enter, the business you'll conduct, the deals you'll make, and the people you'll talk to

Life is filled with decisions

And without a grid or a framework through which to run those decisions – it can be overwhelming; even disastrous

- Like it was for Bill, an ex-con who I literally met at the gate of the East Moline Correctional Center, about 10 years ago now
He was the first one I'd ever picked up to take him to the post-prison ministry I was working with
And I thought after 4 years behind bars, he'd be jumping for joy; like a kid at Christmas

But the first thing I noticed after signing him out, was that he was sweating profusely

Nervous wouldn't even come close to describing him; He was almost debilitated

And after getting in the car, I turned to him and said, "Dude, what's wrong?"

And I'll never forget his answer; He said, "I'm scared to death"

And I'm thinking – Whoa; Is somebody coming after him? Do I need to be concerned?

Do I need to keep an eye on the rearview mirror? What's going on?

And then he said this, with a shaking voice – "I don't know what to do; All my decisions have been made *for* me the last few years, and I'm afraid I'm going to mess up"

And then it dawned on me – he was overwhelmed; Absolutely overwhelmed with the decisions he was facing; B/c in prison, they were limited to about 20 a day

Fast forward a few years, and Bill was doing pretty well

Until he broke into a gas station, put an ATM machine on a dolly, loaded it into a pick-up truck that he stole from a friend, and drove off

Not a good decision; And the judge didn't think so either

- And while that may be the extreme, to some extent we've all been there – especially when *unforeseen* situations converge to make a perfect storm
Or difficult decisions pile up; Even our *daily* routine begs for help sometimes

And that's where this passage comes in – providing a framework of questions, through which we can run our decisions, and imitate Paul as he imitated Christ

The same Paul, who was a prisoner *himself* at times; Maybe he knew something

So here's question #1 when you're facing a decision in your life . . .

1. Is it **helpful**? (v23a)

Ask yourself if the course you're considering, is helpful?

V23 says "*All things are lawful,*" but *not all things are helpful*.

It's the very thing he said back in 6:12, in the context of sexual immorality

Once again quoting those who were arguing, that in light of God's grace and forgiveness, they could do as they pleased; All things were lawful for them

To which Paul responds by essentially saying, "You can say that if you want, you can say that you have carte blanche freedom in Christ" – and to a great degree we do . . .

But exercising it is not always helpful

It's not always helpful to do what you want, even though you can

Like hanging out with people who are a bad influence on you – it's not helpful

So we'd do ourselves a favor, and avoid a wealth of trouble when making a decision . . .

If we'd just stop to ask ourselves – Is it helpful? Is it helpful for me, *and* for others?

2nd, and closely related . . .

2. Is it **constructive**? (v23b)

That is, does it build others up? Will it leave them better off than they were before?

V23b says – "*All things are lawful,*" but *not all things build up*.

For instance, it might be okay for you to drink a beer at a ballgame this summer . . .

But it may *not* be very constructive for the guy next to you – the guy who struggles with that; In fact, it might *weaken* his resolve, and tear him down

Or how many times have you been in a heated discussion with one of your kids, and another decides to chime in, to the detriment of the first?

Not a good decision; It's lawful, but definitely not constructive

Not that that happens in our household or anything; I'm just saying

- How much pain/grief would you avoid in your life, and especially in that of others . . .
If the things you said were only constructive?
If the things you did, only built *up* instead of tore down?
You'd spare yourself and others *a lot* of grief, wouldn't you?

Does that mean you should never speak hard truth to someone – truth that may hurt from time to time? Not at all

But it does mean that it should always be constructive in the long run – for the purpose of building up, instead of tearing down

And then he says in v24 – *Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor*.
IOW when making a decision – big or small, ask yourself . . .

3. Is it other-oriented? (v24)

Does your course of action or inaction, seek the good, the betterment, the blessing – of your neighbor?

B/c Paul's admonition is very straight forward – don't seek your own good, seek theirs
As in, put all your time, talent, and treasure into bettering *others*; Into helping *them*
Into making the most of *their* lives; Into seeking *their* advancement; *Their* good
And do so, if necessary, at the expense of your own; Your own good

Like the winners of Purple Hearts and Congressional Medals of Honor

Awards given to men and women in the armed services, who didn't just seek the good of *others*, but did so at their *own* expense; At the expense of their *own* good
That's often the cost of being other-oriented

And if that makes you wonder, "Where does that leave *me*?" It leaves you blessed
Immeasurably so; B/c while you're seeking the good of others, *God* is seeking yours
Blessing you with increased faith, and joy, and peace, and love . . .
Not to mention the privilege of seeing him clearer, and experiencing him nearer

Other-oriented obedience – always brings blessing; Base your decisions on that
Is it other-oriented?

4. Is it okay? (v25-27, 29b-30)

When making decisions, this is one of the most fundamental questions to ask – Is it okay?
Is the thing you're considering, acceptable or allowable?
B/c if it is, you can do it; You're free in Christ

And he clues us in to that, with two scenarios; Look at v25

Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience [i.e. without worrying about whether it's wrong]. 26 *For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof."*

Then he gives us a second scenario in v27

If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go [you want to go], *eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience.*

Here's the deal – some of the meat sold in the Corinthian market, was used for demonic idol worship in the temples; And Paul's like, that's okay
Meat is meat, and food is food, no matter how it's been used
And it's okay to eat, whether on your own, or with others
You don't have to abstain just b/c it's been associated with something evil, and doesn't quite feel right to you; That's v25-27

- And then, after a little side note or parenthesis in v28, he tells us *why* in v29-30
Saying in the middle of v29 – *For why should my liberty* [he's including himself in this] *be determined by someone else's conscience?*
Do you see the flow of thought from v25-27? *Eat* [he says there] . . . *without raising any question on the ground of conscience*
And then tells us why in v29 – b/c our liberty as believers, shouldn't *be determined by someone else's conscience*; It shouldn't; And it's not

If I partake with thankfulness [i.e. if I thank the Lord and eat food that's been associated with false worship], *why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?*

Once again, you're not; It's okay

Meat is meat, and food is food, and it's okay to eat no matter what the source
It's the same thing he said in chapter 8

- But the *reason* he gives here, is different; And that's v26
For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." That's from Ps 24:1
And he quotes it, to say that it's okay to eat sacrificed meat, for 2 reasons:
(1) It comes from the Lord – it's part of his creation; (2) We thank him for it

You see, Ps 24:1 was part of a traditional prayer of thanks by God-fearing Jews at the dinner table – that's part of what they prayed, when it came to the food
So in recognizing that it came fr God by giving him thanks – that made it okay to eat
Just as it is for you, when *you* give thanks for *your* meals – which I hope you do

- But this applies to far more than just food
If something is of the Lord, and not prohibited by a scriptural principle – it's okay to do, despite the fact that it's been twisted and associated with sin
Sinful associations don't permanently taint, that which comes directly from the hand or heart of God

Which is why Paul says in **1 Tim 4:4-5** – *Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, 5 for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.*

It's set apart by God's spoken word to create it in the first place, and it's redeemed if you will, by our prayers of thanks

- On that note, several years ago, we took into our home 4 sisters who were refugees, and fresh off the airplane from Afghanistan
And they stayed with us for 8 days, during which time they cooked – not necessarily by our choice, but their insistence
The problem was, they would only cook and eat – *halal* meat
Meat that was cut and blessed by a Muslim butcher, according to Islamic law
It was either that, or they were going to starve under our watch
Which they did for the first 2 days – they didn't eat a single thing

So, Becky found a Muslim butcher there in the suburbs of Chicago, loaded up Faheema, Farishta, Miriam, and Sahar . . .

And picked out some meat from a goat, like the one that was skinned and hanging behind the counter, brought it home – and we ate *halal* meat for a week *****

Was that okay? Ya; That's okay; Why?

B/c it came from the Lord in the first place, we gave thanks for it in Jesus name at every meal, they invited us to join them, in our own house nonetheless . . .

And our liberty wasn't restrained by the presence of someone who didn't approve
Not to mention the fact that it was helpful for our bodies, constructive for building a relationship, and definitely other-oriented

That food was so hot, that the first bite Becky took, she jumped up from the table, ran to the sink, spit it out, and put her mouth under the faucet; And then came back for more

If something is of the Lord, and not prohibited by Scripture – it’s okay
Despite the fact that it may have been twisted and associated with sin
Sinful associations don’t spoil that which comes directly from the hand or heart of God

5. Is it **harmful**? (v28-29a)

Like when I was in Jr. High, and there was a dumb, dumb fad going around, where you’d go up to someone and ask them to pick a number between 1 and 100 . . .
And whatever number they chose, you’d pressure them into allowing you to rub a pencil eraser on the back of their hand that many times – back and forth
Which made for a raw abrasion about an inch long, that sometimes bled and left a scar
Hello! Is anybody in there? If it’s physically harmful, don’t do it

And the same goes for emotional harm that’s inflicted by what you say . . .
And especially spiritual harm by what you do – which is what Paul’s getting at in v28
After saying we’re free to eat meat used in sacrifices, he then 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— 29 I do not mean your conscience, but his.

He seems to be referring to someone at the dinner table, or someone who knows *you’re* at the table – and has a problem, a spiritual issue, with eating food offered to idols
Whether you eat it, or they do, it violates their conscience – it makes them feel as though *they’re* doing something wrong, or are a *part* of something that’s wrong
In which case, your actions are harmful, and you shouldn’t do it; It’s that simple

Sixth, and the pinnacle of this passage, is this question . . .

6. Is it **God-glorifying**? (v31)

He says in v31 – *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*
From worship to work; From ministry to make-up; From Bible study to birthdays
From discipleship to dishes; From love to laughter; From birth to death . . .
Whatever you do [whatever you do], do all to the glory of God
Do it all, to make him look good; That’s what it means
Do it all to reflect the majesty, beauty, greatness, goodness, power, riches, might, and honor – that are already God’s, and just waiting to be magnified by our lives

If we would just keep this one question perpetually before us . . .
I’m convinced it would not only change our decisions, but transform our lives
B/c it requires a fundamental change of focus from *ourselves*, to *God*
And that’s not the norm

Our norm, is to glorify *ourselves*; To make *our* lives, and *our* decisions, *all about us*
When the fact is – it’s not (T-Shirt)
This *life* is not about us, nor are the decisions we *make* in this life; It’s not about me

Which I’m starkly reminded of, every time I wear this T-shirt from my brother-in-law
On the back it says – “Created for God’s Glory” . . .
And on the front it says – “It’s not about me”
Two sides of the same coin that we’d do well to remember, when making decisions
Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

And then last, when making a decision, ask yourself . . .

7. Is it **winsome**? (v32-33)

Is the course of action you’re considering – attractive, and endearing, and appealing to those around you?
Will they be drawn to your manner of living and thinking, as a result?
Does it give you a greater chance of leading them to the Lord?

That’s the point of making winsome decisions in your life – to win souls
Look at v32-33 in that respect; Paul says . . .
Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, 33 just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

Give no offense as in, don’t unnecessarily offend
The gospel is offensive enough – pointing out people’s sin, and calling them to repentance; You don’t need to add to it; Be winsome

And try to do so with *everyone*, believers *and* unbelievers, in *everything*
Just as Paul did; Something he’s explicit about in the very next verse, 11:1 – *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*
As in, do what he does; Follow his example

How so? V33 – by not seeking your *own advantage*, *but that of many, that they may be saved*; Imitate Paul that *many* may be saved
That’s the point of winsome decisions – it’s to save souls

- Which you have a golden opportunity to do next weekend, by inviting someone to our baptism services; Or maybe even getting baptized yourself
B/c few things are more *powerful* in the mind and heart of unbelievers, than hearing story after story of *God’s* power to save
And seeing person after person bold enough, to show it (**Summary**)

So whether it’s 20 decisions, or 200 – be sure they’re God-glorifying and winsome
Imitating Paul, and not Bill

Pray – God, it’s in you that we live and move and have our being
And we want to do so, first and foremost, for your glory; B/c you *are* glorious
And we want to make decisions that are helpful, and constructive, and winsome – to those who have yet to see it; Who aren’t yet saved
Help us in that, I pray