

1st Corinthians Chapter 10 – John Karmelich

1. In Chapter 10, we are continuing the discussion of Christian rights versus privileges. Christians have all sorts of freedoms as we are not under the Old Testament law. At the same time we need to give up our rights if it could cause another Christian to stumble in their faith. With that said, I'm calling this lesson, "Understanding our accountability to God."
2. When it comes to Christian accountability, here are some issues to consider:
 - a) When it comes to "gray areas" there is the danger that we refuse to believe any opinion but ours is right. In areas of our life where the bible does not have any solid yes or no answer on how we should live, we should be flexible on our views. This was Jesus main criticism of the Pharisee's. He did not put down their desire to follow God's laws. He put down their interpretation of the law, especially on gray areas! Jesus put down their own interpretations when it was contradictory to the principals of God's laws.
 - b) Another extreme in the area of "accountability" is to allow anything and everything. In other words, in the name of tolerance, some have no set of rules on right and wrong. We ignore God's principals of how to live to be "tolerate" of what the bible says is wrong.
 - c) An idea related to the second concept is the idea that we have "rights" as Christians and we should never compromise those rights, even if it causes other Christians to stumble!
3. All of this leads to Chapter 10. We're going to spend a good portion of this chapter reviewing some of Israel's history, especially during the time they were wandering in the desert!
 - a) If you only get one point out of this lesson, it should be this one: God demands obedience. If one fails to be obedient, one still may be saved, but one may lose their ability to be a witness to others. God may suddenly "end our life" or end our ministry opportunities as we failed to be obedient to what God called us to do!
 - b) As we read of the Israelites wandering through the desert, the issue is not salvation, but being a good witness for God! The Israelites as a nation, committed a number of sins that caused them to lose their "witness". The issue of salvation is not addressed, only one of "witness". Much of this chapter is about the Israelite failure at this time.
 - i) The point for you and me is God's standards for being a witness have not changed from the Old to the New Testament! Just as that generation of Israelites was tested as being witnesses for God, so He tests you and me, both as individuals and as part of a Christian community on our faithfulness to Him!
4. After the review of the Israelite nation at this time, Paul then gets back to the issues at hand:
 - a) Paul discusses dealing with temptation. The point is just as the nation of Israel was tempted during their 40 years of wandering, so we as Christians are tempted. Paul teaches that God provides a way of escape when we are tempted.
 - b) Finally, the lesson gets back to the issue of "eating food offers to idols". While that issue is not very prevalent today, the principal behind that idea is prevalent: This is, to be willing to give up our rights to do something if it could cause another Christian to sin!
 - i) The more I study this chapter and the previous chapters on this topic, I am starting to believe the Corinthians wrongly thought, "Paul, what's the big deal about eating meat offered to idols? If a Christian is sitting next to me, and he or she thinks it is wrong, I'll just explain to him or her why it is ok!"
 - ii) Paul's underlying point is that it is a big deal. It is not just a matter of telling the person next to you it is ok. We don't always know who is and who is not offended by what we do! What we should be concerned about is showing love to the fellow Christian! Just as not suing in court is showing love to fellow Christians (remember that lesson in Chapter 4!), so to not publicly eat meat offered to idols is an example of showing love to one's fellow Christian!
 - c) With that said, it is time to review the nation of Israel as they wandered in the desert!

5. Chapter 10, Verse 1: For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea.
 - a) When the Israelites first came out of Egypt, God parted the Red Sea and the Israelites walked on dry ground in the middle of that sea. Further, they had a "cloud" cover them during the day and a "pile of fire" during the night wherever they went. (Exodus 13:21, 23, 14:24 and Numbers 14:14).
 - b) Before I discuss the significance of these events, notice that Paul refers to the Israelites who lived during that time (roughly 2,000 years prior to this letter to Corinth) as "our forefathers". Remember the Corinthian church was all or almost all Greek converts.
 - i) Paul is saying in Verse 1 that the Jewish people who lived 2,000 years earlier were the "forefathers" of the Christians. What did Paul mean by that? My point is that the Greek residents who lived in Corinth are not of Jewish decent.
 - ii) Notice what Paul says in Romans 9: "For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring." (Romans 9:6b-8 NIV).
 - iii) What Paul is saying is that not all the descendants of Abraham are saved. It is not the natural children of Abraham who are guaranteed the promise of salvation, but those who are "children of the promise", in other words, only those who are saved by faith.
 - iv) That's the reason we as non-Jewish Christians can say our "forefathers" were the Israelites who were in the desert is because of our faith in God and our trust in Him for our salvation as provided through Jesus His son!
 - c) This is also why I argue that the topic at hand is not salvation but being a witness for God in all that we do. Of that generation, all but two people were forbidden to enter the Promised Land! If you think about that generation that way, it is actually an insult for us as Christians to be thought of as the descendants of that particular generation!
 - i) Our salvation then, as it is today, is an individual thing. God judges individuals fairly based whether or not we trusted Him with our lives.
 - ii) The issue of comparing us to that generation is not about salvation, but about being a good or bad witness for God in how we live our lives. Much more on this topic is coming up!
6. Verse 2: They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.
 - a) When the text says they were "baptized into Moses", it is not saying they were trusting in Moses as their savior as opposed to God!
 - i) When we as Christians get baptized, it is a visual sign to the world that we accept Jesus full payment for our sins! The act of baptism is one of "identification".
 - ii) Well, when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, Paul is saying it is a type of baptism. If you study the Old Testament study of that passage, the Red Sea crossing is never once called a baptism!
 - iii) When the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, they never thought of it as a form of baptism. Paul's point is the crossing of the Red Sea was a form of baptism whether they realized it or not.
 - iv) Getting back to what baptism is: A symbolic act of being cleansed from one's sins. Here were the Israelites, leaving Egypt, about to start a new life trusting God. To begin that new life, they needed to be symbolically cleansed of their sins, which is being compared to leaving Egypt.
 - v) Back to the question of "baptized into Moses": They were trusting in Moses to lead them into a new life of trusting God. It does not mean they worshipped Moses. It means they were letting Moses lead them as a people!

- b) The rest of Verse 2 says they were baptized in the cloud and in the sea. Well, we've already discussed that the "sea" refers to leaving Egypt and the Red Sea crossing. So what is the significance of the cloud?
 - i) If one knows the geography of the territory where the Israelites wandered for 40 years, it is practically impossible to survive. Temperatures get into the 120-degree range. It would take a supernatural cloud covering to protect the Israelites in order to survive such an ordeal!
 - ii) The reason the "cloud" is emphasized in these verses, is the reminder that God was always there protecting the Israelites as they wandered through the desert. God's presence was there in the form of a cloud covering!
 - iii) Even when the Israelites were disobedient and sinned, they never lost the cloud covering! That too, separates the issue of "salvation" versus "witness".
- 7. Verse 3: They all ate the same spiritual food
 - a) God provided their food to survive in the desert. It was a form a bread that rained down from the heavens every day. The Israelites called it "Manna", which means "What is it?" In other words, they didn't know what to call it, so they called it "What is it?"
 - i) By the way, if you read the text carefully (Exodus 16 and Numbers 11), only the Israelites called it "manna". God never used that term to describe this daily gift!
- 8. Verse 4: and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.
 - a) First, let's discuss the drink itself and then I'll discuss the "Christ" reference.
 - b) In Exodus 17, just a few chapters after the Red Sea Crossing, the Israelites complained they were out of water. The people complained to Moses. Moses then complained to God. God told Moses to go strike a particular rock and water would come out.
 - i) There is a Jewish tradition that the Israelites then carried this rock around with them as they wandered through the desert. I don't know if that tradition is true, but that tradition would explain the idea of the rock "accompanying them".
 - c) Later, as the Israelites were still wandering in the desert, the Israelites were complaining about thirst again. In Numbers 20:8, God told Moses to speak to the rock and that rock would pour out water. Moses was disobedient in that Moses struck the rock to pour out water as opposed to just speaking to that. When Moses struck the rock twice, water still came out, showing God still cared for the needs of the people, despite the disobedience. As a punishment for Moses disobedience, Moses could not enter the Promised Land.
 - i) Why was God so strict on this issue? Precisely because that rock symbolically represented Jesus! The first time (back in Exodus 17), God told Moses to strike the rock. Now here in Numbers 20, God told Moses to just speak to the rock!
 - ii) Jesus died for our sins once and for all. He does not have to die over and over again. At the same time, after Jesus death, there is no additional shedding of blood required for the forgiveness of sins! That is why Moses was told to only speak to the rock, and not strike it again! Just as we are taught to pray to the risen Jesus and not strike Him again for sins!
 - iii) The point is Moses "blew the model" of Jesus sacrifice. That is why He was punished so badly for striking the rock. Is Moses still saved? Yes, but he blew his witnessing opportunity and was punished for it!
 - d) This leads us back to the text: The "rock" that followed the Israelites in the desert is a symbolic picture of Christ. Does that mean that the rock that was struck by Moses was literally Jesus? Of course not. It is a symbolic picture of what Christ did for us.
 - i) I can't resist sharing a cute story at this time. I have a friend at work who is Orthodox Jewish. He once told me a story of a local rabbi that local religious Jews call "Mad Vlad". Apparently Vlad argued that all the references to rocks in the Torah tie to the Messiah. No Vlad did not believe in Jesus.

- ii) When my friend shared that story with me, I showed him the passage about how Paul said Jesus is that rock. It didn't change his views about Jesus or even Vlad, but it was an interesting moment.
- 9. Verse 5: Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.
 - a) The understatement of this chapter is the reference to "most of them". In Numbers 1:46, it was stated the number of men over 20 years old were 603,550. That did not count the Levites. Assuming there were an equal number of women over 20, the number of adults over twenty was well over 1.2 million.
 - b) Do you know how many adults of that generation got to enter the Promised Land? Two. Therefore it is the understatement of the chapter to say that God was not pleased with most of them! God said no one of that generation, except for two guys named Joshua and Caleb could enter the Promised Land! (See Numbers 14:29).
 - c) Have you ever wondered what the Israelites did during those 40 years? A professor of mine ran the numbers on something: If over 1.2 million people died in a 40 year stretch that means on average 80-90 people died per day! They were busy burying the bodies!
- 10. Verse 6: Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.
 - a) Remember the main point of all of this has to do with being a good witness for God. Paul uses the example of the generation of Israelites that came out of Egypt. They got to see more grand-scale miracles than any generation in human history. Despite that fact, they still committed idolatry and turned from God on more than one occasion.
 - b) Paul's point to the Corinthian church and to us is that the price we pay for giving our lives to Christ is that we are now accountable to God. He wants us to live a life of being a good witness for Him! If we fail to be a good witness God can and does take people "out of the ballgame". Again, this is not a salvation issue, but a witness issue.
 - c) In the last chapter, the example of the moment was about giving up one's right to eating "sacrificed meat" for the sake of being a good witness to other Christians. This discussion of the Israelites is designed to teach us what can happen to Christians if we fail to be the type of witness God wants us to be! This whole section is about our "motivation"!
 - d) Meanwhile, back to the Exodus from Egypt! ☺
- 11. 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."
 - a) Paul is quoting Exodus 32:6. At that time God called Moses alone unto a mountain for forty days. During that time, the Israelites did not know what happened to Moses. They made an idol, which was a golden calf. This calf was based on one of the Egyptian gods. The Israelites "mixed" some aspects of praising the true God with praising the Egyptian calf-god. Idolatry can occur even if we mix it with the worship of the true God.
 - i) Think of the story this way: This is the same generation that saw the 10 plagues on Egypt. This is the generation that got to see the Red Sea part for them. Yet, the first time they were really tested of their faith, they turned to idolatry!
 - ii) This ties to my theory that miracles alone are not enough to get people to change their hearts. There had to be a moment of commitment. If one is dependant upon miracles, then one is living from one miracle to the next. When there is a time when God is silent in the lives of such people, they often turn back to other Gods.
 - iii) Jesus commented on this fact (miracles alone are not enough) in Luke 16: "'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'" (Luke 16:30-31 NIV).
 - b) Tying this back to the Corinthians, Paul's point is if they continue to eat meat offered to idols in the presence of "naïve believers", they (we) too are committing idolatry!

12. Verse 8: We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did--and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died.
 - a) Verse 8 is a reference to another sexual-immorality story that happened to the Israelites as they wandered in the desert. In Numbers 25, there is the story of some Israelites who took Moab women (the Moabites were a nearby people that lived at that time). The Israelites joined the Moab women in their worship of the false god "Baal".
 - b) It seems strange to us that a group of people who worshipped the true God could turn so quickly to idolatry and then to other sins in connection with that idolatry. I will add that such stories are repeated in various forms throughout history. Show me a church where they turn away from the bible and sooner or later, one will find a church where they mix the worship of the true God with all sorts of things.
 - c) The point of all of this is God punished the Israelites and 23,000 died in one day! Remember Paul's point is about being a good witness for God. If one turns away from being a good witness, God can and does "take us out of the ballgame". That could mean physically taking our lives or in many cases, it means He takes away our opportunity to be a good witness for him.
 - d) One last point: Many commentators make a big deal about the fact that the Paul said 23,000 died and in Numbers 25:9, it said God brought a plague on those who committed this idolatry and 24,000 died. The most likely explanation is that Paul said 23,000 died in one day and about 24,000 died total from the plague. It's not a major issue, but just know that one when one reads bible discrepancies, there is usually an explanation!
13. Verse 9: We should not test the Lord, as some of them did--and were killed by snakes.
 - a) Verse 9 has a reference to another story: In Numbers 21, God sent snakes among the Israelites as punishment for their idolatry. The remedy for snakebites was simply to look at a bronze snake placed on a pole. (Numbers 21:8-9). Why have that as a remedy? The answer is for people to look to God when they turn from Him as a source of forgiveness. Seeing the snake on the pole reminded them of their sins and the sin is being judged!
 - b) Notice that Paul is using example after example from the Exodus story about how the Israelites committed idolatry during their 40 years wandering in the desert. In every story there was some sort of consequences for their disobedience to God.
 - c) Remember the church in Corinth were Greek converts. They must have had some understanding of the Old Testament if Paul could use these stories as examples for them!
 - d) Paul's point in this verse is that we (Christians) should not test God, as some of the Israelites did and were "taken out of the game" for testing God in that way!
14. Verse 10: And do not grumble, as some of them did--and were killed by the destroying angel.
 - a) There is no specific story of an angel who killed the Israelites for their sins. This verse may be based on a Jewish tradition that there is a "single angel" that is in charge of destroying those who rebel against God. Whether or not this legend is true, we don't know. The point is those who rebelled against God were "killed" by God.
 - i) Again, we don't know anything about the individual salvation of those were killed. It may be that some were saved and some were not. The main point is such people lost their ability to be a public witness for God!
 - b) This leads back to the key point, which is how we should act as Christians:
15. Verse 11: These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. ¹² So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!
 - a) Was the story of the Exodus a true story? Yes it was. Was those events also written for us to learn from them? Yes. A point here is our lives become witnesses for God whether we realize it or not. Even if we do wrong, God may take us out of the "game", but God still may use us as a negative witness for future Christians to learn from! I say that as the story of the Exodus, with all of its faults, is written for us to learn from their examples.

- b) The point is one should not read the story of the Exodus with all of its faults and just think, "Well, too bad for them!" The point to learn from all of those bad stories is that if God could destroy those people for being a bad witness, God can and does do the same to Christians when we fail to be a good witness for Him.
 - c) The only recorded New Testament story along this line is the death of Ananias and his wife Sapphira. Their story is in Acts Chapter 5. They were in trouble for lying about how much money they gave to the church. They were not forced to give that money, it was a voluntary act. The sin was lying about how much they gave! Was this couple saved? I would argue yes, as they were Christians. However, their living witness instantly ended, they both had heart attacks (presumably) and instantly died when their sin was exposed!
 - i) Does God kill lots of Christians when we sin? No. If every Christian whoever sinned were killed the moment they sinned, none of us would live very long! ☺
 - ii) The point is not that God kills everyone who sins every time. The point is God has that option and it should motivate us to keep us on our toes!
 - iii) I suspect that what happens more often, is that God has the right to take away our "witnessing opportunity" or the effectiveness of our particular ministry if we turn to some sort of idolatry. Can we regain our witness opportunity if we confess our sins? Sure. Again, it is up to God and not us.
 - iv) If all of this scares you, it should. That's Paul's main point of these examples!
16. Verse 13: No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. 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.
- a) Here is one of the most famous verses in 1st Corinthians. Yes, it is memorization time! ☺
 - b) All people go through various temptations in life. Being a Christian is no exception. The advantage of being a Christian is God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can handle. Notice the second sentence of this verse says that God is "in control" of whatever temptation we are facing at the moment! God won't let us be tempted beyond what we are able to handle!
 - c) A point of this verse is that God does test us! He does not lead us into temptation, but God does allow us to be tempted. Why? To build up our loyalty to Him! This does tie to all of those examples from the Old Testament. Did God allow the Israelites to be tested in all of those situations? Yes He did. Did God provide a way for them to escape? I believe God did, in that His methods of operation are consistent through the bible! Did the Israelites choose to take that escape route? No.
 - d) The point of this verse is that when we are in situations where we are tempted, there is a way to escape. The key is for us to look for that way! The way we normally thinking of the way to escape may not be the way God provides. We have to keep that in mind!
 - i) In fact, the way of escape may be a painful way! The way of escape might be treacherous or difficult. God makes no promises that the "way of escape" is easy. God's only promise to us is that there is a way of escape out of whatever temptation we find ourselves in at that moment in time.
 - ii) The good news is we can take comfort in the fact there is a way out! The other good news is when we go through such temptation, we can take comfort in the fact God is watching us and is limiting our amount of temptation!
 - iii) It is best to think of these situations as "God allowed" as opposed to "God ordained". I don't believe God directly tempts us, as much as He allows such temptations to exist to see how we react in such situations.
 - e) God testing us is about trusting Him when we don't sense His presence. I like using the illustration of "letting go of the handle bars!" When we teach a child how to ride a bicycle, sooner or later we have to let go of the bike, so they can learn to ride! That is sort of what God does when He allows us to be "tempted". It is how He tests us!

17. Verse 14: Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.
- a) Notice Paul does not say for us to stand there when we are tempted and see how strong is our faith! Paul encourages us to run away as quickly as possible. Paul said something similar in 2nd Timothy 2:22. Paul said to "flee youthful lusts!" Again, when we recognize something as a temptation, we are to run away as much as possible!
 - b) Need some examples? When we are in an intimate situation where we should not be in, the bible says to run away! When we are in a situation where drugs or alcohol is present and this is a problem for us, we are to run away! If we are given access to money that has already been committed to some other cause, we are to run away before we should touch those funds. The point is when temptation comes, we are not to stand there and fight the temptation, we are to run from it as much as possible!
 - i) Back here in 1st Corinthians, the example of the moment was about publicly eating meat offered to idols. Remember that the temptations are not always about us, but sometimes it can be about temptations to those around us! Don't be tempted to do something even if it is perfectly legally to do that thing, if it causes another to sin!
18. Verse 15: I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.
- a) Let's recall something from earlier in the letter: Back in Chapter 3, Verse 1, Paul said that the Corinthians were "babes in Christ". That meant that they were not growing in their maturity as believers. There were divisions within the church. Maturity is all about growing in one's faith by making good decisions about what is pleasing to God. With all of that background in mind, Paul is now saying, to think logically about what He is telling us! We may have the right to do one thing or another, but not all things are beneficial to our relationship with God and other people.
 - i) Remember that some of the Christians in Corinth followed Paul's teaching, others followed Peter and others Apollos. Paul is saying whether or not you consider me a leader, just think logically about what I am saying and judge if it is good advice!
19. Verse 16: Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.
- a) We move from Old Testament examples of being a bad witness for God and the issue of temptation to the issue of "communion". Paul is now describing the issue of communion within the body of Christ. Why? To emphasize the fact that all Christians are "one".
 - b) I don't want to get into a detailed discussion of communion here because in the next chapter is just that, a detailed discussion of the Christian communion ritual.
 - c) The point, as it relates here, is that when we share in the "body and blood" of Christ, we are becoming one with other believers. In that culture, to eat food with someone, is to become "one" with them, as they are sharing the same food.
 - i) Remember what Paul is trying to teach: The point is the willingness to give up our rights as Christians in order to be a good witness to other people. If we share in the body and blood of Christ with other believers, they become "equal" with us in terms of importance! Therefore, Paul is giving another argument why we are to give up our rights as Christians for the benefit of other believers!
 - d) Let me explain a few of the terms used here: Paul says the "cup of thanksgiving" when describing drinking Christ's blood. Most likely it is a reference to the Passover ritual. Remember that when Jesus instituted the communion ritual, it was given during a Jewish Passover dinner ritual. As part of that Jewish ritual, there are four times when the Jews are to drink wine. The third drink is called the "cup of thanksgiving". One takes a drink as gratitude for one's salvation. Here was Jesus saying to drink his blood as to remember that it was shed for the forgiveness of our sins!
 - i) The main point is we accept Jesus payment of our sins with the "blood sacrifice" on our behalf.

- e) The other key term is the loaf of bread, which is symbolic of Jesus body being broken for us. The essential idea is to remember Jesus "humanity". The idea is that God became human for our sakes so we could relate to Him and what He did for us!
 - f) Again, what is important in context of this text is not the details of communion so much as the concept that we understand that we as believers become "one" with other believers. Therefore, we should care for other believers as much as, or better yet, more than we care about ourselves. The decisions we make in life should not be about whether something is or is not legal for Christians, but the question of "Is what I am doing a good witness to God and a good witness to other Christians around me?"
20. Verse 18: Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar?
- a) If one studies the book of Leviticus, it is full of rituals that Jews perform not only for the forgiveness of sins, but to show gratitude to God for their lives. The point is when animals are sacrificed, the people offering the animals participate in the sacrificial rituals!
 - b) Paul's point here as it ties to the Christian communion ritual is that all people who confess Jesus as Lord and have asked forgiveness of their sins have the right to participate in the communion ritual, just as the Old Testament Jews who offered animal sacrifices have the right to participate (eat of) those offerings!
 - c) Again, the key underlying point is about how we are treat fellow Christians! Another Christian may not be as wise as us as far as what is legal or illegal for Christians. With that in mind, we are not to raise ourselves above their level, but to sink down to their level if such actions could cause them to sin! The point is about how to have love for the fellow Christian. That entails giving up our rights for their benefit.
21. Verse 19: Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.
- a) Remember the example being used is about the food being offered to idols. Paul's first point is that those idols are "nothing" in that they are not true Gods.
 - b) At the same time, God does not want us to participate in those pagan rituals. In other words, if the meat from those sacrifices are offered for sale in the marketplace, it is ok to buy them, preferably without asking where the meat came from! What is not acceptable is to actually go to the ritual where the meat is being offered and participate in the ritual!
 - i) Yes, those false gods are not really gods. At the same time, we are not to be part of those rituals. That is a form of "idolatry".
 - c) It is "no coincidence" that the 10 Commandments begin with a warning against idolatry. In Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, where the 10 Commandments are listed, the first thing God says is that He is the God that brought them out of slavery. The next thing God says is that we are not to worship any false gods nor make any images of the true "God".
 - i) If we know that other gods are not real gods, what's the harm in being around those rituals? The harm besides the fact God specifically forbids it in the 10 commandments, is the idea that there are demonic forces behind those false gods!
 - ii) God allows demons to have some power. If we are to choose God, He must allow some other choices to see if we truly choose to follow the true God! Therefore, he does allow demons to have some legitimate power. My point is people who follow false gods often get some real special blessings in their life.
 - iii) That is one reason why God wants us to avoid the rituals around false gods. The true God understands that false Gods have some power, and does not want us to be tempted by such powers.
 - d) Idolatry is far more than to go to some pagan temple! It includes any made images of the true God designed for the purpose of worshipping it. The God we worshipped cannot be visually represented.

- i) God is not an old man sitting on a throne as sometimes portrayed in paintings. I don't believe God is anti-art for the purpose of illustrating the bible. The danger is to make some image and claim "this is what God looks like!"
 - e) Idolatry is essentially the worship of anything that is not the true God. Any hobby or interest we have can be idolatry. Can we have hobbies? Yes. The question becomes, "If God asks us to give up that hobby for Him, are we willing to do so?"
 - f) All people worship "some" god. Those that do not worship the true God still worship something. Find out where people spend their free time and spare income and you will find their god. Even atheists worship "themselves" in the sense they believe they have all the answers to life!
22. Verse 21: You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.²² Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?
- a) Getting back to the example at hand, Paul is saying to the Christians in Corinth that they are not to be part of pagan rituals. They are not to eat sacrificial meals to demon gods. It is not permitted for Christians to participate in rituals to other gods, even false ones!
 - b) One has to remember that in that culture, it often cost people their lives if they failed to participate in such rituals! To join certain trade unions, one had to offer sacrifices to the local gods! For a Christian to say no to such rituals would be like an American accused of treason and being un-American. It is part of the lifestyle of that culture. Yet, Paul is saying it is a sinful act to be a part of that ritual!
 - c) Verse 22 says that if we commit such an act, we could "arouse the Lord to jealousy". This ties back to the first half of the chapter. Remember while the Israelites were wandering in the desert, they committed all sorts of sins, and it caused them to die off. God got "jealous" for His name sake, and would not allow them to continue to be a witness for Him and act the way they did! If God could take away their witness for Him (i.e., end their lives) He can do the same for us as well!
 - d) The last sentence of Verse 22 is the interesting one: It says, "Are we stronger than he"?
 - i) The point is God forbids us to get involved in such pagan rituals. God made that rule for our benefit. Can we tell God, "Well, that rule is not necessary for me because I'm strong enough to resist that temptation?" The point is no we can't.
 - ii) It is better to simply avoid the temptation in the first place. If we are in such a temptation situation, it is best to simply run away as much as possible.
 - e) Notice the two references to "cup of demons" in Verse 21. Remember I said earlier that there are demonic powers behind those false gods. Well, apparently Paul thought so too, which is why Paul refers to the worship of false gods as the "cup of demons".
 - i) When we symbolically drink "Jesus blood" as part of the communion ritual, we are drinking of "God's cup" and becoming one with Him! When we (or if we) participate in the worship of a false idol, we are "drinking the cup of demons".
 - ii) Is such an act a forgivable sin? Yes. I've read the testimony of a Christian pastor who came out of that background. All sins are forgivable except the lifetime denial of Jesus as God. The issue of the moment is not salvation, but our witness for God.
 - f) Finally, let's talk for a moment about the "Lord's jealousy":
 - i) Is God capable of being "jealous"? Yes, in the sense that God cares about those who have committed their lives to Him and guards us jealously! God has perfect knowledge, and therefore knows all things. We can't shock God by our actions! Therefore, when God acts negatively in our life in some way, it appears as if God is getting jealous at that moment in our lives. God is not changing. He is simply getting involved in our lives at a moment where we are not being a good witness for Him in what we are doing!

- ii) It describes all of those moments in the history of Israel where God acted to hurt or kill people. It is not that God wanted those people dead! God cares about us being a good witness for Him. One of God's options when we fail to be such a witness is to take us out of the game!
- 23. Verse 23: "Everything is permissible"--but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"--but not everything is constructive. ²⁴ Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.
 - a) The issue at hand is not "black and white Christian issues" but "gray areas". In other words, if something is permitted for a Christian, the issue is not whether or not we have the legal right to do a thing, but how does that act affect the Christians around us?
 - b) Verse 24 gets back to the issue of "nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others". The Christian life is about lifting up others. It is about helping other Christians grow in their faith. Remember the title of this lesson is about our accountability to God.
 - c) Christianity is designed to be teamwork. God desires that Christians work with other Christians to help each other grow in our faith. Sometimes that involves direct teaching. Sometimes that means living by example. Sometimes it is about helping to bring new Christians into the fold. Other times it means giving up our rights as Christians so other Christians would not stumble.
 - d) John MacArthur told a story of a pastor friend who gave a lecture on this topic. That pastor asked the congregation if anyone could give an example of how they personally gave up some right they had for the benefit of other Christians. The interesting thing is the pastor could not get one volunteer to give a personal example!
 - i) That is the convicting part of this lecture. I cannot think of one time in my life where I gave up something for the benefit of another Christian or "potential" Christian around me! There may be cases, but I can't think of any.
 - ii) Now try to name one time in one's Christian life where one gave up the right to do something as it might cause another Christian around you to sin!
 - iii) Examples could include situations where drinking was involved. It may be about going to some sporting event or theatre show. The issue is not the event itself, but the danger of allowing another Christian to sin! If we know there is a Christian around who thinks these things are wrong and it would cause that person to sin, we should give up that right. If that Christian just thinks it is wrong, but it would not cause them to sin, then that is a separate issue.
- 24. Verse 25: Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, ²⁶ for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."
 - a) Getting back to the illustration of "eating meat", Paul says it is ok to buy such meat in the marketplace and to avoid asking questions about where the meat came from.
 - b) In other words, it is not the meat itself that is the issue. It is avoiding the issue of where the meat came from as much as possible. Further, we are to avoid the demonic rituals where it was offered, but it is ok to buy such meat in the marketplace!
 - c) In Verse 26, Paul quotes Psalm 24:1. Paul's point is that even though the meat was offered to idols, all "meat" (as in "all the earth" belongs to God and we can eat it. Remember the issue is not what we can and cannot do as Christians, but what we should avoid doing if it causes others to sin!
- 25. Verse 27: If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. ²⁸ But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake-- ²⁹ the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? ³⁰ If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?

- a) The issue of the moment is being invited to a meal with an unbeliever. We are free to eat anything they set before us without asking questions about where the meat came from. If anyone at that table then says, "this meat has been offered to an idol", at that moment, we are to avoid eating that meat. The non-Christian may think, "I have heard Christians don't eat such meat". In order to win them for Christ, we may have the right to eat that meat, but we shouldn't as they are watching what we do.
 - b) Again, this is about giving up our rights if it could cause someone who is either a believer or someone who one day "could" be a believer to stumble. It is better to give up our rights than to be a bad witness.
 - i) Suppose someone at that table thinks, "I hear you Christians only worship one God. Here is meat offered to idols." That is a sign they are testing us. The point is we should watch for such tests. If someone is seeing how we should act, we have to be willing to give up our rights if it could cause someone to sin.
 - c) At the same time, if we are invited to a meal, and the issue of where the meat came from is not brought up, we are to enjoy the meal and not even bring up the question!
 - d) In our world, this is not usually an issue. A modern equivalent might be drinking wine with a meal or participating in some event at people's homes. The question is if I do this act, could it cause some other Christian to sin, or some potential Christian to say those Christians are no better than nonbelievers? I don't want to join them! In other words, the issue is not our rights, but what is beneficial to those around us?
 - e) This also brings up the question of who Christians should and should not eat with:
 - i) Here, Paul is saying if we are invited to house of a nonbeliever for dinner, that is acceptable and we can accept their offer!
 - ii) Back in Chapter 5, Paul said we are not to eat with someone who calls themselves a believer but they are guilty of some blatant sin of which they won't repent. The point back in Chapter 5 is we should not eat with people who claim they are Christians, but refuse to turn from some specific sin in their lives. At the same time, we as Christians are free to eat with nonbelievers if we are invited.
26. Verse 31: So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.
- a) Verse 31 is a good summary verse of the last three chapters. The point is whatever we do, we do for the glory of God. Whether we eat or drink or "not eat or drink", the question of the moment is our actions pleasing to God by the choices we make?
 - b) Our life involves making decisions every day. The first question with those decisions is not whether or not an action is permissible. There are some clear cut "black and white" issues for Christians. Such issues are not the focus of this chapter, but they do exist! These issues include things that could lead us into idolatry and things that can cause us to sin in the first place.
 - i) The issue of the moment is "gray areas". If we are not sure whether we should or should not do something, we need to ask ourselves if doing that, or not doing that "gives glory to God". If such an action could cause someone to sin, then we need to give up our rights to do that act.
27. Verse 32: Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—
- a) At this point, Paul divides the world into three groups: Jews, Greeks (i.e., anyone not Jewish, who is not saved) and the church of God.
 - b) Why does Paul separate Jews and non-Jews here?
 - i) The idea of "Greek" is Greek culture, which dominated that world at that time!
 - ii) Paul's point is Jewish culture is different from Greek culture.
 - iii) We should act in a way that does not cause anyone to stumble, whether they come from a Jewish background, non-Jewish background or if they are Christians!

- c) It's not just about preventing less-mature Christians from stumbling, but about preventing someone who "could" be a believer one day to stumble!
 - i) The idea of "stumble" is to avoid some behavior that people think is wrong for Christians to do! If a non-Christian thinks it wrong for Christians to say, drink alcohol or watch a certain movie, we should avoid doing that act even though we know it is permissible. The point is about acting in a way that does not cause a potential Christian or a naive Christian to stumble!
 - ii) Notice we are not suppose to correct their bad ideas! God does not call on us to correct their way of thinking and then do what we want! It is better to give up our rights for the sake of someone's potential salvation than to exercise our rights!
28. Verse 33: even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.
- a) The point is Paul is making every effort possible to save as many people as possible.
 - b) The purpose of the life of the Christian is not to enjoy life as much as possible. The purpose of the Christian life is to glorify God in all that we do. It means to make every effort to think about our lives in terms of pleasing God with what we do and don't do. With that said, all of us Christians are called to make a difference for Him. That includes working to bring new believers into the fold. That also includes working to strengthen existing believers.
 - c) I want to get back to the tough question: What have you or I done or not done (that we wanted to do) for the sake of a weaker Christian or a non-believer? The easy answer is to tell that person, "It is ok for me to do this". The harder thing is to not do it as to be a living witness for them with our lives.
 - i) How this applies to our lives may be easier than you think. It may simply be a matter of asking God, "How can I make a difference to person "x" that I'm either trying to win for Christ or see them strengthened in their faith?" I usually find God has a way of answering that question as He desires to see others give their lives to Him or strengthen their faith. The answer may be simpler than we think. It starts by making the effort to do "something".
 - ii) How do I know if I am doing the right thing? One way is to ask the person who one is trying to influence. If they find something offensive that we do, even if that thing is "legal" as a Christian, we may have to consider giving up our right in order to make a difference in their life! Good judgment is important here. If a person says it is wrong to have drums in church and if we took away those drums, let's say it would make no difference in their lives or their willingness to sin, then we should keep the drums! On the other hand, if we are in a social setting, and a person thinks it is wrong for Christians to drink, we need to give up our rights.
 - iii) My point is don't be afraid to ask others about our behavior. Sometimes winning others for Christ is a simply a matter of talking to them about our behavior. Sometimes it is more complicated than that, but this is a start! Again, start by asking God for help in any situation. Sometimes God guides our tongues and actions in ways we don't comprehend.
29. Chapter 12, Verse 1: Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.
- a) I wanted to add this verse, as it fits in well with Verse 33. Paul wants us to follow his example, as he followed Christ! Paul made every effort to imitate Christ in his life. That should be our model as well. More on that in the next lesson!
30. Let's pray: Father, help us to be good witnesses for You. Help us to remember that the purpose of living is to glorify You in all that we do! Help us to make a difference in the lives of people around us. Help us to consider other's attitude toward you when we make decisions. Help us to be willing to give up things for "Your sake. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.