

FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY IN MAKING DECISIONS

By Terry Jones, July 20, 2008
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1 Corinthians 10:23-33

CENTRAL SERMON THEME – Exercising our freedom as Christians includes the responsibility to make decisions which help others and glorify God.

INTRO. - A cartoon appeared in a Christian magazine of a couple searching for a perfect church. This couple is driving along looking for the perfect church when a church sign catches their attention: *First Perfect Church*. The man drives into the church's parking lot toward a beautiful church building with bright lights revealing an empty auditorium. The searchers drive out of the perfect church's parking lot as the husband says to his wife, "I would really prefer a church with people."

Have you ever searched for a perfect church? Better than a perfect church with no people is an imperfect church with people. Is this church a perfect or imperfect church? One member says to another member, "I will not do that." The other member responds, "I like it. Are you saying I am wrong if I do that?" The other one answers, "I believe you are wrong because it is not permissible." The other person counters, "I see no reason why we cannot have we have our freedom." The two people are now in a heated debate over having or not having. Am I talking about a recent conversation in a church you know and love?

I am speaking of a church that existed almost 2,000 years ago in Corinth, Greece. These Christians disagreed over buying and eating meat offered to an idol. Some Corinth Christians believed no one could any contact with idol worship. They believed every Christian was to stay as far away as possible. Other Corinth Christians held the conviction anyone could eat anything offered to idols because idols were nothing and it made no difference to God. Whose side would you take? The prohibitionists say, "No way!" The freedom lovers say, "Pass the steak sauce!"

Since God has not planned every personal decision for us, we have the freedom to choose for ourselves. Our freedom requires responsibility. Paul writes to solve this conflict about whether or not to eat meat that has been offered to idols. We have a problem applying this Scripture. That practice

does not exist in our community or in many communities. How can we use such a Scripture? We look for principles operating behind the Scripture.

Through a careful study we can discover the principle from a specific situation to apply to us. For example, when water is distilled, particles in the water are removed to make the water usable. When the Bible speaks to a particular issue in biblical times we can distill a biblical principle from the message of the Bible. This Scripture places four principles before us to use when the Bible gives no specific instructions on God's will.

I. DECIDE WHAT WILL BENEFIT YOU, V. 23a

- A. V. 23 - All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable.
 - 1. 'All lawful things' refers to morally neutral issues.
 - 2. Some decisions are not morally right or wrong - color of your car, what you eat, where you attend school, etc.
 - 3. Though we have freedom in morally neutral areas, not all things are profitable to us.
 - a. 'Profitable' is a business term reflecting a business owner making a decision on the basis of how much he will gain.
 - b. This sentence instructs us to consider how a morally neutral issue will affect us. Will we be better?

- B. Illus. - The passenger will hear shortly after being seated on a plane, "In the event the plane loses its cabin pressure, an oxygen mask will be released for you. If you are traveling with children, put the mask on yourself before you help your children." Help yourself before you help others.
 - 1. When the Bible does not address a neutral issue, we discern whether or not it benefits us.
 - 2. Ex. - An Army Sergeant walked into his minister's office asking this question, "Does this church take good care of its leaders?" The minister asked why he wanted to know. He answered, "In the Army we always take good care of our leader. Without our leader we are in trouble." He asked his minister "You are our leader. Is the church taking care of you?" The minister explained how the church was caring for him. Any leader learns he or she will need to learn survival skills. You learn to survive in the business world, in the educational work, and in the political world.
 - 3. Applic. - "All things are lawful but not all things are profitable" is a reminder to humbly take care of yourself.

- a. It's legal in our nation and in the Bible to work 60 to 80 hours a week but is it good for you?
- b. Example - We have known of a relative or friend whose spouse was an invalid that required constant care. The caregiver neglects his or her health and dies before the spouse dies.
- c. I read a report that our President ages four years for every year he is president, 32 years for an eight year term.
- d. All things are lawful but not all things are profitable.

C. The second principle we discover from this Scripture is:

II. DECIDE WHAT WILL HELP OTHERS, V. 23b, 24

- A. Vv. 23b and 24 - All things are lawful, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor (others).
 - 1. All things are lawful but not all things build up others.
 - 2. Let no one seek his own good - do not stop at the first principle of taking care of yourself but seek the good of others.

- B. The Corinthian Christians who practiced their freedom to eat meat offered to idols overlooked the consciences of other Christians.
 - 1. They forsook idolatry to never look back or be involved in or support any form of idolatry again.
 - 2. In the church they knew people who regularly bought meat from the market previously used in the pagan temple worship.
 - 3. Eating this meat brought back memories and temptations to return to this idolatry.
 - 4. Paul - You people who are not influenced by eating of meat offered to idols help those who are offended by eating this meat.

- C. The principle of others relates to all of life.
 - 1. Jesus said the second commandment is to love others.
 - a. Why does God command us to love?
 - b. Love should flow naturally because love for others creates a love in them for us.
 - c. That love that flows so freely at times is challenged when we disagree, have personality clashes or have been hurt.
 - d. These Corinthian Christians had hurt each other badly with stinging condemnations, divisions, lawsuits, and rejection of other's fellowship.

2. We adjust our lives to show our love for others though what we want to do is not wrong.
 - a. Illus. - My family and I became fond of fishing when we lived in Eastern Kentucky. We enjoyed fishing and boating at a lake within a five minute drive from our house. One day the Chairman of our Elders dropped by the office to give me some words of advice. He asked if he could give me some good advice. Of course I agreed. He said, "I recommend you do not go fishing on Sunday." I asked, "Why?" He answered, "The community does not look favorably on a minister who plays sports on Sunday." I was not aware of this community attitude but I promised I would never take our boat out on the lake on a Sunday. Why? Others.
 - b. Illus. - I have a policy I will not meet with a woman by myself. The Bible does not say, "You shall not meet with any woman except your wife by yourself." The state of Ohio or the city of Tiffin has no laws against a man meeting with a woman. Why do we ministers have this policy? This policy looks out for the reputation of both people. Such a meeting can stir up rumors.

- D. Applic. - Work this principle of others into your faith.
1. Seek counsel of Christian people you trust.
 2. Pray for God's wisdom.
 3. Listen to input from those who disagree.
 4. Calculate the impact your decisions will make on others.

E. After we have considered what is good for us and what is good for others, we move to the next principle.

III. DECIDE WHAT WILL GLORIFY GOD, V. 31

- A. Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
1. We have freedom, but we do all to the glory of God.
 2. We limit our freedoms if that freedom would dishonor God.
 - a. Rom. 14:21 - It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.
 - b. Illus. - Mamie Adams always went to a branch post office in her town because the postal employees there were friendly. She went there to buy stamps just before Christmas one year and the

lines were particularly long. Someone pointed out that there was no need to wait in line because there was a stamp machine in the lobby. "I know," said Mamie, "but the machine won't ask me about my arthritis." Bits and Pieces, December, 1989, p. 2.

c. Use kindness on your job or business to glorify God.

B. Whatever you do, do to the glory of God.

1. Matt. 25:34ff - Jesus is describing the final judgment of God. To people on His right hand He will say, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the foundation of the earth. I was hungry, you fed Me; I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger and you invited Me in; naked and you clothed Me."
2. We will say, "Lord, we never saw You in that condition."
3. The Lord says, "If you did it for the least of them, you did it for Me."
4. We are not Christ to these people in need, they are Christ to us.

C. After we have decided to help ourselves, help others, and glorify God we are ready to:

IV. DECIDE WHAT WILL SAVE OTHERS, Vv. 32-33

A. This chapter ends with the words, "so that they may be saved."

1. We have the challenge of keeping people in Christ.
2. We have the opportunity to help people come to Christ.

B. Illus. - A young man was seated in a train with a clergyman across the aisle reading the daily paper. The young man, a recent convert to Christ, began to sing quietly the song "Redeemed, How I Love to Proclaim It!" When he came to the end of the first stanza, the minister softly joined in the refrain, and then remarked, "I take it, young man, that you are a Christian." "Yes, sir," the younger man replied. "How long is it since you were redeemed?" asked the minister. "Nineteen hundred years, sir," he promptly replied. "But I mean," said the preacher, "How long since you yourself were redeemed?" Again the new convert replied, "Nineteen hundred years." With this answer the conversation ended as the minister resumed his reading. As the lad was about to leave the train, he said, "I did not wish to appear arrogant in my reply. I meant what I said. I was redeemed nineteen hundred

years ago, but it was only last year that I found it out." Over nineteen hundred years ago our Lord purchased our pardon on Calvary's cross.
By Kenneth J. Holland, These Times, January 1967.

C. We need salvation because we have sinned against our holy God and Jesus suffered, died, and arose to be our substitute.

CONCLUSION - On a hot summer day in south Florida a little boy decided to go for a swim behind his house. In a hurry to dive into the cool water, he ran out the back door, throwing off his shoes, socks, and shirt as he went. He flew into the water, not realizing that as he swam toward the middle of the lake, an alligator was swimming toward the shore. His mother, watching from a window, saw the two as they got closer and closer together. In utter fear, she ran toward the water, yelling to her son as loudly as she could. Hearing her voice, the boy made a U-turn to swim to his mother. It was too late. Just as he reached her, the alligator reached him. From the dock, the mother grabbed her boy by the arms just as the alligator snatched his legs. An incredible tug-of-war began between the two. The alligator was much stronger than the mother, but the mother was too persistent to let go. A farmer happened to drive by, heard her screams, raced from his truck, took aim and shot the alligator.

Remarkably, after weeks and weeks in the hospital, the boy survived. His legs were extremely scarred by the vicious attack of the animal. The newspaper reporter, who interviewed the boy after the trauma, asked if he would show him his scars. The boy lifted his pant legs; and then, with obvious pride, he said to the reporter, "But look at my arms. I have great scars on my arms, too. I have them because my mom wouldn't let go." On his arms were deep scratches where his mother's fingernails dug into his flesh in her effort to hang on to the son she loved.

You and I can identify with that boy. We have scars, too, not from an alligator, or anything quite so dramatic. Our scars may be from a painful past. Some scars are unsightly and have caused us deep regret. But think of those wounds resulting from God refusing to let go of the person He loves.